

TEMPLE AT THE BAR



FANZINE WRITING BY
BILL TEMPLE

Temple at the Bar

Fanzine Writing

Bill Temple

Edited by Rob Hansen

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Cover photograph: Arthur C. Clarke (left) and Bill Temple at the 1951 London “Festivention”, from the Vince Clarke collection.

Interior photographs of Bill Temple opening each section of the book, and elsewhere: see the captions for individual credits, with a full list at [Photo Credits and Links](#).

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Contents

[Title Page](#)

[Foreword](#)

[Matters of Interest](#)

- [1. The Diary of a Supper](#)
- [2. The Smile of the Sphinx](#)
- [3. SFA London Branch Meeting Reports](#)

[The British Fan in His Natural Haunt](#)

- [1. Eric C. Williams](#)
- [2. Ted Carnell](#)
- [3. Arthur C. Clarke](#)
- [4. Maurice K. Hanson](#)
- [5. Ken Chapman](#)
- [6. Walter H. Gillings](#)

[The Days of the Flat](#)

- [1. The British Fan in His Supernatural Haunt](#)
- [2. Celluloid Resurrection](#)
- [3. Chingford Chiaroscuro](#)
- [4. An Outsider at a Technical Meeting](#)
- [5. On the British Interplanetary Society](#)
- [6. The Flat Truth](#)

[The War Years](#)

- [1. Despatches](#)
- [2. A Letter from the Front](#)
- [3. Home from the War](#)

Post-War

- [1. Caught in a Convention](#)
- [2. How It All Began](#)
- [3. The *Hyphen* Letters](#)
- [4. Anti-Social Notes](#)
- [5. The Dubious Career of William F. Temple](#)
- [6. That Man Clarke](#)
- [7. This Little O, the Earth](#)
- [8. How to Write a Science Fiction Serial](#)

Afterword

[Original Appearances](#)
[Photo Credits and Links](#)

Foreword

William Frederick Temple (1914-1989) was the author of many short SF stories and of half a dozen SF novels – one of which, *Four-Sided Triangle*, was made into a movie in 1953 by Hammer Films. However, this volume is not about William F. Temple the serious SF author but rather Bill Temple, SF fan, writer and editor. First, however, some historical background to set the stage for the pieces you're about to read.

The British Interplanetary Society is an organisation of space and rocket enthusiasts created in Liverpool in 1933. A London Branch was formed in late 1936, and Bill Temple was at its second meeting in November. In 1937, BIS national H.Q. was transferred from Liverpool to London, where it has remained ever since. In January of that same year, the Science Fiction Association was inaugurated in Leeds at what was the world's first SF convention (US claims to the contrary notwithstanding). Local branches quickly sprang up across the country, though it would be the end of October before London fans formed their own. This came about at a meeting held in the Catford home of London fan Eric Williams. Bill was elected chairman of the group's Writers' Circle. The second meeting of London SFA was held the following month at the Ancient Order of Druids Memorial Hall on Lambs Conduit Street, a venue Ken Chapman appears to have been instrumental in finding. The AOD would be the venue for their meetings thereafter. Well, their *official* meetings. Before the end of the year, members of the group had also started meeting unofficially for informal get-togethers on another evening at the J. Lyons tea shop at 36/38 New Oxford Street.

The UK's second convention was held at the AOD in April 1938. Whereas the London SFA meetings took place in a room in that building, the convention made use of its main hall which featured a large *papier mâché* replica of Stonehenge. During the afternoon session, Londoners were elected to all of the SFA's various offices, thus transferring its national H.Q. from Leeds to the capital.

