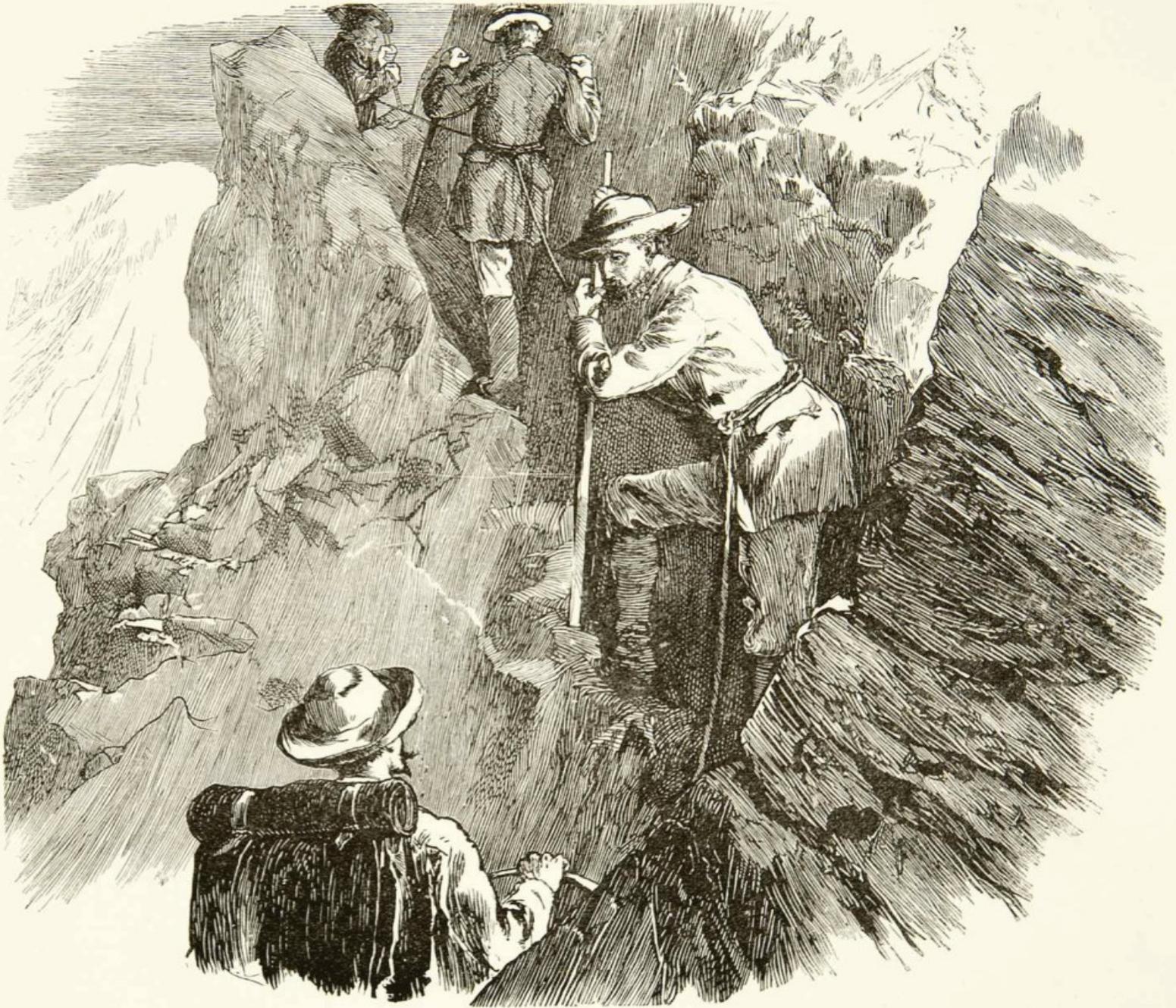


# The Road to Fame



**D.R. Smith**

# The Road to Fame

by **D.R. Smith**

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# **D.R. Smith – The Sage of Nuneaton Rob Hansen**

Delve into the early decades of British fandom and you can't go far without coming across the name of D.R. Smith. Sam Youd championed him, and Vince Clarke would later describe him as “a sort of eofannish D. West” – another Donald also better known by his initial!

Smith had a regular column in our first fanzine and quickly became what would be known in later parlance as a BNF, or Big Name fan – one of our first. Yet he was also famously reclusive, never attending conventions or visiting other fans, which led some to conclude he did not in fact exist, that he was a pen name under which another fan felt able to be more acerbic than when using their real name. So who was he, this Donald Raymond Smith, the so-called Sage of Nuneaton, and where did he come from?

When the Nuneaton branch of the Science Fiction League – chapter 22 – was formed in 1935 (see my article “The Rise and Fall of Leeds Fandom” last issue\*), they held their inaugural meeting at the 89 Long Shoot home of member Denny Jacques, as later reported:

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*\* Of Relapse edited by Peter Weston, which ceased publication before the present article could appear.*

“On June 7th, 1935 the Nuneaton Chapter of the Science Fiction League was given Charter by Headquarters, in future to be known as Chapter Twenty-Two, with Charter members, Dennis Jacques, First-Class SFL No. 737, (Assistant Director), J.E. Barnes, SFL No.926, M. Crowley, SFL No. 927, P.W. Buckerfield, SFL No 928, and Maurice K. Hanson, First-Class SFL No. 738, (Director).

“Since then the course of the Chapter has run, no doubt, in much the same way as many others. Chronologically accomplished facts run in the order – Chapter Meetings, Chapter Library, science fiction survey, and *Novae Terrae*. The first official meeting took place on June 26th when hazy plans were clarified and made concrete.

“There were later Chapter meetings at intervals – these consisting largely of discussion and planning – followed by the foundation of the Chapter Library. The nucleus of this (consisting of odd magazines presented by members) gradually developed. into today’s product, (helped very much by the presentation of three or four dozen magazines dating back to 1930 by newcomer D.R. Smith, SFL No. 1199.)“

As for how he came to be a member of Nuneaton SFL, here’s Smith himself:  
[1]

“Born 1917. Obtained first introduction to scientific fiction in *The Modern Boy*, soon after being introduced to Yankee scientification by a remainder copy of a very early *Astounding*, the third of the Clayton series. Flung it derisively on to the fire. Some months later purchased a copy of *Amazing*; it fully converted me, so that scientification became my favourite form of reading.

“In 1935, shortly after commencing work as an apprentice engineer, I tried to ride through a rapidly approaching bus on my cycle. Whilst laid up with the resultant broken wrist heard of Nuneaton chapter of the S.F.L. Penned laboriously, with my left hand, a joking note to a member of it. Maurice K. Hanson replied and thus brought me into the ranks of stf fans, amongst whom I have blundered happily along. Am a jig-and-tool draughtsman at present. Hobbies; reading, writing, and rock-climbing.”

Smith started his apprenticeship on 24th October 1934, his 17th birthday, having already passed his Higher School Certificate (the equivalent of A Levels). He had won a scholarship to his grammar school and another one for his apprenticeship at Alfred Herbert Ltd. He and Hanson would have met for the first time a few months earlier. Hanson was born a year after Smith and had gone to the same school. This was where their first meeting took place, as Smith later recalled when reminiscing about the earliest UK publication that might be considered an SF magazine of sorts:

“I do remember *Scoops*. I never read it – except for part of one issue which I filched from Maurice Hanson during the end-of-term idleness at the close of my school career – my first indication, incidentally, that there was another reader of science-fiction within

fifty miles, but I do remember it.” [2]

The two would become life-long friends.

In March 1936 the Nuneaton group put out the first issue of *Novae Terrae*. Edited by Hanson and Jacques it was the UK’s first true fanzine. It would see twenty-nine issues in total, and Smith would have a contribution in all but two of them. He made his initial appearance as a columnist in issue #2 the following month with “Alas, Poor Einstein”, which attacked the many crimes committed against the theory of relativity by pulp writers of the time, some of them quite prominent. It served notice that he was no respecter of reputations, and demonstrated how acerbic he could be. This was the first anyone had heard of Smith, the above report on their inaugural meeting appearing in *NT* #3.

Just how far he was prepared to go can be seen by his contribution to issue #4: “Hymn of Hate No.1 – Joe W. Skidmore”, a scathing attack on a writer he considered guilty of shoddy work. The target of Hymn of Hate No.2 in the following issue was John Russell Fearn, which led to an apology in issue #6:

“John Russell Fearn has objected to the wording of the first and last two paragraphs of ‘Hymn of Hate, No.2’. I am sorry that these should appear to be direct personalities, such being far from the plan of the article, which was intended as a general story criticism. Naturally, I offer full apology for anything in this article that can be taken in any way as a reflection on the personal or professional character of Mr. Fearn.”

Smith was back on the attack in #7 when he tore into “Ackermanese”, Forry Ackerman’s assault on the language, in “Hands Off English”. Ackerman was given right of reply and his response duly appeared in #9. The first of Smith’s magazine reviews appeared in #8. These would increasingly form the bulk of his contributions to *Novae Terrae*, though he often had an additional article in the fanzine too.

On 3rd January 1937, the world’s first science fiction convention was held in Leeds. It was here that a national organisation – the Science Fiction Association – was formed. Hanson was the only member of the Nuneaton group to attend. He returned from the convention with the news that *Novae Terrae* was no longer the journal of Nuneaton SFL but would henceforth be the national organ of the SFA. This change was duly announced in *Novae*

*Terrae* #10. The group also changed its name from Nuneaton SFL to Leicester SFA, the only time I know of that a UK fan group has changed its geographical allegiance.

By this point Smith was starting to get noticed in America and as well as reprints of his *Novae Terrae* columns, Claire P. Beck's *Critic* also started carrying new work by him. August 1937 saw the demise of the Leicester/Nuneaton group. During that month Hanson moved to London with his duplicator, and without him the group soon faded away, leaving only Smith as resident active fan. So it was that the October *Novae Terrae* appeared under the joint editorship of Hanson, Carnell, and Arthur Clarke, the first issue published in London. Smith continued as a regular contributor.

In July 1939 Maurice Hanson was called up. He appears to have been the first British fan to be conscripted into the armed forces. Since British fandom at this point was composed almost entirely of young men, its members all found themselves eligible for call-up to the armed forces. Some like Mike Rosenblum chose to be conscientious objectors, some like George Airey were deemed medically unfit, but most were duly called up and served their time in uniform in various capacities. (I hope to have a piece on the WWII service of UK fans in a future *Relapse*.)

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\* This projected article was the germ of the lengthy ebook *Homefront: Fandom in the UK 1939-1945* (2020), downloadable from the TAFF site.

Unlike most of his fannish contemporaries, Smith was not called up when war was declared in September 1939. As a draughtsman designing machine tools he was more important to the war effort where he was rather than toting a gun, his job being designated a "reserved occupation". [3]

While Smith did not visit other fans they did occasionally seek him out, as Erik Needham did in February 1942, as reported in *Futurian War Digest*:

"Home on 14 days leave, Erik Needham of Manchester, now in the RAF, found time to drop us a few lines and let us know that he is still alive. When last we heard from him he was at Preston, or near there, but now he tells us that he was able to drop in and see Nuneaton's Donald Raymond Smith last month. We understand a full report of the proceedings will be in the next *Fantast*." [4]

Which indeed it was:

"One wintry day, having a 36-hour pass, I went to B'ham to spend

the evening skating. After a night at the YMCA I hitch-hiked in ankle-deep snow which had fallen during the night, to Coventry to view the bomb damage. The ruins were bad enough, but did not compare with Liverpool and London's East End. However, sloshing about in the snow I beheld a bus bearing the legend 'NUNEATON' and in a moment of – well, call it inspiration, decided to call on D.R. Smith.

“Arriving with sodden boots at Church Road I felt that for Do Ray to describe his dwelling as Nuneaton was exaggerating slightly. He lives, with his mother, brother and sister, in a small row of houses miles from anywhere, on what is, to my city-bred mind, a bleak depressing stretch of uninviting, uninhabited country. Here, truly, is a haven for hermits.

“Not knowing the number, I made enquiries and was rather astonished to discover that in a row of five houses, four of the families were of the clan Smith. Of course, I found the wrong three first. When I pounded morosely on the door of No.13, I was confronted upon its opening by a tall, well built, good looking bloke of about 27. This was not D.R. Smith, but his big brother Leslie.

“Leslie invited me in and indicated his brother submerged in an armchair. Here, at last, I found the Sage of Nuneaton. So all these rumours about DRS being the pseudonym of a famous fan are shattered, dissolved. I located DRS. I spoke to him, even borrowed books from him. Indisputably, he is real.

“As DW [Doug Webster, editor of *Fantast*] wants this article to be short, I can only dwell on DRS, and so must only mention in passing the rest of the family. Leslie I have already mentioned, but his sister Freda, I haven't. She's about 18 years old, seems to be a non-fan, and is treated shamefully by both Les and Don. Mrs Smith is a really likeable old lady, and is one of the only two women fans I have ever met, the other one being John Russell Fearn's mother. I must thank her in these lines for those delicious tea-buns and the way she coped with my intrusion. Many thanks, Mrs Smith, and I certainly hope to meet you again some happier time.

“D.R. is perhaps the most typical fan I have ever encountered. Formerly the prize was divided between Arthur Clarke and Maurice

Hanson, but D.R. is even more fannish than those two, which is saying something.... He wears spectacles and a preoccupied look. Affects unconventional clothes. His hair, a rich mouse in colour, dangles limply over his forehead, and the general contour of his face is longish-oval. Runs to about 5ft 10ins in height, and moderately well-built, possibly 150lbs.

“Sorry, D.R., if this annoys you: DW asked for it! Don speaks in quick jerks, almost like a road drill, and also has an odd laugh which is a curious cross between a gurgle and a guffaw. Like most people in the Midlands, he has no appreciable accent. [Sid Birchby pointed out when he read this account, ‘it is significant that Erik the Needy is also a native of the Midlands’ – DW]. So there you are. Maybe D.R. will retaliate some day by letting you know what he thought of me.

“The little house is full of books. Books are everywhere and the few bookshelves are crammed. D.R. certainly varies his reading. His collection covers practically everything readable – fictional, classical, technical and pornographic. There were even some SF books there. He told me he had a collection and a typewriter, but I never got around to seeing them. Anyway, every fan has a collection and a typer, except me. I just have the typer.

“I stopped for dinner. And tea. With the family I discussed big cities and small towns, and at intervals tortured the family cat, a lordly monster, who remained lethargic and indifferent throughout it all. Never have I seen such a morose or apathetic mouser as the one at Smith’s. With D.R. himself the discussion veered to fans, societies and conventions, about all of which D.R. is slightly sceptical. Also told me how he was roped into sf, by once being in hospital, and whilst there reading a *Wonder Stories* announcing formation of the Nuneaton branch of the SFL.

“When I came away from No.13 I carried with me two of the latest *Astoundings*, the first two parts of *Second Stage Lensmen*, and Aldous Huxley’s *Brave New World*. As I rolled back to Wolverhampton on the bus, I felt almost at peace with the world.”

In mid-1942, a new national fan organisation came into existence: the British Fantasy Society (no relation to the current-day society of the same name). This was at the instigation of J. Michael Rosenblum whose fanzine *Futurian*

*War Digest* (aka “Fido”) was one of the few things holding UK fandom together at that point. The organisation had first been mooted a year earlier, but it took a long time to put together. Smith would be the editor of its official organ, the *BFS Bulletin* for all 28 issues of its existence from July 1942 until its demise in 1946. As he later wrote, the object of the BFS...

“...was officially stated to be ‘To bring together for their common good persons interested in scientific or weird fantasy’, and which at once acquired a most valuable asset. Ever since the start, of the war generous-hearted American fans had been sending parcels of fantasy pulps as free gifts to the exiled fans of Britain, and John Cunningham of Texas had organised a British Science-Fiction War Relief Society to further this noble aim. Forry Ackerman, Morojo, Bob Tucker, P.J. Searles, Walter Dunkelburger, Bill Watson and Joe Gibson were some of those concerned who received in return, the barren honour of being made Honorary Members of the BFS.

“The BSFWRS was flourishing long before the BFS. Jack Gibson being the English organiser, and he brought the collection into the BFS as the official library, with himself as librarian. It was by far the greatest single attraction of the society, and it was a great loss when Jack, suffering under prolonged attacks of illness, had to relinquish the post, and the library passed into less efficient hands. ”For there was little else the BFS could do in any substantial way for its members, who were to exceed the hundred mark considerably. The bulletin was a matter of one or more sheets added to Fido, and with its editor having none of the enthusiasm which had fired the fan-mag editors to such achievements, will be remembered as consisting chiefly of (futile) appeals for volunteers to execute the various projects thought up by the Executive Committee or the Advisory Board.

“A membership card and a Prospectus was issued to each new member, a gratifyingly high proportion of whom were new fans, contacted by other Service members. Minor conventions were held, members wandered round making contact with other members, and a cosmopolitan touch was introduced by the presence in our midst of American Service fans, and the Canadian Bob Gibson.

“Contact was made with the Cosmos Club of Teddington, a thriving band of enthusiasts, and the idea of their magazine *Beyond*

– a bound collection of story manuscripts by amateur writers – appropriated and used to the extent of three BFS issues. Nobody expected much in the middle of a war, and their expectations were fully met.”

“The Spirit of the New Age” was a rather odd series of profiles of British fans by John F. Burke in which he attempted a deeper character analysis of his subjects. Here’s No.5 in the series, from *FWD* #34 (April 1944), focussing on Smith:

“This is going to be awkward. It is more than somewhat presumptuous of me to attempt a biographical sketch of the aloof, secretive secretary of the British Fantasy Society.

“I have met Don thrice, corresponded with him, and fought with him, in columns of fan magazines, but although he has never been reticent with his opinions, he has never been communicative about himself. When it came to writing this study, I wrote and tried to coax a few details from him, but received only a refusal to divulge any ‘intimate secrets’ of his life, with a rhyme that sheds little light on his character:

*Donald Raymond Smith  
Was beloved of all his kith,  
But he was never very well in  
With many of his kin.*

“Having failed to produce any response, I tried to recall some little thing from our meetings that would help to start a train of thought. Don came to my rescue when I was stranded in a particularly awful army camp near Nuneaton. He came over to collect me with his tandem, and probably does not realise even now how close I was to turning away in fear. Perhaps he hoped I would, and had brought the infernal machine along merely to scare me.

“If so, he failed; we wobbled a bit, I made apologetic noises and thought how contemptuous the back of Don’s neck looked, and then we started on the long road to the Smith ancestral home. I was fed well, given several books of cartoons to read – these being considered about my intellectual standard – and later delighted by a recital of gramophone records that testified to an unsuspected

musical taste in the retiring Mr. Smith.

“This brief respite from creativity was not my first meeting with the Sage of Nuneaton. We had chatted for a few hours in Birmingham several months previously. We met for a third time – well, not much. Don was fair, somewhat windblown, wore spectacles, and looked more good-humoured than I had expected. He will in my memory be clad in sports coat and, flannels forever, unless we come together at some future convention and he wears the flowing gown and wizard’s peaked hat that suits his office.

“But that is unlikely. He says that he will not attend conventions. He discourages people from visiting him, and in his letters and articles has always sneered – yes, I say sneered – at fans. Unsociable? One of those unfortunates who cannot escape from the inexorable grip of fantasy, but endeavours to salvage his pride by making derogatory remarks about his fellow slaves?

“Nothing ready-made will fit the case. If I look back to the days when I first read the Smith articles in *Novae Terrae*, I can remember the feeling I then had of his being conceited; affected in style, and shallow. Time has altered that opinion; Sam Youd and I quarrelled over some of the prose poems by Smith in *Fantast*, particularly the purple ‘Oceana’, which was acclaimed by the devotees of gush as a minor masterpiece. I thought it bad then, and I think it bad now, but certain features of Don’s style appeal to me more now than they did then.

“The name of Donald Raymond Smith will not, I feel confident, ever be known as that of one of the great creative writers of the world. He himself has no such ambitions, as far as I can judge. He would like to make as much money as P.G. Wodehouse, but that’s not much help. I think he would make a good critic of the caustic, destructive kind – a minor James Agate. His phrasing is terse, and at his best he can produce delightful flashes of critical sensibility, but in anything long his style would suffer.

“Perhaps he was destined to be a journalist, but he is not interested in the ephemerae which must of necessity be the journalist’s main concern. And perhaps he was destined to be no more than what he is, a jig-tool mechanic, dabbling in literature and music, admiring blood-and-beery writers like Hemingway, making

a name for himself as a sardonic sage in a small group of adolescent fanatics.

“It’s something for the psychologist: is Don a would-be mighty figure who can find no outlet for his desires in the larger world, and endeavours to build up a reputation among a few gullible readers of science fiction? It fits – he sees as few of these fans as possible because personal contact always destroys such illusions as the Sage of Nuneaton’s reputation for wit and caustic criticism. Could be .” It could be a lot of other things as well. What makes Don what he is? Was he dropped on his head when young? The shape of his head and features does not suggest it – at any rate, no more than those of any other fan. Work it out for yourself. He writes satires and vague fantasies, confesses to having written a science-fiction novel (kept well out of sight), likes the idea of strong men, shows no sign of liking women, beer, or cigarettes; would not like to pluck and clean a chicken, dislikes intellectuals, likes Wagner, James Thurber, David Langdon, climbing mountains...

“He has annoyed more people than I would care to annoy. John Russell Fearn threatened a libel action. Sam Youd, being one of Smith’s most ardent disciples for many years, fell out with him because he showed no signs of sharing Sam’s political view; Sam is like that. Doug Webster, I think, found the views of Smith too much to endure, probably because Don exhibited no social consciousness. We were all shocked at the name of D.R. Smith being entered in the B.F.S. rolls as secretary: the individualistic, unsociable D.R.S, notorious as the dead-end of letter chains, magazine chains; the lazy, annoying Smith! But there he is. It serves him right.

“So far Don and I have not had hard words. We quarrelled in fanmags before we began writing to one another, so perhaps that phase is over. Doubtless if I were a budding politician or a sociologist I would find him intolerable. As it is, I find him tolerable.

“No more than tolerable? Well, now....”

In *FWD* #39 (March 1945), the final issue, Smith reported that: “Remote fastnesses of Hartshill recently stormed by Edwin Macdonald in successful

attempt to interview Hermit Smith – only fifth fan Smith has met. As Roy Johnson came over not many weeks ago I think I’ve seen my quota of fans for the year.”

Not so, as it turned out. In *BFS Bulletin* #22 (June 1945), Smith told of Macdonald’s return:

“Easter Sunday he reappeared in the company of Ron Lane, George Ellis and Don Houston. Big book-swap haggle between Ron and Edwin, Don Houston assisting, occupied the time pleasantly (well, it occupied the time) until a rather puzzled-at-what-they-had-come-for DRS escorted them to a ’bus, hotel accommodation having been obtained at Leicester. Being there, they visited Roy Johnson on the following day.”

This was the first issue of the *BFS Bulletin* to appear following the demise of *Futurian War Digest*. It was a full eight pages, picking up the slack and, for a short while, taking the place of *FWD* as UK fandom’s newszine of record. Sadly, it would not last long.

Writing in *The Whitcon Booklet* for the 1948 Whitcon, the first post-war British convention, Smith detailed the demise of the BFS: [5]

“The organisation was fundamentally unsound. The Executive Council consisting of President Gillings, Director Rosenblum, Secretary Smith (D.R.) and Treasurer Busby lived remote from each other and had to confer through circular letters, than which a more tedious and inefficient method could hardly be conceived.

“The other two will forgive me if I say that most of the actual work devolved on Michael and myself. I being both idle and unsocial this brought it down to Rosenblum. Michael had enthusiasm, energy and sociability, but he had been producing a fan-magazine for ten years, he maintained a huge correspondence with fans and book-collectors both here and in America, and his health began to deteriorate.

“Transfer of the library to Ron Holmes and Nigel Lindsay made an asset out of what had been for too long a liability, but the end of the war brought no signs of any fan resurgence in which the management of the BFS could be transferred to more lively, less-wearied hands, and the iniquitous Secretary put more honest enthusiasm into winding it up than he had put into any other

activity. The British Fantasy Library continues the most useful part of the BFS, much more efficiently than the BFS ever managed it, so the loss is by no means entire.

“Looking back on the whole affair, the most remarkable thing appears to be the tenacious hold on existence of such a puny, scattered, disunited body as fandom. Since a large proportion of fans cease to take any interest in pulp fantasy after a few years there has to be a constant influx of new members of the clan, yet such new members are not the result of anything except the pure chance of falling over some existing fan. Supplies of the pulp-magazines have been difficult to obtain for the last nine years even for the established fans – and there seems no prospect of any improvement. Why is there still a fantasy fandom in Britain?”

The situation Smith wrote about was certainly true. British fandom *was* at a low ebb in the immediate postwar period. Yet the first buds of new activity had begun to bloom, not least with this convention. It was the first in the country in four years. It is also the convention from which the modern Eastercon is numbered. Apart from the hiccup of missing 1950 and being replaced by a proto-Eurocon the following year, our national convention has enjoyed an unbroken run ever since.

Not that this was of direct importance to the hermit of Nuneaton. For him fanzines were where his fan-activity took place, and there were very few venues for such activity at the time. Nevertheless, he had some amateur fiction in Walt Willis’s and James White’s *Slant* #5 (Spring 1951) and continued to write the occasional letter of comment.

Things picked up a few years later with the arrival of *Hyphen* – the successor to *Slant* – and Smith became a regular in the letter-column of its early issues. Here’s an extract from a letter addressed to editor Willis in issue #7 (March 1954) that casts some light on his antipathy towards conventions:

“It occurs to me that I have yet to acknowledge receipt of the January issue of *Hyphen*, and I naturally hasten to do so, representing as it does one of the few ties I still have to fandom. At times it does seem to me that I am drifting apart from something which has been a small part of my life for more years than I care to calculate (20) but then *Hyphen* arrives and I realise I am as deeply connected to the movement as I ever was.

“And this really is a super issue, for it contains one shining gleam of truth, one blinding glimpse of the obvious which has dispelled the horror and repugnance with which I tend to view people who attend conventions, as conventions are usually described, and has made me realise they are human beings like myself, and like the sort of people I like to be with.

“‘The secret of enjoying yourself is to gather together a few congenial friends and hide’ you say, and I regard them as some of the most beautiful words I have seen in a fanzine in many a long year – preceded as they are by the almost equally beautiful disparagement of the conventional convention’s ‘enormous loud and drunken party.’

“Why has nobody dared to utter these lovely words before? Why have convention reporters (and I cannot exclude you from this category) persisted in emphasising the more revolting and disgusting side of the affair, so that Innocents like myself shrank from the shocking inanity of such goings on? I do not say that I shall rush off to attend conventions, the habit of years is too hard to break. But at least I know now that if I do accidentally meet with one I need not run screaming away.”

When Mike Rosenblum decided to publish a fanzine again after having been seduced into doing so as a result of joining the newly-formed Leeds SF Association (no relation to any pre-war group) he naturally put out the call from his Grosvenor Park home to all his old contributors. So it was that the first issue of *The New Futurian* (Spring 1954) opened with a poem by Smith titled “To Michael With Love”:

*Happily examining my Christmas mail  
One card I came across – ’twas yours Michael my friend,  
Eagerly I opened it and perused the message therein,  
But then, like Brandy Marlo, I gotten a red mist before my eyes,  
O God! O Grosvenor Park!*

*“Am thinking of reviving the Futurian” it said,  
And in language curt these two words added  
“Co-operation requested” – no more, no please, and what’s more  
The first and only message from your noble pen for years,  
O God! O Grosvenor Park!*

*Now when I read this I was wroth and said "Bloody cheek!"  
Am I this Rosenblum's dog that I should thus be ordered by he,  
Am I his servant, his slave, his clown, his performing ape,  
If he addresses me thus how fares his wife?  
O God! O Grosvenor Park!*

*Now I say to you Michael that I am a man of parts,  
I have a position of command and when I say do thus men obey,  
I am also a man of possessions, having a car, a lathe, a set of  
Encyclopaedia Britannica,  
I am not one to run to heel at the lift of your finger,  
O God! O Grosvenor Park!*

*Message Ends (Apologies to Samuel Butler)*

In the following issue, which appeared that summer, he had an article titled "How Dost Thou, Benedick?", fulminating against the prevalence of romance in modern magazine SF, particularly in the pages of *Galaxy*:

"As a hardened old bachelor myself I take a twilight view of this utter surrender of science fiction to the cherished female myth that men are so insatiably uxorious that they can't resist a good bust measurement. Is there anything so very incredible in a hero who has more important interests in life than slobbering over an attractive female?"

He concluded:

"The female audience would not exactly go a bundle on such a situation. They would deprecate it all the more because of its dangerous realism. But the female audience is catered for by masses of exclusively soppy magazines bulging with fiction based on the ridiculous proposition that the mating instinct is the only interesting or important thing in life. Let them therefore be – for once – unselfish and not insist on this sickly theme slurping over into science fiction. Let us return to the happy days of science fiction stories which were stag parties, not necking sessions."

I wonder if Smith – who was by now 37 years old – modified these antediluvian attitudes later when he got married (to Margaret Strong) in 1966?

A letter from Bill Temple in the following issue contained news of the by now long-gatified Maurice Hanson:

“I’m sending Maurice this copy of *Futurian*. It may stir him to write to you, but I doubt it. His wheel too has turned full circle and he’s vegetating quietly in Leicester, reading George Elliott, gardening, house-decorating, listening to music, subscribing to the *New Yorker*, grinning at Wodehouse and Frank Sullivan, writing to no s-f people except myself (and then only twice a year), and working daily in a science lab of the local university among genuine scientists who also garden, house-decorate and don’t read science fiction.”

Aside from a couple of letters, Smith’s next contribution to *The New Futurian* appeared in issue #7 (Spring 1957) and was a piece of amateur fiction written some years earlier. Smith’s fannish career was now winding down. This appears to have been due at least in part to his recent acquisition of a house and the work that having such a property entailed.

He appeared in the letter-column of Daphne Buckmaster’s *Esprit* several times in the early 1960s, and was no more positive about fandom than he had been in the pages of *Hyphen* in 1954. Here he is in vol. 2 number 3 (February 1961):

“I personally am very fond of SF but care very little for fandom. The illusion that fans are a race of homo superior is as old and as tedious as that other illusion that fans are hard-drinking, hard-loving, matey men of the world. Between them they account for my lack of interest in fandom.”

The last record of his fannish activity that has so far been found was a listing as a BSFA member on the 1965 Membership List. He does not appear on those for subsequent years. This may have been the end of Smith’s association with fandom but he maintained his friendship with Maurice K. Hanson and the pair kept up a correspondence until it was ended by time and circumstance. [6]

Smith’s niece Kate Crooks recently got in touch with me after finding mention of her uncle online in *THEN*, my history of British fandom. She explains what happened:

“Don kept the last letter he received from Maurice Hanson. It

suggests that Hanson was working at Imperial College, but commuting from Kettering! I wonder if he was an administrator, rather than a lecturer, unless he went to university after WWII.”

A search of the Imperial College website reveals that to this day their Department of Civil & Environmental Engineering has a Maurice Hanson Prize, “for annual award to the student who produces the best performance in the written papers on the Advanced Course in Transport”.

Kate continues: “Don annotated Hanson’s last letter ‘died 12 May 1981 in lodgings in London’, which fits in with the registration of his death in the June quarter of 1981 in the Kettering District; Hanson’s home address was in Kettering, where he had been living since 1975, if not earlier.”