In June 1938, Bill Temple was flat-hunting and decided to call in on Arthur C. Clarke at his tiny Norfolk Square bedsit. Both were members of the BIS, the SFA, and shared a love for classical music, so Bill suggested they seek a larger place together and flat-share. This they did, eventually finding a

top floor flat, a few minutes walk from the AOD, at 88 Gray's Inn Road. Celebrated in fannish folklore as "the Flat", it quickly became a favoured drop-in for visiting fans, while the informal Thursday meetings transferred from J. Lyons to The Red Bull, a pub on the corner of the same block. (The pub and the AOD were destroyed during bombing raids in April and May of 1941, but the flat that was the Flat still survives.) A couple of months after moving in, Clarke and Temple invited Maurice K. Hanson to join them. Hanson and fellow Nuneaton fan Denny Jacques had created *Novae Terrae*, the UK's first true fanzine, in 1936. This had been made the SFA's official organ at the 1937 convention, and Hanson had brought it with him when he moved to the capital in August 1937. Now that he was living at the Flat, Clarke and Temple became co-editors. They were also editing the *BIS Bulletin* for that organisation so, for a time, 88 Gray's Inn Road became the national H.Q. for both organisations.

The Flat lasted eighteen months in all. First to leave was Hanson. He was conscripted in July 1939, becoming part of the British Expeditionary Force. Bill's new bride Joan took up residence soon afterwards in September, adding a much needed "woman's touch" to what had until then been a bachelor pad. Then Clarke was called up and sent by the RAF to Colwyn Bay in North Wales. Unable to afford the rent on their own, Bill and Joan had no choice but to vacate too. The final SFA meeting was held there on Friday 22nd December 1939, shortly before they departed. Both the SFA and the BIS would be suspended "for the duration". Only the BIS would return.

Phew! Well, that's the necessary background out of the way, which just leaves the question: why choose to collect Bill's fan writing? Well, quite apart from these pieces being entertaining and informative in their own right, Bill deserves credit for introducing humour and wit into British fanzines where, apart from the occasional wry comment in a D.R. Smith review, they had been entirely absent. Before Bill came along, the writing in our fanzines was largely stolid and po-faced, the advancement of science fiction being a serious business that left little room for levity. Then Bill wrote "The Diary of a Supper", his report on the 1938 convention (the first piece reprinted in this volume). It was the opening salvo in the battle to get SF fans to loosen up.

Presented here in roughly chronological order and written over a twenty-year period, these pieces offer a fascinating look at a time long gone when SF fans and writers in the capital were few enough in number to form a small, tightly-knit community, and of the part Bill played in that community.

– Rob Hansen, October 2017

Acknowledgements

A number of people helped me in putting together this volume. I'd like to thank Joe Patrizio for providing a copy of a piece I knew existed but could not otherwise locate, and to him and his wife Anne (Bill's daughter) for permission to publish this volume in the first place, of course; to the staff at The British Interplanetary Society building in Vauxhall for their courtesy and their help when I was doing research in their library; to Robert Lichtman for checking those issues of *VOM* that I didn't have for further [Despatches](#); and last, but never least, to Dave Langford who takes the text files I provide him with, line-edits them, and does all the design and production work necessary to deliver ebooks like the one you're now reading. Thank you one and all.

Oh, and should you be able to locate a copy, issue #29 of the fanzine *Lan's Lantern* (January 1989, ed. George Laskowski) was "A William F. Temple & Lester Del Rey Special" that may be of interest.

– Rob Hansen, October 2017

Matters of Interest



*Bill Temple, 1937
Photo from the album of Ted Carnell*

1. The Diary of a Supper

Trying to recall the supper party at the Convention of some weeks ago the first thing that floats across my mind is a side-table laden with sandwiches, cakes, and sausage rolls of such a weird shape that they involved John Russell Fearn and myself in a discussion on surrealism. I think we both agreed it was berhunk. My memory is not clear, for I'd stopped (some time) at the bar on the way to the supper, and had a wet argument with Erb Warnes about Finance and Education.