I checked with Imperial College and they revealed that Hanson was the librarian in their transport library. The prize was established in his memory in 1983 from money raised by friends and colleagues.

Don himself died on 24 September 1999, at his home in Coventry.

Looking back over Smith’s time in fandom it’s clear he was at his most active during his first dozen or so years in fandom – not an unusual pattern. What also becomes clear is the contribution he made to British fandom during the war. It’s often been said that J. Michael Rosenblum played a large part in keeping British fandom together during those dark days. This is true. It’s also sometimes been said he was single-handedly responsible for doing so. This is not true. As secretary of the British Fantasy Society, D.R. Smith edited more than two dozen issues of its newsletter over a period of three years. When it came to keeping British fandom together, he was Mike Rosenblum’s right-hand man and deserves his share of the credit. Not a bad fannish legacy, all in all.

*Rob Hansen, April 2013*

## **Notes**

[1] DRS’s tale of how he found fandom was “Fan Parade No. 2” in *The Futurian* #3 (January 1939) edited by J.M. Rosenblum.

[2] *Scoops* anecdote from letter in *The New Futurian* #6 (January 1957).

[3] Kate Crooks says, “Don was very clever. He spent his entire career from 1934 to 1982 at Alfred Herbert Ltd, becoming Chief Designer in 1964”.

[4] Eric/Erik Needham's account of his visit, originally titled "In Search of a Sage", first appeared in *The Fantast* #14 (July 1942) edited by Doug Webster. Why Needham's forename is spelled differently at different points is unknown.

[5] Smith quotes about the BFS are taken from his article in the *Whitcon Booklet*. The *BFS Bulletin* can be found online at <http://efanzines.com/FWD/BFS.htm>. We're missing a few issues of this and other BFS publications. Scans of these would be gratefully received.

[6] Checking with Genesreunited I discovered that Maurice Hanson was born in 1918 and that the middle initial, "K", stood for the rather unusual "Kimpton". He is cited by the Natural History Museum as a "plant collector". Kate found Hanson's entry into the Civil Service in the *London Gazette* – August 1937 – Executive Class, "after open competition". She notes "Kimpton was his greatgrandmother's maiden name; Maurice's grandfather was Mark Kimpton Hanson, and his father simply Kimpton Hanson. If only Don had thought of inviting some friends to his wedding I would have met him."



*D.R. Smith in the late 1940s. Photo*

*courtesy of Kate Crooks.*

# Introduction

## Rob Hansen

In the five years or so prior to starting work on *The Road to Fame*, D.R. Smith wrote several pieces of amateur fiction that appeared in various fanzines of the day. So far as I'm aware he never wrote any fan fiction (i.e., fiction about fandom and/or fans) and this was his first piece of IP fan fiction (i.e., amateur fiction using Intellectual Property created and owned by others – or what most people mean by the term “fan fiction” today). It is the first significant piece of IP fan fiction from an SF fan in the UK, possibly the first ever (I've yet to come across an earlier one), and predates the first *Star Trek* IP fan fiction by a quarter of a century. As we join the tale the Heroes of Science Fiction (*circa* 1940) are gathering to undertake a quest on behalf of their genre....

*Rob Hansen, June 2021*

# **The Road to Fame**

# Chapter I

The little flying machine made three silent circuits of the City of Waiting before floating down to land in the central square, at the foot of the steps leading up to the Reception Station, where it was at once surrounded by a crowd of the most prominent of the inhabitants. Two men emerged from the cabin, a big man in a magnificent fur coat, who, twirling a large spanner in his hand, stood guard over the door while his red-bearded companion swung himself up on to the top of the plane with an activity which did not disguise the fact that he had an artificial leg.

“The name is Kettle,” he announced without any preamble. “I, and my friend, Mr. McTodd, have been sent by the Ruler of the Hall of Immortal Fame to ask you of the scientific fiction stories to make a bid for the attainment of that distinguished place. It is not expected or required that you should all attempt the long and arduous journey, but if only one or two can get through, the rest will be sent for automatically. The advantages are numerous, of course, the least of them being that you will have all the advantages of advanced civilisations to which you have been accustomed instead of languishing here in a primitive state that must resemble Hades to most of you. On the journey you will have to face such obstacles as the Impassable Precipice of Public Ridicule, the high passes of the Mountains of Contempt through which howls the High Wind of Carping Criticism, the Bog of Apathy in the lowlands beyond, and the vast waterless Plain of Mediocrity where hunt the Wild Wolves of Fierce Competition. We are only allowed to give you this map, and the encouragement that all of us who live in the Hall have had to face similar journeys.”

His brief speech over, Captain Kettle dropped to the ground and handed the map over to a large, handsome man in the front of the crowd, and was about to get into the cabin again when a big, black-haired man stepped forward and addressed him in a cold, hard voice.

“Why should we not take this flying machine off you, by force, if necessary, and fly to this Hall of Fame?”

Captain Kettle gave a bark of laughter and continued on into the cabin as McTodd stepped forward.

“You’ll be Mr. DuQuesne, I’m thinking,” quoth the Scot. “Here’s the

only reason I'm prepared to give the likes of you." And with the greatest nonchalance conceivable, he knocked the scientist flat on his back, stepped into the plane, and was rapidly returning whence he came by the time that the astonished and annoyed DuQuesne had scrambled back to his feet.

The bewilderment of the crowd gradually changed to comprehension and passed on to dispute. DuQuesne made a cutting remark about Seaton's characteristic luck in having the map handed to him and nearly had another fight on his hands. In the confusion the map was dropped and seized by a short, amazingly burly man with a big, blue-black beard who fought his way out of the crowd until he could address them from the elevation of the steps of the Redemption Station.

"There is no need for this foolish wrangle," he bellowed in a voice that compelled attention. "The point is that on us, the characters of scientific romance, rests the fate of our own and our literature's fame and immortality. We have heard the difficulties to face, but we have a map, and I am prepared to lead a party. In fact, George Edward Challenger goes, if he goes alone."

"As far as I am concerned you go alone," snorted Professor Summerlee caustically. "My experiences of your leadership are disconcerting, sir, very much so."

Professor Challenger swelled with indignation. "You are quite right, sir, in declining to go. There will be no room for old women and cripples."

His elderly opponent returned glare for glare. "On second thought, I will go. There will be great need of a sensible man in a party so led."

Meanwhile volunteers were sorting themselves out in a group, organised by Lord John Roxton and Malone. Seaton and DuQuesne, watching each other like two strange dogs, Arcot, Morey, Wade, Tarzan and John Carter, Kinnison, Dr. Bird, Commander John Hanson, James Atkill, Hawke Carse and Friday, Gregg Haljan, Sergeant Walpole, Cossar, and others until Professor Challenger said: "Who's going to see to the preparations; I haven't the time myself. It had better be the most intelligent member of the expedition."

"After you," said Seaton politely to Kinnison, who shook his head courteously and smiled, "No, after you."

"I'll do it," said the impatient Cossar abruptly, ignoring the glares of the courteous ones.

## Chapter II

About a week later the party set out, cheered on their way by the only two of those staying behind who could be troubled to get up early enough. They made a brave show, clad in stout breeches and open-necked shirts, shod in clinker-nailed climbing boots and carrying ruck-sacks containing a three week's supply of condensed food prepared by the combined genius of Seaton and Wade, extra clothing for the high regions they expected to scale, and an assortment of articles dictated by individual ideas. At the front, Professor Challenger and his three companions each carried ropes and ice-axes, awkward things that added to the acrimony of the disputes between the two Professors. Lord John Roxton was the unwilling companion of the only incongruous member of the party, a tall slender young man whose face ran backwards both above and below his nose, fair-haired with vacuous blue eyes in one of which was fixed a monocle. He had various names, but the only one that was adopted was Clarence, for he was that almost legendary person, the American Idea of the Young English Aristocrat.

Behind these leaders the party spread out for some distance. Seaton walked with Kinnison, DuQuesne with Atkill, Tarzan with John Carter, and so on, each pair engaged in maintaining their reputations as strong silent men while making sure that all were well acquainted with their exploits. In spite of this blows were only dangerously near once, when Sergeant Walpole expressed with military bluntness his lack of belief in one of Commander John Hanson's stories, and the efforts of the party at preserving the peace were successful. They camped for the night far up the steep-walled valley that the map told them was the only break in the mountain barrier, and stories that were told about the camp-fire would have made the fortunes of all the science-fiction magazines.

Two hours after their start on the following morning they arrived at the first obstacles, the tremendous Precipice of Public Ridicule which crossed the valley from side to side. On all sides the cliffs were sheerly perpendicular and smooth; the Precipice itself had an overhang at two hundred feet that cut off all view of its higher parts. It appeared that the party was defeated already.

"It seems to be impossible," commented Lord John Roxton.

"The word has no meaning to us, the heroes of science-fiction,"

reproved the Grey Lensman. "Now, if I had my DeLameter, I'd have a stairway carved up that in no time."

"If I had my X-pistol I'd blow the whole mountain out of the way," added Seaton rapidly.

"And if I had a body of steeple-jacks I'd run a lift up it," said Cossar, his tone a little sarcastic. "We've got to climb it, not wish ourselves up on it."

"There is no need for you to feel defeat, gentlemen, not with G.E.C. leading the party," said Professor Challenger, preening himself visibly. "I perceive a flaw in the left hand corner of this remarkable natural phenomenon that may well enable us to overcome the difficulty."

The flaw he had noticed turned out to be an inviting perpendicular crevice apparently formed by the end wall of the valley not coming quite up to the side wall. For eighty feet it was parallel sided and an admirable width for that climbing technique known as "chimneying," then it was blocked by a flat chock-stone. The most unfortunate part was that the chimney did not start at the foot of the cliff, but some twenty-five feet or more up the smooth, almost perpendicular face. Challenger was not beaten by this.

"We must form a pyramid," he said. "There are enough strong men here to do it, I think; a three, two, one will be sufficient, the climber himself to be a fourth storey. Now who are the strongest here?"

It was an unfortunate question. The harmony that had prevailed was entirely lost as boastful giants swelled their biceps and described the feats of strength they had performed and cast doubt on the claims of others. Jaws were thrust forward and fists shaken under noses. Tarzan of the Apes thumped his chest and gave his war-cry, and Aarn Munro staggered around holding a boulder as big as himself above his head, until Jimmy Atkill ticked his ribs. The uproar grew and there seemed to be real danger of a fight when Cossar took charge.

"Shut up! Be quiet for a moment please," he shouted. "It's not a matter of strength alone, but of height as well. Also a certain unity about each layer. I suggest Seaton, DuQuesne, and Kinnison for the base, Arcot and Wade for the second tier, and Tarzan on top. The upper tiers take their boots off."

This did not assuage those whom he left out, but it did leave a solid band of six to back him in his decision, and that was the pyramid eventually erected. Professor Challenger was about to mount it impetuously when Lord John detained him.

"Take it easy," he urged. "Look at the gap that remains above Tarzan."

“Well, sir? Well?”

“Well, it requires someone a little taller than you, I think.”

“Oh indeed. Very good, sir. I am not accustomed to being jeered at because of my lack of height, but let it pass. Perhaps you consider your own qualifications superior?”

“Well, as a matter of fact, I do,” replied Lord John, knotting one end of his rope around his waist as Professor Challenger stalked away huffily, his beard bristling with rage. Malone paid out the rope as the lean adventurer stepped from Seaton’s palm to his shoulder, head, to Wade’s palm, and so up until he balanced precariously on the top of Tarzan’s head. But at utmost stretch his fingers fell inches short of the sharp edge at the foot of the chimney, and he had to retreat.

“No can do,” he said breathlessly. “Suppose you have a go, Malone? You’re a bit taller than me, I think.”

“Just a minute,” interposed a voice from the center of the base. “How much do you weigh, Malone?” enquired a perspiring DuQuesne.

“Why, fifteen stone or so,” said Malone, and was puzzled by the sudden hush that fell upon the pyramid. Five mighty American foreheads corrugated in painful thought, and the mental power expended was almost palpable.

“How much is that, anyway?” said someone savagely, and Malone grinned with sudden realisation.

“Who, it be nearly eleven score, surely,” he said, and DuQuesne snarled in fury. “Two hundred and ten pounds or so,” translated his tormentor.

“Too heavy anyway,” retorted DuQuesne.

“Of course, if you’re feeling the strain,” began Seaton in carefully calculated tones of exasperating solicitude.

“If you’d take your fair share of the weight instead of scrim-shanking...”

“Why, you jelly-bellied hell-hound...!”

“Stand still, blast your eyes,” wailed the upper tiers, and grumblingly the pair subsided to indignant peace.

“Anyway, I’m not much taller than you,” said Malone to Lord John. “Morey’s the tallest here.” But that gentleman urged hastily that he was neither a gymnast nor yet a climber.

“Well, isn’t there anyone?” enquired Lord John, ignoring a remark by DuQuesne that there was no need to hurry and that he (Lord John) might have a rest and a bit of a meal before carrying on for all he (DuQuesne)

cared.

“I say, old boy, I’m pretty tall, what?” remarked Clarence. “Don’t weigh much, either. Suppose I have a bit of a smack at the jolly old pitch, what?”

“You mean get up there and help someone else into the foot of the chimney?”

“No, dash it, all or nothing, old chappie. I used to be pretty hot at this chimney business, got sent down for ranting around the jolly old roofs as a matter of fact. This rock business always seemed too jolly sweat-making, but I don’t mind having a bit of a stab at it now, what?”

Challenger, who had returned to watch with an evil smile, sniffed contemptuously, but Lord John rather doubtfully showed Clarence how to tie a bowline, and, with the thin strong rope dangling behind him and with his boots in Malone’s charge, he climbed awkwardly to the top of the pyramid. From there he reached up and wrapped his fingers round the edge and vanished from view of those directly below with astonishing celerity.

“I say, this is a jolly nice chimney,” they heard him say as the pyramid resolved itself into its component parts with sighs of relief on the part of the lower tier, and those farthest away saw him stand erect and brace himself across between the walls. Back against one wall, right foot up on the other, left foot doubled underneath, cautious raise of about a foot, left foot across right and right back underneath. Such was the cycle of movements, carried out with the rhythmic steadiness that showed that Clarence had found his metier. Up and up the perpendicular cleft, pausing at times to rest and to examine the faces in case it were possible to move out on to them, but always moving on, until he was right up under the big chock-stone, a hundred feet above the ground and still only supported by the friction of his back on one wall and his feet on the other.

“Now, if he can only get over that chock-stone...” breathed Lord John, watching with fierce concentration, in imagination up there himself, braced across emptiness, realising the danger of fatigue overtaking the climber if he had to climb back down that chimney. The arms of the climber groped over the face of the rock, searching blindly for holds that were not there. He groped, seemed to grip something, and wriggled his shoulders round until his left hand was up by the other. He seemed to gather together his resolution, then suddenly was hanging free from his hands only his legs kicking helplessly in midair. With a twist, he brought his body round, his feet up on the wall where his back had been, and walked up horizontally until he could

reach for another hand-hold and bring his feet across onto the chock-stone below him. Then he scrambled rapidly out of sight, after a minute's rest on that comparative safety.

“Good work, very good work indeed!” commented Lord John, drawing his first real breath for some time. “Let's hope it is possible to continue on past that chock-stone.”

The non-climbing members of the party were looking very thoughtful at the prospect of having to follow, but before any comment was made, Clarence's face became visible over the edge, peering down at those below. Before he could speak, Challenger's bull voice flung up the eternal query of the climber: “Will it go?”

“He means can you get up any further that way?” elucidated Lord John.

“Oh, rather. Jolly old walk-over, old boy,” called Clarence. “Absolutely like going upstairs to bed,” he elaborated, with a backward wave of his hand which overbalanced him. He made a sort of rolling dive down over the face of the chock-stone, saved himself with a frantic grab, and wiggled back to safety. His face reappeared without a pause. “How are the rest of you chaps coming up?”

The rest of the party were wondering that themselves, and although Challenger snorted “The same way as you did, of course, you nincompoop,” the non-climbers were looking rather grave. Even Seaton seemed a little dubious at the prospects of repeating Clarence's feat, and it was left to the direct mind of Cossar to give the solution.

“We can't all do that climb,” said Cossar. “You can, Tarzan. Not up the rock – up the rope. More your type of country. Take another rope with you, then each of us can tie on, and you can help us. One of the others can relieve you later. Obviously. Clarence!” he bawled.

“Yes, old thing?”

“Tie the end of your rope to a firm chunk of rock. And don't use a granny knot either.”

“Why, what other sort of knot is there?” called Clarence in surprise.

“Good God!” said Cossar feelingly, and Lord John laughed and called:

“Use that knot I've just showed you to tie round your waist, a bowline, But make sure it can't slip off, and the rope isn't resting against a sharp edge.”

“Righto,” and Clarence disappeared from view for some time, during which Tarzan knotted the end of another rope about his waist. In due course

there came a hail from above, and Clarence called doubtfully, "I think it's all right."

"Go on, Tarzan," said the impatient Challenger, and, rather doubtfully, Tarzan began to climb hand over hand. It would have been easier, and would have taken less skin off his knuckles, if he put his feet against the rock and walked up leaning on the rope, but John Clayton, Lord Greystoke, was too proud to resort to such effeminate methods. As a consequence, he arrived at the top just about sparked-out, and he could only look his feelings when Clarence said with a cheerful smile:

"Gosh, I'm glad you made it, old thing. I couldn't for the life of me think how to tie that bowline knot, so I just wound the rope round and round that knob. But all's well that ends well, what?"

When Tarzan had recovered physically and mentally he tied the rope on properly and used the other one as an extra support to Aarn Munro, whose Jovian muscles made the task an easy one. With these two at the top, there was little difficulty about bringing the rest up, though several who tried to be proud and dispense with the aid of those above, as did Challenger, who tried to imitate Clarence, or Seaton, who tried to imitate Tarzan, were hauled up unceremoniously when they got stuck and held up proceedings. Indignant though they were, they were too strangled by the ropes around their diaphragms by the time they reached the top to vent their wrath by other than glares and snorts.

By the time that all were up on the ample platform above the chockstone, Challenger's indignation had cooled sufficiently under the persuasive tongues of Lord John and Malone to allow him to make an inspection of the route that lay before them. It lay up a cliff which continued the line of the chimney, and, though at a very stiff angle, it was provided with a regular staircase of broad footholds. Challenger was greatly pleased, apparently attributing their good fortune to his own skillful planning.

"Having forced our way thus far, it would seem that the way is made easy for us," he said. "Follow me, gentlemen, in full confidence that no matter what happens, G.E.C. will pull you through."

The pilgrimage camped that night by a stream of clear, cold mountain water well back from the edge of the mighty precipice. Before and above them, with the rays of the setting sun warm on the grey rock of the lower crags and glistening on the snow-capped peaks, rose a formidable mountain barrier of awe-inspiring ruggedness. Gazing on that fantasy of rock, Professor

Summerlee said sourly, "It looks as though we might as well have saved our energy and stopped at the foot of the precipice."

"To one who is not only a confirmed pessimist, but also lacking both the ambition of a virile man and the explorative courage of the scientific spirit, such an obstacle may indeed appear insuperable," rumbled Challenger with heavy sarcasm. "Nevertheless, my learned colleague may perhaps remember that we were told of a pass in these Mountains of Contempt, a pass which, I may say, is not only clearly shown on this map, but may also be seen by a person with normal eyesight directly in front of us."

"Indeed?" said Summerlee bitterly. "You have already given us, sir, a brilliant example of your powers of leadership in the noble way in which you led the attack on the last obstacle and the ease with which you climbed the first pitch, an example which hardly encourages us to repose complete confidence in you."

"Oh, very good, sir!" snorted Challenger furiously. "Am I to be insulted by every scrawny he-goat who takes refuge in his age and decrepitude to cast aspersions on his mental, moral, and physical superiors? I demand an apology, sir! At once, or I leave the party!"

"The sooner the better for me, sir," retorted Summerlee, and it required all the tact of Lord John and the blarney of Malone, and, above all, the satisfaction of supper to pacify the two professors.

## Chapter III

In the clear mountain air of the morning, the peaks appeared to be very near, but the distance over the intervening foot-hills was greater than it seemed, and the limbs of the Pilgrims were stiff from the exertions of the previous day. They camped that night on stony ground just below the pass, where it was necessary to raise the voice to penetrate the constant howl of the Wind of Carping Criticism which blows incessantly through that gap. To the discomforts of sleeping on the cold, hard ground was added the noise of that wind, which kept many of the party awake.

As a consequence, they rose early in an unamiable mood, and there was a deal of angry argument as they broke camp and donned their packs. Dr. Bird, who was more or less on his own and watching only for a chance to slip away in the lead, got away first, and the others ceased their arguments to pursue him angrily. The muscular, determined Bird kept well in front up the sharp rise to the flat-bottomed cleft that was the pass, and found that the easiest way into it was to proceed up one side onto a ledge which ran across level with the floor of the pass.

He reached this well in front of the others, and strode along it, eager to pit his brain and thews against the Wind of Carping Criticism. At the corner he stepped boldly full into the pass, and the blast lifted him as if he were a feather and hurled him outwards and upwards terrific speed. The appalled watchers saw his spinning body dwindle to a dot that passed high over the edge of the Precipice.

“Poor old Bird,” said someone soberly. “Our first casualty. I knew him well, one of the biggest boors that ever lived.” He might have kept his sympathy, knowing Bird. Through he never again tried the pilgrimage, Bird was not killed then. The wind hurled him to the very outskirts of the City of Waiting, and as he plummeted down at terrific speed, the archfiend, Saranoff, who had seen him coming and wished to make doubly sure of his destruction, touched off a cunningly laid mine at Bird’s landing point. As usual, his maliciousness defeated its object, for the blast met the descending Dr. Bird at the right time to cushion his fall, so that he alighted unharmed, apart from bruises and the entire destruction of his clothes.

The party below the pass were not to know this, and a few manly sighs

were breathed before a cautious attempt was made on the pass. So wary were they, indeed, that nothing happened until Sergeant Walpole worked his way to the front and tried to wriggle out into the pass on his belly. He made progress for a time, but found that the rocky floor was too smooth to furnish enough grip for pulling himself along, while an attempt to raise his body up high enough to crawl was nearly disastrous.

“If we could force our way along ten or twelve yards, there is a dip which would provide a resting stage,” he added, after reporting to Cossar. (Challenger was at the back of the party, vainly trying to get along the overcrowded ledge.)

“Hum,” said Cossar, and had a look himself. “Only thing to do is build another pyramid,” said he. “There’s a furrow running across which will give the base men foot-hold. Come on, four of you – as you were. Single file will do; wind resistance of a column will be the same as that of one man. Obviously. Where’s Munro?”

The squat Jovian worked his way along the ledge to the fore and crawled out into the wind. When he was braced firmly in position (“Can you hold ’em from there?” asked Cossar; “I could hold back a comet from here,” said Aarn cheerfully.), Cossar sent Tarzan, Kinnison, and after him Seaton.

“Are you there now?” called Cossar, in a voice which fought its way up against the wind to where Seaton vainly sought for holds to drag himself forward the extra few feet.

Seaton finally called sulkily, “Not quite.” Cossar withdrew his head to summon the next man, but even as he did so, a powerful figure crawled quickly past him and began to work its way up the line. Seaton, furious with disappointment, was incensed beyond words to find DuQuesne crawling over him, DuQuesne’s saturnine features a few inches from his, as DuQuesne’s hand pulled down on his head, and DuQuesne’s feet found toe-hold in his belt. “You rat!” began Seaton wrathfully; then DuQuesne maliciously found his next foothold on the face of his enemy and thrust himself forward into the shelter of the hollow.

“All right, Blackie, drop us a rope,” called Seaton after a moment, but Dr. DuQuesne had other ideas on the subject, and was trying whether it was possible for him to continue alone. Seaton’s suspicious mind tumbled to this in a very short time, and the prostrate and helpless scientist flamed with fury at such treachery. He was explaining the exact nature of the double-cross to his companions when the familiar sneer came back into view and the end of a

coil of rope hit him in the face. DuQuesne had found that it was not, after all, possible to continue alone.

“I might have known that a hound like you would try to play such a dirty rotten trick as leaving his companions in the soup while he went off on his own,” accused Seaton, standing up in the shelter of the dip. “A rat like you isn’t fit to associate with decent men.”

“Be yourself, Seaton,” said DuQuesne coldly, as the rest of the party began to pull themselves up the fastened rope. “Of rather, be someone sensible, for this childish behaviour is characteristic of you. In the first place, I was only hunting round for a place to tie the rope to, and, in the second place, even if I were trying to get on by myself, what of it?”

“What of it, you sneering swine, you? What of it?” choked the furious Seaton. “I don’t know how I keep my hands off you, you double-dealing, cheating, lying...”

“Shut your face, you prissy-mouthed punk, or I’ll remove some of that beauty of yours!” snarled DuQuesne, thrusting out his granite chin until it nearly touched his adversary’s.

“You and who else?”

“Just little me, with one arm tied behind my back, if you like.”

“I’m warning you, if I hit you now it’ll probably kill you!”

“Why, you great booby, you, you’d burst into tears if I slapped you!”

“Go on, then, slap me! And then send for the undertaker!”

“Yes, you’d need an undertaker, all right!”

“Stop this infernal arguing!” bellowed Professor Challenger, thrusting his short, burly figure between them. “You’re like a couple of overgrown children, both of you. If you can’t stop this infantile behaviour, you’ll have to be treated like other children and chastised.”

“Oh yeah?” said Seaton. “By whom?”

“By me, sir!” roared the burly Professor, turning on him with such bristling fury of that great black beard that Seaton fell back a pace involuntarily. “By Jove, George Edward Challenger is not the man to stand for impertinence from you young whippersnappers. I’ve chastised young puppies like you before now, sir. Mr. Malone will tell you that I’m a dangerous man to cross.”

“That I will,” grinned Malone. “But I fight at your side now, not against you,” he said, looking meaningfully at the other two as he spoke. The squabblers looked at the short but Herculean figure of Challenger, and at the

big athletic Irishman smiling cheerfully behind him, and turned away, shrugging indifferent shoulders.

Meanwhile, the rest of the party had arrived, and Cossar was already directing operations for tackling the next wind-swept stretch... Now they had the technique, so it was merely a matter of time and perseverance. An observer perched high up on the often overhanging walls of the great gorge, would have noticed a fascinating resemblance to the progress of an amoeba. The party would assemble in a black mass at one side of the dip, a thin black tentacle would be slowly reached out towards the next dip, there it would seem to take hold, and the main body would flow along it into the next hollow.

At one time it seemed as if they would have to camp in one of the inhospitable dips, but even as evening was coming on, they found that they had reached the end of the wind-swept portion, and the gently descending slopes before them were comparatively calm. Camp was pitched at sunset where a broad and surprisingly placid river issued out of a side wall to occupy most of the floor of the enormously deep gorge.

## Chapter IV

It was a silent party which rose with many groans the next morning from its bed of scree, which had only added new aches and pains to muscles tired by the unnatural effort of proceeding like a snake. A few hardy spirits had a brisk bathe in a pool of the river, and when they had recovered from the shock of immersion in water that must have originated in the eternal snows above they were the best off. But the party had proceeded a considerable distance down the gently descending gorge before anyone spoke.

It was Clarence (who to the vast indignation of most members of the party, had slept like a top and woken almost cheerful) who made the first remark. "Rather awe-inspiring place, what?" he remarked cheerfully.

"What?" snapped a crag overhead.

"Expiring face – sot!" retorted a bulge on the other side of the gorge, and suddenly from crag and bulge and cliff and crack on either side of the gorge came cracking and drawling and mumbling and bellowing copies and distortions and harmonic blendings of the remark, building up in noise as it lost in clarity until the whole blended into a monstrous enduring cacophony of hysterical mirth, uncontrolled Rabelaisian roarings of mountainous contempt. Disturbed from their precarious balance by the incredibly amplified vibrations, chunks of rock came hurtling down about the stunned pilgrims. "WhirrrrRRRR – Crack" went the stones, shattering splinters of rock in all directions, and the Mountains of Contempt shook with laughter, jeering laughter that racked, smashed, and tortured the pitiful little egos of the cowering mites below.

The shattering laughter died away gradually into dying ripples of sardonic mirth far away in the lower peaks, and the noise-numbed minds of the pilgrims rapidly threw off the mere physical effects. The psychological effects were more dangerous; vast through the egoism of the party was, sturdy through their belief and knowledge that they themselves were perfect was, something in that vast torrent of ridicule had penetrated the armour of each and had given rise to tormenting doubts in his supreme greatness. Mingled fear and rage at this novel feeling of inferiority struggled for outlet in minds which never before had thought to question their own greatness. The strongest seemed to have lost their backbone and to be crumpling like

snowmen in the sun, and the weaker seemed ready to burst into weak, womanish tears – in fact, two were squirming on the ground, red-faced, hugging their sides, furiously biting their lower lips in an attempt at restraint. Kinnison tried to find the courage to lend to them as he bent over them and said softly, brokenly, “Cheer up! Try to – try to bear it.”

“I’m all right,” grunted Clarence through his teeth.

“So’m I,” said Atkill tightly, but the effort of speaking was too much for them. Their self-restraint collapsed completely – and suddenly they were laughing as men had never laughed before, howling and shrieking in every paroxysm of mirth as they collapsed on the floor the better to laugh. The gales of laughter ran up the great sounding boards of the cliffs and the mountains rocked and shook their sides in monstrous glee.

“Ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha!” bellowed the mountains, peaks, cliffs, crags, and crannies, and “Ha-ha-ha-ha-ho-ho-ho-ho-hehehe-hehehehe!” wept and snorted and gurgled and howled Clarence and Atkill, tears streaming from under their closed eyelids as they writhed in uncontrollable mirth. Around them their fellow-pilgrims, all thoughts of their momentary weakness swept away in a wave of indignation, cursed them with the complete thoroughness and vivid imagery to be expected of such mighty minds – which added another factor to the din and increased the volume of the gargantuan guffaws. The end did not come until Clarence and Atkill had literally laughed themselves senseless and lay in a blissful stupor while the noise died down.

When all was still once more, the party moved off again cautiously, the prostrate pair recovering in time to stagger weakly along behind, still unavoidably sniggering under their breath at times, but quenching themselves whenever they felt their control slipping by dipping their heads in the ice-cold water of the river. In this way, they managed to avoid any further incidents until the opening out of the gorge had caused the echoes to be reduced to normal proportions and so came, towards the evening, out of the main mass of the mountains to a camp-site overlooking a drop to the foothills. These were amazingly rugged, crossed this way and that by deep narrow valleys that constituted a formidable maze. Immediately before them a wide, deep valley slashed through the jumble, running arrow-straight to the horizon with a river, a silver streak along its center.

“That appears almost suspiciously convenient,” commented Cossar as the leaders of the party surveyed the scene while Friday, Clarence, and Atkill

(the only persons who did not consider themselves leaders) cheerfully set about making camp.

“Your suspicions are well-justified, my friend,” said Professor Challenger, unrolling the map with an air of importance. “This remarkable natural conformation is here aptly termed a maze, the Maze of Possible Plots, and the canyon before us is termed the One and Only. Unfortunately, it is barred towards its far end by an enclosure inhabited by what is here described as the Monster of Good Taste. A note describes this beast as extremely ferocious, quite uncontrollable, and resolutely opposed to the passage of anyone through his domain. In view of the fact that the composer of this map has, as we have seen, a tendency rather to under-rate difficulties than otherwise, we shall do well to consider the possibility of making a detour through the Maze.” And for once there was no voice raised in disagreement of this point.

## Chapter V

The disagreement started the next day when the pilgrims went into committee to decide the best route through the Maze, and after the first hour there was never, at any moment of the day, less than six views being put forward at the same time with the full power of the lungs of their proposers. Towards nightfall – when few could raise more than a throaty whisper of contempt for the intelligence of their fellows – Clarence, who with Atkill had appeared to take the view that the whole thing was put on for their amusement, made an important contribution.

“Well, old things,” he said, “there’s only one way out of the bally impasse. We shall have to jolly well agree to disagree, what? I mean to say, separate into parties of chaps all with more or less the same ideas on this aggravatin’ question and each lot tool off on its own and try to meet on the other bloomin’ side. Pretty grim for those that are wrong, but what I say is, serves them right. What?”

The suggestion was the first of the day to meet with the full commendation of the whole of the party. It did not seem quite so reasonable in the morning when tempers had cooled somewhat, and such awkward facts as that there existed only one map were fully realised, but there were very few of the party capable of admitting that they might be wrong and someone else right. So they all had a last long look at the map, making such notes as they thought would be necessary to assist memory, and set off down into the main valley from which each party would branch off in turn.

The band under the nominal leadership of Professor Challenger (still in possession of the map) was the first to branch off and included Cossar and Sergeant Walpole in addition to the Professor’s three associates. In spite of their stubborn individuality, many of the others watched them go out of sight down the canyon of their choice with a certain wistfulness, as if conscious of the folly of splitting up the party, and did not move on until the boom of Challenger’s voice disputing with Summerlee the geology of the Maze had finally died away.

They moved in silence now, each concentrating on counting the number of side canyons passed in order to know when to strike off according to his own particular plan. Tarzan and John Carter were the first to go, fording the

shallow river to an opening on the left; Hawke Carse led Friday up the next to the right; DuQuesne, on his own, dropped behind and slipped away furtively, unnoticed by the others; a melange consisting of Aarn Munro, Gregg Haljan, and Commander John Hanson essayed a broad and inviting opening; Seaton and Kinnison, with superior smiles, strode confidently up a narrow and most uninviting one; and Jimmy Atkill and his boon companion Clarence had selected one of a five way junction on an “Eeny-meeny-miny-mo-out-you-go” formula, tossed up to confirm the result, then taken a dislike to the selection, and headed up another. Arcot, Morey, and Wade continued for some time afterwards up the main valley, having worked out that the later they branched off the shorter would be the detour.

Their adventures were a fair sample of those enjoyed by the remainder of the pilgrims. At the very first bend where they paused in indecision and sought the aid of the compass, they found that a strong local effect made it useless, while the narrow strip of sky at the top of the two hundred foot canyon offered no guidance either. None of them was so primitive as to possess a sense of direction, and after following the directions derived from memory for about ten miles of hard going with some fifteen branches and side openings to the mile, they had to confess that they were completely lost.

In spite of the difficulty of their position, it would be an exaggeration to say that they were alarmed. Their combined genius (or luck, as some envious persons would term it) had pulled them out of so many impossible predicaments already, that they were confident that all would be well. Even when they camped at nightfall by the side of a little pool and found that, having no matches, the combined genius of the party could not think of a way to light a fire, they were more annoyed than perturbed. Arcot and Morey worked their annoyance off on Wade, saying that, as the chemist of the party, fire, being a chemical change, came under his jurisdiction. Wade’s language in replying to this unfairness was little short of the temperature required to cause the pile of brushwood to burst into spontaneous combustion.

The ground that night seemed particularly hard to sleep on, and it did not improve on subsequent nights. The days of wandering more or less aimlessly along the indeterminate detours and windings of the vast Maze were days in which irritation gradually gave way to despair at the futility of it all, until their emergence on the morning of the fourth day into the broad, straight valley of the One and Only came as a wonderful relief.

“Personally,” said Arcot, and it was the first time any of the three of

them had spoken to each other for two days, “I don’t give a damn whether we’ve circumnavigated the Monster or not. I’m definitely not going back into that Maze again.” And the other two agreed that it was the first sensible thing that Arcot had said for a long time, and, more or less united again, the three made their way up the One and Only.

Towards evening they came to a place where the level of the valley floor rose sharply for perhaps fifty feet. At the foot of the rise the broad, shallow river stopped, its end being marked by a flat, leisurely whirlpool as if the water flowed underground. It seemed a suitable place to spend the night, and they were drawing near a likely looking level space when they were set back on their heels by the sudden appearance, round a boulder, of a bear.

It was not a particularly large bear as bears go, but it was large enough to startle a group of brilliant young scientists who had unfortunately left zoology out of their learning. While they went into a huddle to try to recollect ways of distinguishing friendly bears from dangerous bears, this one approached to within a few feet of them, where it sat back on its haunches and regarded them thoughtfully. “I wouldn’t go much farzer if I were you,” it said in the matter-of-fact tone of one yielding disinterested information.

“It talks!”

“Course I talk. I’m Johnny Black; who are you?”

“My name is Arcot, Richard Arcot,” said that gentleman with poorly assumed carelessness. “And these are my friends, Morey and Wade. Perhaps – ” he laughed a little at the absurdity of the word – “perhaps you’ve heard of us?”

“Werr...” said Johnny cautiously. “How did you get here?”

Arcot unslung his rucksack, set it on the ground, and sat with his back resting comfortably against it before beginning the story of the trip to date. Johnny listened to it very intently, thoughtfully placing himself to the leeward of the humans, and afterwards, in reply to Arcot’s question, explained how he had got there himself. He had arrived at the City of Waiting as had the others, but found that it was rather dull for him there and had struck off for himself into the hills. He had detected slight evidences of someone’s having struck out that way before and had followed the faint tracks out of curiosity. His claws made him something of a climber, and he had worked his way up the Precipice of Public Ridicule, and, though he had then lost all signs of the route, he had continued on across the mountains. He had been exploring the Maze for months, living off the country as was natural

to him, and thought that eventually he could master it.

“But what’s wrong with going straight on?” asked Arcot cunningly.

“Nozzing, excep’ zat in about an hour you come to an open space occupied by a mos’ disagreeebro anima’. I tried to sneak through once and the wretched zing – it’s something rike a burr on’y more so – caught me and rifted me a hundred yard with one toss. I go back now and zen to have a rook at it, but it’s a’ways awake. I don’t rike it – it isn’t natura’ – why, it eats rocks!”

“Tough, eh?” murmured Wade thoughtfully. “Anyway, we’ll have a look at it tomorrow. Me for a meal and about ten hours sleep at the moment.”

## Chapter VI

Morey was the first out of the tent the next morning, and his amazed hail brought the other two out very quickly. There was reason for surprise, for, grouped around within a quarter-mile radius, were the tents of the rest of the party with the yawning occupants staring round in mutual amazement. Evidently they had drifted up singly after dark and pitched their tents in ignorance of their neighbors.

The pilgrims were thus once more able to assemble for breakfast together, and though all were very reticent over the details of their wanderings, it was clear that all were glad to be back together again and out of the Maze. However, all were equally convinced that it would be better to try to force a passage past the Monster at all costs rather than wander miserably about in the Maze until their stock of synthetic foods gave out. Of course, none then knew anything about the Monster – the account given by the Arcot party was considered to be quite invalidated by the obviously absurd idea of a talking bear, and even the appearance of Johnny himself did not cause anyone to believe in his story of a great bull browsing on rock.

“I won’t argue,” said Johnny with the amicability of one who knows that he is right. “You just come have a rook-see for yourselves, and I bet you be g’ad to try ze Maze again.”

An hour or so later the sceptics came over the top of a little ridge and looked down on a smooth-floored area a hundred feet below them which stretched the entire three hundred yard width of the valley and was twice as long. The drop below them was almost perpendicular, and the side walls of the canyon here were overhanging. In the exact center of the open space was lying the Monster of Good Taste.

In form, it *was* a bull, a bull of bulls, for it was quite twelve feet from nose to the root of its tail and extremely massively built. It seemed too heavily muscled to be quite real as it lay there with its back towards them, its hooves drawn up under it statuesquely, the straight upward sweep of yard-long, needle-sharp horns appallingly visible on its wide forehead. Even at the distance from which the pilgrims saw it, they felt the superb dominance it radiated from every proud line of its figure and the subdued menace of its leashed fury.

“You see?” said Johnny softly, and the rest of the party nodded thoughtfully.

“But it doesn’t seem very wakeful,” said Gregg Haljan with characteristic naivete. “Perhaps it’s asleep, and, if so, we might be able to sneak past. I’m going to have a go.”

He climbed stealthily down the short cliff, which was rugged enough to make the descent quite simple, and began advancing cautiously outwards and sideways, to give the Monster as wide a clearance as possible. He was perhaps eighty yards out when it suddenly heaved itself to its feet, and, as he froze, watching it, the great bull pawed the ground nervously, hesitated dubiously for a moment, then wheeled with a thunderous bellow and charged with tremendous speed straight towards the trespasser. A very few seconds later Haljan was back with his friends again, and the Monster, whose tremendous upward slash of those formidable horns had missed by half an inch, was registering rage and disappointment most vividly.

“You see?” said Johnny. “A most unreasonabre zing. After aw, what does it matter to him whezer we get across or not?”

Whether the Monster heard and understood or not is debatable, but it retorted most effectively by suddenly gouging out a huge lump of solid rock with its fragile-seeming horns and tossing it clear up the hundred foot cliff into the middle of the party. While most of them were dodging and cursing rebounding stones, the animal snuffled amongst the rubble it had dislodged, found a small piece to its liking which it crunched up with great satisfaction, and then trotted back to the center of its precious Lebensraum, snorting belligerently.

“Those horns!” cried Wade excitedly. “They must be lux!”

“Relux – they’re opaque,” corrected Arcot.

“I never could remember which was which,” said Wade apologetically.

“Lux and relux are two materials made by condensing light into matter and are thus extremely strong,” explained Arcot patronisingly.

“Whaddya mean, condensing light into matter, and why *thus* extremely strong?” enquired someone in the background. Arcot chose to ignore this question in favour of one by Atkill, who said:

“In that case, what is old Grumpy stropping his horns up on now?”

The Monster was indeed busily engaged in sharpening his horns by wiping them to and fro on a lump of stuff in the center of the arena, testing the point by digging it into the solid rock of the floor.

“Cosmium,” said Arcot promptly. “Made by condensing cosmic rays.”

At this point DuQuesne said nastily, “Well, Tarzan, you’ve been telling us every night of the terrific battles you’ve fought and won with the denizens of the jungle, and you’ve been waving that pigsticker of yours about and saying what you’d do to any animal which attacked us. Now’s your chance to go and do your stuff. What are you waiting for?”

Tarzan looked very thoughtful and said nothing. But he *had* tended to monopolise the conversation at night with stories of his valour, thereby annoying the rest of the pilgrims who wanted to monopolise the conversation with stories of *their* valour, and so there were not lacking jibing voices to support DuQuesne until they infuriated him into descending to the arena. Lord John Roxton called after him, telling him not to be a fathead, but he took no notice, and a rather subdued band saw him drop boldly onto the floor of the arena. Atkill and Clarence were the only ones not filled with a presentiment of tragedy, for they had left mysteriously a minute before, chuckling over some idea of their own which seemed to please them mightily.

For a short time the Monster eyed the steady advance of the alert Tarzan with the affronted air of a schoolmaster confronted with an unexampled piece of cheek on the part of a boy he has just seriously warned; it snorted and pawed the ground threateningly, looking up to observe the effect with its head comically on one side, and then it charged thunderously. Tarzan crouched watchfully and tried to dodge to one side and leap on the back of the great bull to cling there while trying to reach a vital spot with his knife, but, quick as he was, the Monster was far quicker. It stopped and pivoted in a prodigious effort which ploughed great furrows in the solid rock and got its horns under the man’s leap. For a moment it seemed that his falling weight had depressed the mighty head to the floor, and then it snapped up with supernal power, and Tarzan shot high in the air, twisting and turning in a great arc which would finish in cruel disaster on the rough rocks not far from the appalled watchers.

Tarzan was in the air for not more than ten seconds. In that brief time Sergeant Walpole had accurately estimated his landing-point, had stooped to his ruck-sack and wrenched free from the straps his tent, and had shot the roll of fine tough cloth forward and open with a cry of “Take hold!” and Malone (“Rightho”), Challenger (“Piffle”), Cossar (“Obviously”), Aarn Munro (wordlessly), Friday (prompted vigorously by Carse), and DuQuesne (to spite

Seaton) had seized hold of the edges of the cloth, had pulled it stiff and taut, and had caught the falling Tarzan neatly and safely on the middle of it, the impact being lessened by the fact that he landed a hundred feet higher than where he took off.

“Nice work,” said Lord John Roxton appreciatively. “Are you hurt at all, old man?”

Tarzan, staggering to his feet, shook his head breathlessly. “Only winded,” he gasped. “Brute caught me in the middle.”

“A fortunate end in one sense,” said Summerlee sourly. “But we are still as far as ever from a solution to our problem. Force is clearly out of the question.”

There was a silence at those dour words. The Maze had beaten them, the Monster seemed unbeatable too – was this the end of their valiant attempt? Not thus were the heroes of science-fiction to be defeated, they whose matchless courage and incredible luck had extricated them from far more sinister situations. Hawke Carse, the cold-faced adventurer, was first with a solution.

“There are twenty-two of us,” he said in tight, clipped phrases. “There is one Monster. He can’t get *all* of us – not if we all make a rush together. One or two will get through. Prepared to try it?”

They were. The Plan was welcomed with enthusiasm. Nothing could have been proposed more acceptable to the mentalities of the majority. One or two, Kinnison and Seaton, for instance, paled a little when they thought of the carnage, but they set their jaws grimly and prepared to face the fact that all their friends might be killed with spartan fortitude. Not one of the party, of course, thought even for a moment that he himself might be amongst the casualties.

They were preparing to spread themselves out solemnly when someone noticed the absence of Jimmy Atkill and Clarence. This shortening of the odds brought out the worst in the usually amiable pilgrims, but before they could lash themselves into much of a fury, the two appeared. They were staggering under the weight of their rucksacks, for these, as was seen as they came nearer, were filled with large pebbles from the river-side, but both were grinning as if greatly tickled by some secret thought.

“Stop fooling, you too, and listen to this,” said Carse curtly. “We’ve decided that the only way for any of us to get across is for all to make a dash at once. Got the guts to have a go?”

“No jolly fear,” said Clarence positively. “I used to play a game like that when I was a kid, and I was always the first to be blooming well nobbled.”

“Besides – we’ve an idea worth two of that,” grinned Atkill. The cries of derision and anger at his impertinence were ignored as he and Clarence clambered cautiously down the cliff to halt on a ledge just above the Monster. While the beast crowded below threateningly, as one who is not prepared to stand any more nonsense, they cautiously unsung their loaded rucksacks.

“Is the fool going to pelt the Monster with pebbles?” snorted Carse disgustedly as Clarence produced a large pebble of pure white marble from his bag.

He was not. He held it in finger and thumb before the large intelligent eyes of the animal, and the bellows and rumbles of rage ceased magically. “Here’s a present for a good boy,” said Clarence coaxingly, and the animal delicately took the rock out of his out-stretched hand. A crunching sound, a munching, and a gulp, and the Monster was snuffling pleadingly for more. The pilgrims stared unbelievably as the two dropped into the arena and began feeding the great beast with lumps of marble as one feeds a horse with sugar; and the invincible brute blew marble crumbs amicably in their faces, bowed his head sorrowfully at being scolded for doing so, snuffled anxiously at the rucksacks, and gratefully accepted the gift of “just one more bit and no more.”

“Come on, you chaps,” called Clarence, while his friend stroked the mighty nose of the Monster soothingly. “Stroll across while the going’s good. Cart our stuff across for us, will you?”

They obeyed in a daze, splitting up the little pile of stuff that Clarence and Atkill had turned out of their rucksacks and starting without a word. The Monster raised his head and looked at them ominously, but Atkill spoke sharply to him, and Clarence found him a very fine pebble of marble, and he turned his attention back to his new-found friends. Quite unmolested, the pilgrims strolled across the arena, Tarzan picking up his knife on the way, clambered up the cliff on the other side, and turned to see Clarence and Atkill gaily riding the Monster over towards them, encouraging their steed with merry whoops and ineffectual kicks in his massive ribs. They got off at the foot of the cliff and emptied the rest of the pebbles out of their rucksacks for the Monster, and had to duck laughingly his well-meant attempts to kiss them in his delight.

“All done by kindness,” laughed Clarence as the two rejoined the party.

“Jimmy spotted that it was a bit of marble old Grumpy went for back there after chasing Gregg – result of his training in scientific observation, I suppose – and we decided to try the old wheeze of feeding the brute. Mean to say, we thought of stuffing it till it couldn’t spring, but of course it turned out that the jolly old thing was simply dyin’ for a snack of the old marble and was prepared to be quite chummy in return. Fairly smooth work, what? You chappies take things too bally seriously.”

Which crack quite ruined the good impression he had made.

## Chapter VII

The next morning saw the party gazing out across the repulsive Bog of Apathy which lay in the trough between the foothills of the Mountains of Contempt and the plateau of the Plain of Mediocrity. It appeared as a flat, featureless plain crossed and recrossed in all directions by flat streams of muddy water flowing so slowly that they were covered with slimy algae, fading almost imperceptibly into banks of dark grey mud and separated by expanses of bright green sward or clumps of coarse grass.

“The map,” said Challenger heavily, “contents itself with saying merely that great care must be exercised in crossing this bog as the surface is frequently treacherous. It is about forty miles wide.”

“A fat lot of good that is,” said Lord John gloomily, gazing across the misty expanse. The air was heavy and dead after the crisp mountain atmosphere, and a fine cold rain began to fall from the grey sky. Only the harsh cry of a dispirited heron drifting gloomily across the waste in front of them broke the dank silence. It was a formidable task to pick a safe route, with a most unheroic death as a penalty for failure.

The man who suddenly decided to take the lead and show that he at least had the qualities of pluck and perseverance required by a pilgrim was Commander John Hanson – whose only knowledge of land was as something space-ships rested on while they were refuelled. He strode blithely down to the edge of the swamp, saying “Come on!” and the others followed with glances of mingled annoyance and amusement.

For a couple of hundred yards he was lucky in following a fairly sound spit of land, and by sheer audacity progressed a further dozen paces across an expanse of smooth, squelchy sward before he suddenly found he couldn't wrench his feet out of the mud for another stride, that the mud was over his ankles, over his knees, flowing hungrily up his thighs towards his waist....

“Throw yourself on your face, you fool,” shouted Cossar from the rear of the crowd watching in dumb amazement. “Someone crawl out to him with a rope.”

The victim of the bog had sufficient sense to obey, but the crowd of heroes watching made no rush to follow the second piece of advice. The mud was cold and wet, and, most of all, it stank with a peculiar blend of sewerage,

rotting fish, and general decay, and the prospect of crawling out and getting smothered with it was most distasteful. Moreover, it did not call for any of the glorious feats of strength and courage such as the heroes were capable of, and there was a general feeling that it was up to some lesser being of smaller sensibilities. Commander John Hanson was almost out of sight when Cossar and Malone burst through the crowd and wriggled out in desperate haste, Cossar with a rope the other end of which was held by Lord John Roxton. Their combined efforts got the rope around the unfortunate Commander, and while they crawled back the mighty thews of the science-fiction heroes pulled him out with an almighty “plop” as the bog reluctantly released its hold.

“Stinking job,” said Cossar. “Where’s the nearest water?”

It was a slime-filled pool not many yards away, and, after washing the worst of the mud off hands and face, the three made the unpopular decision that the rest of the mud would have to dry on them – rather unlikely in view of the persistent rain. They were placed in the rear of the procession, and Lord John Roxton, armed with the map and a compass, took the lead without any quibble.

The only sound ground was that marked by the tussocks of tough grass, and it was on these Lord John progressed by a series of zigzags. It was frequently necessary to cross stretches of pure mud by means of two or three hasty strides in which the feet sank ankle deep, and quite often a pilgrim would measure his length face-down in the muck, as the result of a slip. The streams, thick with green slime as they were, had to be forded, and they were often thigh-deep. In a short while everyone was plastered from head to foot with the stinking mud. The thin drizzle of rain had no cleansing effect, but sufficed to complete the physical and mental misery of the party.

“This is impossible,” said Kinnison bitterly, struggling to his feet after his fifth flop onto the mud. “We can’t be making a mile an hour in a straight line, which means staying the night out here. That’s impossible; there’s no water fit to drink, we can’t eat the iron rations without water, and we certainly can’t light a fire or pitch a tent or do anything to make life endurable. We must go back before it is too late.”

There was a murmur of assent. There was nothing great or glorious or magnificent in this miserable bog-trot, nothing but the dumb endurance of acute discomforts. They were cold and wet and hungry, and these are not enemies which can be knocked down with smashing fists or blasted out of existence with ray-guns. The morass stretched out into the rain-mists on all

sides, inertly deadly, incredibly unpleasant.

“We might get nearly across – and then have to retreat....” sighed a voice with a hint of approaching panic in it, a horrible thought. They were approaching that stage of utter, helpless misery when suicide seems the easy, attractive solution.

They were brave men, the bravest of the brave, yet none dared look at his neighbor’s face as the common thought seized them all. All around the flat, repulsive surface of the great swamp stretched out into the misty rain, passively supreme. They were hungry, desperately tired by the long struggle, wet to the skin and chilled to the bone, and none could say that a continuance of the struggle would be rewarded by victory. The dangerous thought strengthened that perhaps a quick oblivion was preferable to any prolongation of the intense discomfort.

“Jimmy!” said Clarence brokenly, “Jimmy, old pal, old pal of mine....”

“Yes, Clarence?” said Atkill gently.

“Save – save a bullet for me,” pleaded his friend pathetically.

“I haven’t got a gun, old chap,” replied Atkill. “Do you want to borrow my knife?” – solemnly proffering a little pearl-handled penknife.

“Not much of a help to a chap, are you?” said Clarence indignantly. “If that’s the best you can do, I jolly well won’t commit suicide at all.”

“Tarzan’s got a regular pick-sticker,” suggested Atkill penitently. “Maybe we could borrow that?”

“I say, that’s a jolly good idea, old boy. Tell you what I’ll do for you – I’ll put you out of your misery first before I operate on myself, just to get hold of the right technique.”

Before his friend could express his appreciation of this generous offer, the horrified Kinnison intervened. “Come, you two, don’t take the coward’s way out. There’s still a chance left for us, just a bare chance to find our way out if we keep our chins up and advance doggedly keeping our backs to the wall. Think of the honour of the science-fiction heroes! We who have battled and defeated the massed forces of interplanetary, interstellar, intergalactical, and intercosmic space-naughtiness, we who have blazoned the proud name of Earth large on the scroll of cosmic history, we key-stones of the mightiest, proudest, worthiest civilisation of all time and all space, are we to yield so readily to physical discomforts and adverse conditions? No!”

“No!” echoed Clarence, gripping Kinnison’s hand enthusiastically.

“A thousand times, no!” added Atkill, seizing the other hand. “You’ve

snapped us out of that, ace, and thanks a lot. We will go on with you to the end, on and on....”

“And on,” murmured Clarence with a catch in his voice, and suddenly the two friends collapsed in each other’s arms, each hiding his face on the other’s shoulder, heaving mutely with the release of some intense emotion. Kinnison turned away in some embarrassment from this display and so did the sterner members of the party. Lord John Roxton started to lead on again with down-cast head and crimson ears as he bit his lip violently to restrain his own feelings. Only Professor Summerlee addressed the two weaklings as the party moved on, and all he said was “Idiots!” in a voice that shook slightly.

When the waning light made any further progress impossible, they were faced with the necessity of spending the night on the skimpy tussocks of coarse grass which were the only sound ground to be found. Kinnison found an exceptionally large clump and called Clarence and Atkill over to it and fussed around them solicitously while they made themselves as comfortable as possible – actually managing to recline awkwardly back to back. By that time all the best tussocks in the neighborhood had been appropriated, and Kinnison himself had to squat miserably on a very interior clump. The glow of self-approval at his own nobleness soon wore off, and occasional snores from his proteges chafed his haughty spirit more than somewhat as the night wore on. Towards morning Clarence was heard to murmur sleepily, “Good job it’s raining. The midges must be perfect swine in decent weather, and there’s nothing worse for keeping a chap awake.” Kinnison swore a little at this, and Atkill said “Poor old Kin,” at which he and Clarence chuckled for a long time as if at some private joke. The Grey Lensman made a grim resolve that the next time the ungrateful fools wanted to commit suicide, he’d render all aid in his power.

The next day was a repetition of the first, except that they were tired, and hungrier, and, if possible, thirstier. They walked themselves into a semi-stupor, and the first any of them knew about the successful conclusion of the crossing was that he was standing on a dry, grassy hillside in the warmth of the evening sun, looking down into the swift, clear waters of a small river. The realisation came simultaneously to all, and with it the thought that here was drinkable water at long last. The whole party at once prostrated themselves on the banks and sucked up greedily the pure, sweet hill-water with its faint flavour of miles of stony bed and peaty banks.

“Ah!” sighed Cossar satisfiedly, sitting back on his heels and shaking

the water off the end of his nose. “We want a fire, several fires, BIG fires. There seems to be plenty of dry driftwood around and with a fire we can dry the contents of our rucksacks, and prepare some hot soup. Clarence and Atkill, you can be the cooks – serve you right for your behaviour back in the bog. Get on with your baths while the rest of us get the fires going.”

For once there was no one strong enough to dispute this assumption of authority, and things went smoothly. The two cooks plunged into the waist-deep stream fully dressed, stripping off their muddy clothes under water and washing them and their bodies at the same time. Meanwhile, the others combined in the congenial task of getting two big fires going, Johnny Black in particular performing prodigious feats of wood-hauling. He backed up clumsily with sizeable tree-trunks which went on the fire whole, and which proved to be of a resinous wood which blazed up merrily. The wet clothes out of the rucksacks were spread out to dry in the fierce heat, the collapsible billy-cans were charitably filled in readiness for the cooks, and everybody went to bathe.

The stream was clear but chilly, which made it all the more pleasant to return to the fires, and to squat as close as possible to the glorious heat while gulping down the thick, greasy savoury, synthetic soup, scalding hot, drying yourself in the same way as your clothes and tent were drying at your side, feeling the gracious warmth penetrating glowingly to every starved extremity, to lie back and stretch comfortably bloated and almost to fall asleep before the first breath of a chilly night breeze reminded you of your tent and warm sleeping bag. The effort required to erect that tent seemed hardly worth the trouble – until it was done, and you were inside, and inside that sleeping bag watching the fire-light flickering on the canvas, thinking you would like to lie forever watching that warm flicker and feeling warm and dry and feeling the poisons of fatigue seeping from relaxed muscles; but you closed your eyes and there was nothing.

## Chapter VIII

“The Plain of Mediocrity does not seem to be an obstacle of the same gravity as the last” said Challenger, consulting the map on the morning after a day devoted to rest and recuperation. “It is about a hundred miles across, as far as one can see a monotonous rolling expanse covered with rough grass and occasional clumps of scrubby trees, with isolated out-crops of rock for which Professor Summerlee will no doubt have an ingenious, or perhaps one might say an ingenuous explanation. The wolves are, of course, an unknown factor; one hopes they will remain so.”

And he laughed inordinately at his own joke.

His amusement was not entirely shared by his companions, but all agreed that it was desirable not to encounter the Wild Wolves of Fierce Competition which, according to the map, hunted over this plain. But towards the evening, after a hard day’s walking had covered a good third of the distance, Tarzan, glancing back on a whim, saw the striking silhouette of a huge wolf outlined on a ridge against the red disk of the setting sun. For the space of two heartbeats it remained immobile, looking towards the Pilgrims with sinister concentration. Abruptly it raised its head and howled beckoningly, and seconds later a huge pack of the brutes swept over the ridge and down on the pilgrims – who turned and ran desperately for the possible sanctuary of the nearest outcrop of rock.

They would not make it. The wolves were coming in from the side and rear with the smooth swift rush of water coursing down a steep conduit, far faster than the best of the pilgrims could run with the possible exception of Johnny Black. Even as the more balanced minds realised this, all hope was banished by the appearance of another pack which jetted up from a hollow in front of them. With the same unified impulse that had started them running, they halted and backed up together in a double line, preparing to combat the white-fanged death with no weapons but the four ice-axes of Challenger and his companions, Tarzan’s long knife, and the formidable natural weapons of Johnny Black. Nevertheless, most of the pilgrims felt better prepared to cope with this danger than they had with any of the previous difficulties, for this red-blooded battle-to-the-death stuff was what they were accustomed to.

The bold uncompromising front thus presented caused the canny leader

of each pack to swing round with the idea of a flank attack, and by chance one turned left and one right. In the instant of launching the attack on the pilgrims, each leader saw the other pack. Hijackers! Without the slightest hesitation, the two packs swung towards each other and joined bloody battle, so evenly disputed, that the objects of the quarrel soon realised that they were forgotten in the heat and fury and quietly withdrew out of range.

The first idea was to take refuge in the rock-pile which had been the original objective, but closer inspection showed it to be infeasible. They walked rapidly and nervously on through the night, listening apprehensively to the howls of other packs of wolves hunting in the distance. Eventually they found, by the light of a brilliant moon, an outcrop which looked as though it could be climbed by men but hardly by wolves, and thankfully took refuge there – barely in time to avoid attack by a third wolf-pack. The discomforts of a night spent on naked rock were not diminished by the poignant howls of the disappointed wolves prowling around below.

Fortunately, the wolves were creatures of the night, and dispersed to their lairs with the first flush of dawn. Their presence thus added to the length of the journey more than to its difficulty, for all cooking and catching had to be done in daylight, and it was advisable to be looking for a refuge well before nightfall, which cut down the time available for actual travelling considerably. But the weather was fine, and they found themselves enjoying the journey and grew more and more tolerant towards each other. There was still a large proportion, though, of the more majestic heroes, headed by Kinnison, who made no secret of their dislike of Clarence and Atkill and who were greatly annoyed by the fact that the despised pair did not show any signs of wilting under such terrible displeasure.

Towards the end of the fourth day, the country began to change becoming more and more thickly wooded, and beginning to descend in slow waves of small hills. That night they camped in a circle of fires, but no wolves appeared, and it seemed that they had left the Plain on which the brutes hunted. Early in the next morning, they were surprised and delighted to stumble across a broad, smooth road which led in the direction which they wanted to go.

“This is the Pilgrim’s Way,” announced Challenger, consulting the map for the last time. “It appears on the very top of the map, and, apparently, if we follow it to its end, we shall arrive at our destination. There is a vague warning here about the temptations of the easy way out, but it does not

appear to mean that we shall ignore the road and continue struggling through the forest. After all, we are all adult, moral, thinking persons, and, I trust, will be able to stand up to whatever temptations may assail us to abandon our quest.”

“I check you to nine places of decimals,” agreed Kinnison. “There are one or two, two in fact, weaklings here who may succumb to whatever temptations are put in our way, but they will be no loss to the Hall of Immortal Fame anyway.”

The tone of this remark was so laden with meaning, that the thickest skin must have been penetrated. Unfortunately, while everybody else there was crowded round looking at the map, Clarence and Atkill were some distance away eating wild strawberries and did not hear.

The march continued along the road at a swinging pace through the pleasant country. It was quite late in the afternoon when they came in sight of the first great sign-board which said simply, in letters ten feet high: “Yoshiwara.” Nobody could make anything of this, so, after discussion and deliberation, they continued on their way. Notice-boards with the same single cryptic word began to appear with increasing frequency, but nothing else until, when they were preparing to camp in a glade by the side of the road, someone looking up saw a glow in front of them in the darkening sky.

“A peculiar meteorological phenomenon,” said Challenger pompously. “It may possibly be the aurora borealis. In fact, it cannot be anything else.”

This was disputed by his friend Summerlee, who propounded the theory of the “After-glow”. The various interplanetary travellers chimed in with accounts of the peculiar glows *they* had seen in their travels on other planets, and the reasons for them, and the discussion was prolonged into a heated debate. Meanwhile, the sky got darker, and the glow increased in apparent brightness, until Clarence seized an opening in the debate to say:

“Personally, I think it’s caused by a jolly old city lit up on the other side of the hill, and I’m going to see. Me for a hotel bed tonight!”

The last point brought a large body of opinion round in his favour, and, in spite of the derision of a few higher thinkers, the pilgrims set off up the road to see for themselves. At the crest of the rise, the doubters were silenced. Before them in the valley, about four or five miles away, sprawled a city, a city of fairy-like towers, of blazing lights and multicoloured signs. Even as they looked, four great rockets climbed high into the air from the four corners of the city, red, green, yellow, and blue, curving to a focus where a single

white rocket shot up from the central tower to meet them in one soundless gigantic flash that plastered the flaming message across the firmament –

**“Y O S H I W A R A”**

## Chapter IX

Sunk in the very heart of the huge central building of Yoshiwara was a small, dimly lit room, the walls of which were hung with thick, black velvet, the floor of which was covered with a deep-piled black carpet, the concave ceiling of which was finished in dull matt black, in the center of which was a small black divan. On this, cross-legged in the manner of some Asiatic member of his madly-mixed ancestry, sat September, the owner of Yoshiwara, planning how best to beguile his approaching guests (of whom he knew more than they did themselves) so that their every desire should be satisfied. No walls, no barred gates had Yoshiwara, but men who would have laughed at such obstacles were bound here by the unbreakable chains they forged for themselves out of desire.

When he had emerged from his meditation to be greeted with the news from one of his observers that the pilgrims were within sight of the city and approaching it, he had merely to issue the order "Carry on with the arrangement for a Class A civic reception" as he passed on to the board-room where the executive committee were awaiting his instructions. He took the chair with the aplomb of an Anglo-Saxon company director, but in the attention of his assistants was the humility of the counsellors of a Mongolian warlord.

"The primary weapon is flattery," he said directly. "The subjects comprise the most conceited body of persons ever gathered together. Honours should therefore be showered upon them, underlings in their presence should portray intense hero-worship, sycophants of a strong silent type should surround them. Seaton, Kinnison, John Carter, and Commander John Hanson will need nothing more, basically. In the cases of Professors Challenger and Summerlee the atmosphere should be rather more scientific with opportunities for brow-beating opponents. Lord John Roxton and Malone should be allowed to exhibit their prowess at various sports. DuQuesne has a power-complex; he should be engaged in machinations to usurp me as head of the city. Arcot, Morey, Wade, and Munro must be allowed the run of a physical laboratory. The back-to-nature colony for Tarzan is already in full swing, and the bear will be content in the Municipal Library. Hawke Carse is easy – he must merely be notified that you are in town, Ku Sui, plotting

something diabolical, as I suppose you are?” (The slender Eurasian, who held the vice-chairman’s seat at the other end of the table, rose and bowed politely, contenting himself with an enigmatic smile.) “Haljan will be delighted to help him. Cossar will be interested in how we built this city; he must meet other technical men. Finally Atkill, Walpole, and Clarence will be the easiest of all, as they require only the standard entertainment – wine, women, and song.

“A word about general entertainment. Musical concerts must be of the popular orchestral standard, with large, impressive orchestras. Plays, varieties, and such light entertainment must be scrupulously clean and entirely escapist. Boxing, wrestling in the classical styles, and athletics should provide opportunities for our guests to show superiority to our professionals. Bathing will be popular but be very careful in choosing the feminine element to accompany the parties and be rescued from drowning occasionally. But I rely on individual departmental heads to work out the details.”

# Chapter X

September had allowed himself just sufficient time to don his civic robes of magnificent Tyrolean purple and meet the pilgrims at the head of the steps leading up to the huge Central Hall. He looked most imposing, and the pilgrims, rather dazed by their slow drive through streets lined with madly cheering crowds, impressed despite themselves by the steps of green soapstone inlaid with myriads of glistening jewels on the tread to provide a non-slip surface, showed a tendency to gawp blankly when he bowed to the ground before them and said, with magnificent humbleness:

“Welcome to Yoshiwara. Welcome to the city of pleasure, of happiness, of delight, of freedom from all care and frustration. All we have is yours to command, all we ask is that you may be graciously pleased to accept our hospitality. Tonight we offer you rest and refreshment – tomorrow we hope to have the honour of your company at the celebrations we hold because of your visit. I am September. I am the master of Yoshiwara. I am your very humble servant.”

Challenger took it on himself to reply, beating Seaton by a short head.

“In the name of my companions, I thank you,” he said pompously. “I would like to express our very deep appreciation of the way in which we have been greeted, but words fail me. It reflects a great credit on you, sir, that you and your citizens should have that nobility of mind which so readily acknowledges superior worth in others. Nothing I can say...”

He spoke fluently and well for several minutes, September replied obsequiously, Seaton inserted a speech of his own, and the meeting settled down to a mutual admiration society. None of the pilgrims would have tired of hearing such appreciation of their true worth indefinitely, but September managed to ease them in the direction of the refreshment and rest which they needed so badly, and it was then that the absence of Clarence, Atkill, and Sergeant Walpole was first noticed. When they were eventually located, they were found asleep in bed in the three best of the superb suites of rooms provided for the pilgrims.

Kinnison insisted on holding an indignation meeting over this piece of strategy before the pilgrims retired.

“What can our host, September, think of such conduct, so lacking in any

sense of decency?” he said hotly. “What will everybody think of us when they associate us with these buffoons, these moronic clowns, these zwilniks?”

The meeting agreed that it was most unfortunate, but what could they do about it, and anyway let’s get some rest. Kinnison retired disgruntled and had such a nightmare as only he could have had.

The culmination of the celebrations on the following day was a banquet with the pilgrims as guests of honour. The hall in which it was held was so huge as to appear to stretch away into a mist of lesser guests on all sides, so high that the ceiling had to be floodlit to show the elegant designs inlaid voluptuously in gold and platinum and precious stones of superlative fire. When September rose at the head of the main table, after a meal of inconceivable elaboration, to toast the pilgrims in a speech which was a magnificent half-hour’s undiluted, non-repetitious flattery, his words were echoed by loud-speakers to the remotest recesses of the hall and came back underlaid with a swelling murmur of “Hear, hear.”

He was not much more than half-way through when Seaton, who was fairly wriggling with delight, was nudged by Kinnison. Turning his head impatiently, he saw that his friend was red with rage, and following the direction of his bulging eyes, saw Clarence, Atkill, and Sergeant Walpole crawling rapidly in single file across the smooth stone floor on their hands and knees in the direction of the nearest exit. As they passed the end of one of the lesser tables, each of them reached up and furtively removed a bottle of liquor from under the noses of the unnoticing owners. They gained the doorway safely with their booty. There they stood up, noticed the scandalised observers, and made a vulgar gesture in their direction before departing gaily.

That was the last any of the pilgrims saw of the three reprobates for some time, except for casual meetings at bathing parties in the mornings, when all three seemed strangely sad and silent. Nobody, not even Kinnison, ever gave them a thought, for all were too much engrossed in enjoying themselves in the various ways arranged for them – enjoying themselves more than they had thought possible. Gone was all thought of the Hall of Immortal Fame, gone all thought of those they had left behind awaiting success of their Pilgrimage. They were living in Paradise and had thought for neither the past nor the future.

The perfect success of September’s scheming might have lasted indefinitely, but for a chance encounter of Kinnison with his enemies. He met them one night reeling arm-in-arm along the middle of an important street,

informing everyone in earshot that they were “Poor little lambs who have gone astray,” in three different keys. He was hastening by with curling lip and averted face when they spotted and intercepted him.

“Here’s ol’ Kin,” said Clarence merrily. “How are y’, me ole pal, ol’ pal o mine.”

“No pal of yours, you drunken swine,” said Kinnison wrathfully. “Disgustingly drunk as usual, I see.”

“Thash right, ol’ boy,” agreed Clarence amicably. “Abshol’ly shquiffy. Shunk to she level of she beash of she field.”

“Wine,” said Atkill owlshly, “wine is a mocker, but shtrong drink ish fool.”

Sergeant Walpole merely grinned hazily.

“Have you no sense of decency whatever” said Kinnison sharply. “Can’t you realise how you are insulting our hosts and forfeiting the respect which they were willing to show you? You make me sick.”

“Oh, ’s terrible, ol’ boy,” said Clarence sadly. “Absholu’ly dishgustin’. But I can’t help it, it’s not drink it’s medicine. When I had to listen to oF blubbergutsh giving ush all that tripe about how wunnerful we are I nearly spewed. An’ that Civic Hall of theirsh ish really shockin’ bad taste. Talk about vulgar oshtentation! Even the concerts round here are lousy – we went to one your pal whatshisname said was wunnerful but it was only the same ol’ stuff played twice ash loud.”

“Drunk or sober, I’ll knock you down in a second if you don’t stop these ridiculous vile insults to the finest city you’ve ever disgraced by your presence,” cried Kinnison passionately, and left before he lost control of himself. The three reprobates watched him go, laughing helplessly at his wrath, and went to the nearest bar to celebrate. But having already drunk themselves silly, they went further and drank themselves into a stage of wild, lunatically lucid logic. And Atkill produced some startlingly accurate theories.

“You know, this is the worst trap we’ve fallen into so far,” he said seriously. “We haven’t the chance of a snowball in hell of getting those big boobies to continue the Pilgrimage.”

“See what you mean,” said Sergeant Walpole gloomily. “You couldn’t prise ’em away from this dump with a ten-foot crowbar. They’re far drunker on flattery than we’ve ever been on hooch.”

“Absolutely,” said Clarence, draining his glass, and in the bottom of it

looking for and finding inspiration. “But I tell you what we can jolly well do – get us all thrown out, what? Just follow your uncle Clarence to the Hole in the Warp and do as he bally well does.”

His companions followed him loyally, though unsteadily, to the huge main bar of the supreme palace of carnal entertainment, and willingly followed his lead in adding further variety to the wonderful mixture of liquids they already contained. Thus when he said “Look who’s coming,” and began to laugh as at some tremendous secret joke, they had no difficulty in following suit again – in fact, all three were soon in paroxysms of mirth.

It was September who was coming. September had felt rather benignant toward these, the easiest to entertain of all his guests, but no man was less ready to tolerate being the subject of amusement.

“You seem amused at something, gentlemen,” he said coldly. “Would it be indiscreet to ask what it is you find so humorous?”

“Oh yesh, very very very indishcreet,” said Clarence, supporting himself precariously on the bar. “Oh, you wouldn’t half be waxy with ush if we told you – if we told you...” and he went off into another fit of senseless laughter.

“If you told me what?” asked September sharply.

“If we told you what a fathead you are,” wept Clarence. “Oh how we’ve spoofed you! All that guff about ush being pilgrimsh and big noisesh! Shilliest thing I ever shaw!” and he laughed and laughed.

September almost permitted himself the luxury of hissing “So!” as he bowed blandly and strolled away, so blind with passion that he bumped heedlessly into people unnoticed, hastening to his inner chamber, and even there too infuriated with the thought of his humiliation, of his wasted efforts and futile scheming to release his rage in any way. He was almost beyond all powers of reasoning which ordinarily would have enabled his alert brain to see through the clumsy stratagem, and, after hours of revengeful planning, produced the worst punishment he could think of for the pilgrims. They were bundled into the same ragged, dirty garments in which they had arrived, and taken far out of the city and dropped by the roadside not far from the Hall of Immortal Fame. A map was left with Challenger to indicate this, a superb refinement of mental cruelty in September’s opinion.

# Chapter XI

He would have been amply satisfied by the display of emotion when the pilgrims realised completely what had befallen them. The spectacle of overgrown men dancing with futile rage and frothing with feeble oaths struck Clarence as rather comic in spite of the appalling hang-over under which he was suffering, and he could not repress a feeble grin.

Kinnison saw that grin and transferred to its owner all the fury which possessed him over the loss of his own private paradise, heated still further by the pent-up grudges he had for Clarence.

“You’re the cause of all this, you drunken fool!” he shouted, and made for Clarence with all he’d got. It looked at that moment as though things would go hard with the victim, for the Grey Lensman was, in his own witty phrase, a real forty-minute egg.

Clarence took one look at the charging Kinnison and promptly fled for his life down the road. After him thundered Kinnison, after Kinnison the rest of the pilgrims, some urging him on, some calling on him to cool down, some, seeing that the massive Lensman had no chance of overtaking the long-legged Clarence, laughing. All came to an abrupt halt when a formidable figure in full armour, mounted on a strapping shire stallion, spurred out of a thicket crying, “Hold!”

“By my knighthood, Sir Launcelot,” said Clarence, as haughtily as breathlessness would allow, “wouldst have me soil my hands on this low-born knave? By my halidom, ’twere easy to overthrow the caitiff but it ill becomes my honour to harm one tainted in his wits.”

“A noble answer, fair sir, and I do repent my hasty judgment. In sooth, I do perceive that the fellow is grievously possessed, for he doth foam at the chops most foully. But ye have a goodly company here – what manner of men be ye?”

“Travellers and adventurers in space and time,” said Arcot quickly. He had waited a long time to get that one in.

“Travellers in time? And by the twang I ween ye men of Yankee-land?”

“Most of us are Americans – yes,” said Arcot, wondering why Sir Launcelot had asked the question through tight-clenched teeth. The answer resulted in the knight’s closing his visor with a savage jerk, simultaneously

drawing a three-foot sword, and whirling it round his head in a most intimidating manner.

“Is’t even so?” inquired Sir Launcelot in the tones of a high pressure safety valve blowing off. “Dost any of ye claim kinship to one yclept Hank Morgan who entitled himself The Boss? Verily an thou dost, prepare to meet thy doom!”

By way of illustration, he took a swing at a six-inch diameter sapling, lopping it off with horrific ease. John Carter quickly removed the hand which he had optimistically placed on the hilt of his own long-sword, and the pilgrims shuffled their feet and waited for someone to speak. The silence lengthened.

At the most unbearable point, it was broken by a dapper little man who stepped out of the thicket to say authoritatively to Sir Launcelot, “Now then, that’ll be all from you, me lad. Be off with you.”

The armour-clad giant crouched obstreperously on his horse, sidling it round to face the intruder. The flaming red torpedo beard that identified Captain Kettle stuck out a shade more aggressively, and, casually, its wearer removed a hand from his jacket pocket, a hand in which glittered a nickel-plated revolver. Sir Launcelot made a grumpy noise and rode off.

“Now, gentlemen,” said Kettle briskly, turning to the pilgrims, “I see that you have overcome all the obstacles so far placed in your path, though I must say you’ve taken your time. However, there is only one last barrier in your way, but it is the most formidable one of all. It takes the form of a narrow, steep-walled canyon inhabited by a semi-humanoid race of animals called Critics. These beings are very fierce and savage, and habitually tear into shreds everything less than a hundred years old. One quite recently – Edmund Wilson by name – massacred a whole group of very formidable entities known as Shoggoths, Elder Ones, and so on. You wouldn’t have the chance of a snowball in hell!”

He paused to examine distastefully the expressions of asinine egoistic courage which adorned most of the pilgrims.

“There is, however, a possible way out. A wizard by the name of Mr. Reading Public has a dwelling on the edge of the canyon and will construct for you a fairy bridge if he thinks you worthy to enter the Halls of Immortal Fame. The bridge will be only as wide as his desire to see you enthroned there, and, of course, if it is not wide enough, then you fall into the jaws of the Critics.”

The pilgrims assumed expressions of sublime confidence. “Lead on, sir,” said Professor Challenger grandly. “The bridge will be wide enough for *me* at least.”

Kettle shrugged his shoulders. “Carry on along this road,” he said. “You’ll be there in half an hour.”

And so they were, at the edge of the canyon looking down on the snarling Critics. A hundred yards away terraced gardens ran back from the very edge of the canyon to distant buildings, some of white marble, some of many-coloured stones, and some of mellowed red brick, but all exquisitely beautiful. But the pilgrims were looking at the pack of ravening beasts who barred the path to that Elysium, and the most foolhardy of them found the chance of safe-passage too small.

So they turned to the alternative, a rambling, untidy building on their own side of the canyon, around whose open front door ran the Rubaiyat quotation, “Oh the brave music of a *distant* drum.” They entered it in search of the Mr. Public who built bridges, and wandered for a considerable time in and out of rooms filled with books before they eventually ran the occupier to earth. He turned out to be a vague, bespectacled person, who blinked amiably up from his book as Challenger introduced the pilgrims and demanded a bridge suitable to their importance.

“Certainly I can supply you with such a bridge, my dear Professor,” he murmured, “But will such an exceedingly narrow structure be of any use?”

“Narrow, sir? Narrow? What the devil do you mean?” bristled Challenger huffily. Mr. Public sighed and shut his book.

“Well, you see, Professor, I only construct bridges of useful size for characters whom I feel worthy to cross over. You yourself, and the same applies to your companions, Summerlee, Malone, and Lord John Roxton – and indeed to many of your present companions such as Tarzan, John Carter, Gregg Haljan, and others – have some of the requisite qualities. You do resemble living people in that you are of that blend of strength and weakness, of brute and angel, of id, ego, and super-ego, which characterises humanity. But the things you do are very superficial, their interest to the observer is quite ephemeral, they do not in any way demonstrate a fundamental truth of human behaviour or human reaction to the universe. If I may quote a well-worn sample, Hamlet’s ‘To be or not to be, that is the question’ has lasted fresh down the centuries and will do so, because it states an ever-recurring problem in human life, states it with simple clarity. But your actions and

words are petty, relevant only to yourselves. Thud-and-blunder, my dear Professor, is entertaining, but of itself insufficient.”

The pilgrims named seemed to find this little lecture remarkably indigestible, but Seaton and Kinnison gestured reassuringly, and the latter addressed Mr. Public confidently.

“You must remember, Mr. Public,” he said reprovably, “that we are all Comrades in this Great Adventure, and that there must be no question of the persons you name not being allowed to use the same bridge as myself and Dick Seaton.”

“But what makes you think that Seaton and yourself will have a bridge?”

“Your own definition of the qualities required. What more eternal and cosmic truth is there than that demonstrated by our battles against Evil and the struggle for the survival of the Fittest shown in our huge wars?”

“O – I agree with you there. But you lack just those important qualities which the others have, the qualities of human beings. You are cardboard figures impossibly stuffed with virtues, strong in every way with no weaknesses, entirely good with no trace of natural sin, having the intelligence of a genius with the courage of stupidity, and quite lacking all the natural emotions that cause men to laugh or weep. Even in love you are incredibly and revoltingly priggish and dull.”

Mr. Public paused and looked the pilgrims over more carefully, ignoring the large proportion of them who clearly had formed the opinion that he was mad. He picked out one or two of them with signs of more interest.

“Yet there are some of you who are not entirely unworthy,” he mused. “You, Johnny Black, do nothing important, but your personality is most attractively real. I have a certain fondness for you, Atkill, and you do express some truth in your proposition that even a benevolent dictatorship must be opposed, though I fear your chances sadly diminished by the rather minor story in which you appear. Walpole, you express admirably the soldierly virtues of courage and tenacity. And, Cossar, you come close to greatness. Men who can think with such clarity are rare, but those who have the physical and moral courage to act promptly and sufficiently as their reason bids are almost unknown.

“Perhaps, after all, you shall have a bridge... a small one....”

“When?” asked Cossar.

“O – now, of course....” said Mr. Public, opening his book again. Taking

this for a sign of dismissal, the pilgrims left him and, with considerable trouble, found their way out of the building.

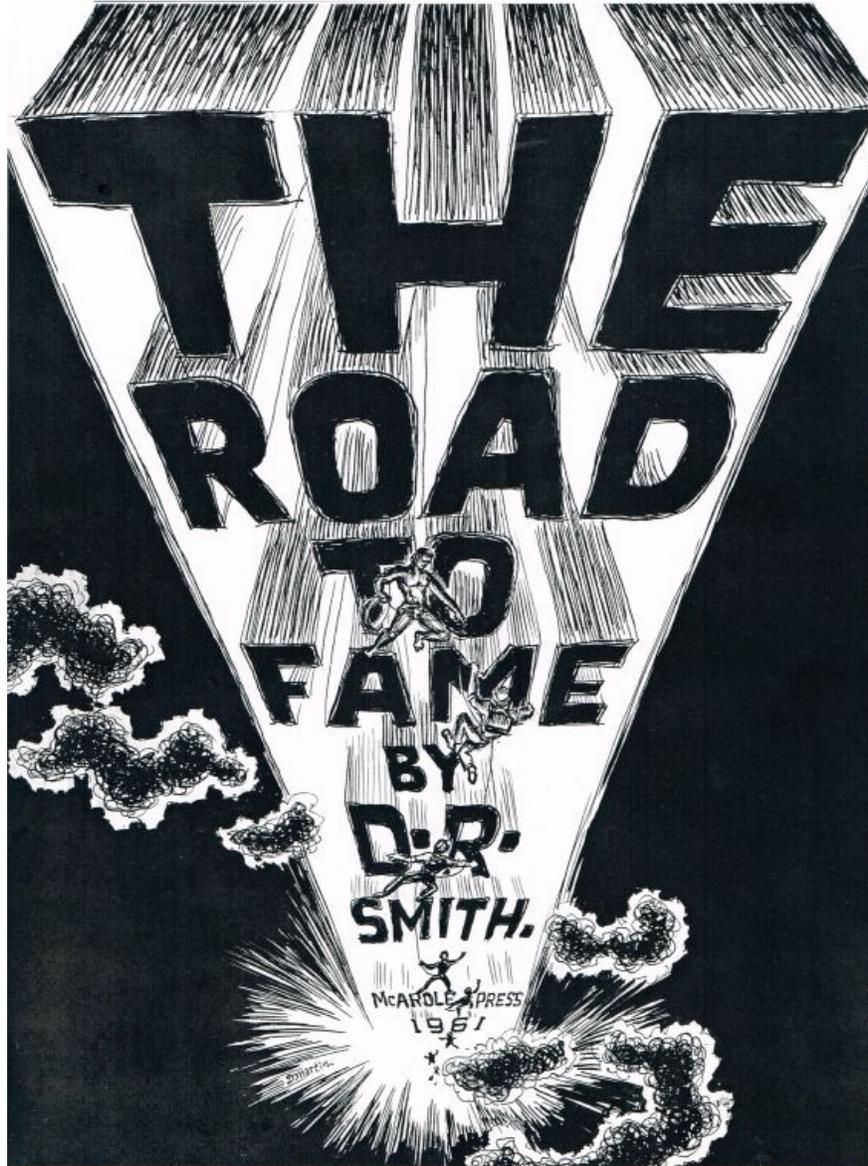
The bridge was there, all right, a shimmering strip of impalpable mist stretching flatly across the canyon. It was firm enough to the foot, though, and its width of six or seven inches not impossibly small for clear heads. It was small enough, however, for a certain amount of thought to be devoted to it before one started across, and it was while these cogitations were in progress that they heard the airplane.

In dull curiosity they looked back and saw the tiny, silver shape glinting high above in the clear sky. It was too high for even the most keen-sighted to see the bomb doors gaping, and they turned to contemplate further the problem before them. No one had made a move when suddenly the entire landscape was illuminated by a dazzling violet glare from behind, a light so strong that the sunlight sickened before it. Within seconds came the wind, the colossal blast which lifted them off their feet and whirled them high over the canyon, high over the cowering Critics, spurning the meagre bridge, safely into the welcoming cushion of a high yew hedge.

“It’s an ill atomic bomb that blows nobody any good,” cracked Kinnison as they dazedly disentangled themselves. The others looked at him in awe. Kinnison had made a joke!

Not one of them noticed that the plane had circled round and was flying towards them.

# Appendices



*Cover by Dick Martin for the 1961 McArdle Press edition, reprinted 2004.*

# Glossary of Characters

- Arcot: Star of the Arcot-Morey-Wade team, who began their activities with “Piracy Preferred” in *Amazing Stories*, June 1930, and went on and on to “Invaders from the Infinite” in the Spring-Summer 1932 *Quarterly*. Author: John W. Campbell.
- Atkill: Amoral sub-hero of “Beyond the End of Space”, *Amazing*, March and April 1933. Author: John W. Campbell.
- Bird, Doctor: The super-scientific detective who devoted most of his time to thwarting the super-ditto villain Saranoff in the early 1930s. Author: Capt. S.P. Meek.
- Black, Johnny: The intelligent and amusing bear introduced in “The Command”, *Astounding*, October 1930. Author: L. Sprague de Camp.
- Carter, John: Alias *The Warlord of Mars*. Author: Edgar Rice Burroughs.
- Carse, Hawke: Deadshot Dick of the Spaceways. First appeared in the story of the same name in *Astounding*, November 1931. Author: Anthony Gilmore.
- Challenger, G.E.: Leader of the party to *The Lost World* in search of pre-historic flora and fauna. Author: A. Conan Doyle.
- Clarence: The American science-fiction author’s idea of a jolly old Englishman, what? Appeared quite a bit in early *Amazings*, usually as an utter outsider, what? Imitation Bertie Woosters, one presumes, but fearfully shoddy imitations, what?
- Cossar: Hero of *The Food of the Gods* – as far as anyone was the hero. A man who always did what he reasoned to be the right thing, whether it involved crawling down a burrow to ferret out and exterminate giant rats, or feeding the Food to his own three sons and helping them fight the world for freedom. Only plausible because of such men as T.E. Lawrence and Sir Richard Burton. Author: H.G. Wells.
- DuQuesne, Marc C.: The bad lad of the Skylark series. Author: E.E. Smith.
- Friday: Servitor to Hawke Crusoe – I mean Robinson Carse. Author: Anthony Gilmore.
- Haljan, Gregg: Hero of “The Brigands of the Moon”, commencing in

- March 1930 *Astounding*. Naive but nice. Author: Ray Cummings.
- Hanson, Commander John: Ex-Special Patrol Service, first appearing in “The Forgotten Planet”, *Astounding*, July 1930. Author: Sewell Peaslee Wright.
  - Kettle, Captain: Formidable early twentieth-century tramp steamer type, frequently mixed up with fantastical happenings. Author: C.J. Cutcliffe-Hyne.
  - Kinnison: The ubiquitous Grey Lensman. Author: E.E. Smith.
  - Ku Sui: Hawke Carse’s svelte opponent. Author: Anthony Gilmore.
  - McTodd, Neil Angus: Scotch engineer, frequently in contact with Captain Kettle. The zenith in the class of which Burks’s Josh McNab was the revolting nadir. Author: C.J. Cutcliffe-Hyne.
  - Malone: Irish reporter, companion to Professor Challenger. Author: A. Conan Doyle.
  - Morey: Arcot’s computer. Author: John W. Campbell.
  - Morgan, Hank: The Yankee at the Court of King Arthur. Author: Mark Twain.
  - Munro, Aarn: Jovian-born Homo Sapiens genius, hero of “The Mightiest Machine”, commencing in *Astounding*, December 1934. Author: John W. Campbell.
  - Roxton, Lord John: Another of the *Lost World* group. Author: A. Conan Doyle.
  - Seaton, Richard: The Skylark hero. Can be distinguished from Kinnison by an acute observer, which is more than can be said for their respective sweethearts. Author: E.E. Smith.
  - September: Keeper of Yoshiwara, high-class establishment in the red-light district of *Metropolis*. Author: Thea von Harbou.
  - Summerlee: See also Challenger, Malone, and Roxton. Author: A. Conan Doyle.
  - Tarzan: Obviously.
  - Wade: The man who issued the shares in “Piracy Preferred”, until unfortunately converted by Arcot. Author: John W. Campbell.
  - Walpole, Sergeant: “Morale”, *Astounding*, December 1931. A good soldier. Author: Murray Leinster.
  - Wilson, Edmund: Book critic to the *New Yorker* who in the issue dated November 24, 1945, devoted several columns to annihilating H.P. Lovecraft. God has since punished him by causing a book of his short

stories to be suppressed for obscenity.

# **By Way of Explanation**

## **Bill Evans**

### **postface to the first book appearance**

“The Road to Fame” first appeared in the *Fantast*, published in England during 1941-1942 by C.S. Youd, J.F. Burke, and Douglas Webster. It was originally conceived as a round-robin type of story, with each author writing one instalment; however, after D.R. Smith started the ball rolling, no one else wanted to continue, so he did, writing each section just in time to meet the publishing deadline. When *Fantast* suspended publication, the story was still unfinished. That was in 1942. In 1946 I persuaded Don to finish the story so that I could reprint it as a booklet; at this time he also compiled the glossary of characters. The whole story was stencilled during 1946 and sent to Andy Anderson in Los Angeles for illustration and printing. No more was heard from it. In 1950, when Roy Loan, Jr., was looking for material for his *The Talisman*, I decided that here was an opportunity to get it published, since I felt I really owed it to Don Smith after getting him to finish the story. Three instalments appeared – and then publication of *The Talisman* was suspended. I have finally decided that the only way to get it printed was to do it myself. Here it is.

The above will explain the dated nature of certain parts of the story and the omission of certain prominent characters who would probably have been included if the story had been written – or even revised, which it was not – today. With great thanks for Don Smith for the various favours.

Bill

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# Acknowledgements and Publishing History

Many thanks to Ruth Berman, who provided a copy of her nicely printed 2004 reissue of *The Road to Fame* which made the scan/OCR process very easy. Copies of that edition can still be had from her for \$6.00 (or \$8.00 outside North America; dollar check preferred): Ruth Berman, 2809 Drew Avenue South, Minneapolis, Minnesota 55416, USA. Thanks are also due to Rob Hansen, who first inspired this ebook with his comments about *The Road to Fame* in *Faan Fiction 1930-2020: an exploration* (Ansible Editions ebook, June 2021). Rob suggested the inclusion of his D.R. Smith memoir, checked queried words against the 1953 edition, commented on the cover design and wrote a brief Introduction.

- First edition: January 1953, Bill Evans as “An Elder publication” for FAPA (mimeo).
- Second edition: August 1961, Ruth Berman as McArdle Press for the Professor Challenger Society (mimeo). [Cover by Dick Martin.](#)
- Third edition: 2004, Ruth Berman as McArdle Press, reprinting the above (lithographed). [Cover by Dick Martin.](#)
- Fourth edition: June 2021, David Langford as Ansible Editions (ebook only) for the TAFF site ebook library.

*David Langford, June 2021*

## The End

This free ebook is exclusive to the unofficial TAFF website at [taff.org.uk](http://taff.org.uk). If you enjoy reading it, a donation to TAFF is a fine way to express your appreciation.

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