Fearn was a real surprise to me. I'd imagined him as being rather snappy like the brainy scientists in his stories but he turned out to be a smiling, pleasant personality, modest, and with a balanced outlook on things. Everyone liked him. I congratulated him on the amount of work he turned out, and he explained that he planned his working hours, writing between 9 and 12 in the morning and 6 and 9 in the evening. He spends many of his afternoons in cinemas, for, like me (I like discovering points of similarity between me and the great) he's a rabid film-fan.

Just then, I'm sorry to say, the rum began to take effect. John faded into a mist and presently I came out of a sort of pipe dream to find myself in the midst of an argument between Arthur Janser and Benson Herbert on methods of government. Mr. Janser is a monarchist. Benson Herbert wasn't, nor was I. (Again similarity with genius, please note.) We argued over the Austrian situation, at that time acute, and Herbert displayed quite a wide knowledge of international politics and history. Janser, being Viennese, gave us some inside dope on how the Nazis were confining his friend, Sigmund Freud, the great psychologist. After that things took a stf turn and Herbert told me he could never write the quickfire, tearing action stuff some of the U.S. mags demanded. (And now I see he's crashed *Thrilling Wonder*!) The ardent monarchist broke in again, and I, disgusted with a scientist for letting traditional sentiment over-rule reason tried to expound my own theory of a State governed by a board of humane, tolerant, sympathetic scientists, engineers, artists, and educationalists, and got into another frightful muddle, which became another confused pipe dream.

Woke up to find myself sitting at a table with John Beynon Harris and eyeing him blearily across a glass of brown ale. Apparently we had been

discussing everything under the sun: Wells, the F.P.S.I., Prof. Joad, the theory of physics and the practice of flat-hunting; music and typewriters, blues, slips, carpet tacks, Gamages and things. John B. said he detested writing (like me – good!) and always sat down at his desk with a sinking feeling, and all through his labours kept trying to think of an excuse to stop and go out and have a cup of coffee. He’s a fine conversationalist, full of amusing anecdotes, and a bit of a thinker too. I tried to get him to open up on the “Wot’s-the-use-of-living” philosophy he brought into “Sleepers of Mars”. But he said it was only a passing mood that everyone gets sometimes. He thought “The Venus Adventure” (*Wonder*, April 1932) the best of his yarns, and was rather contemptuous of *The Secret People*. (I wasn’t.) Arthur Clarke’s Ego, closely followed by Arthur Clarke, entered the conversation here to agree that “The Venus Adventure” was John B’s best, and tried to tell of a scene in that story that always stuck in his mind. But he couldn’t remember it.

Then F. Vic Gillard came along touting bound copies of the three issues of *Amateur Science Stories* at 1/- each, and after a spot of brilliant sales talk persuaded John B. to buy one. Arthur Clarke’s Ego and myself made a simultaneous pounce on John B. to point out to him that both of us had stories in it that were well worth reading. This struggle for recognition developed into a disgusting melee, and John B. wriggled out of it somehow and got clean away. I mooned about disconsolately after that among the busily thawing jaws of Messrs. Hanson, Williams, Chapman, Gillings, Carnell and other dull souls with no ideals beyond food, found the bar and got all muzzy again. I have a dim memory of arguing with Albert Griffiths about some fool named Temple, of gloating with alcoholic admiration over the drawings of H.E. Turner, and of waving goodnight to Mr. I.O. Evans.

Then another period of mental blankness, and came to again to find myself in the homeward-bound train, with both feet on the opposite seat, a half-eaten ham roll in one hand and a crumpled copy of the Constitution in the other. “Good ol’ Constitootion,” I burbled, and in a fit of generosity gave my Convention supper – all of it – to a porter standing on the platform at London Bridge. I’m still not sure whether he wanted it, but he happened to be standing outside my compartment window, and the wind was blowing in his direction. He shouted his thanks as the train moved off. He said it was “Ruddy fine”. Or I was. Anyway it sounded something like that. He was a nice man.

– *Report of the Second Convention* (April 1938)

2. The Smile of the Sphinx

Believing that our readers would be interested to learn how such an unusual story as “The Smile of the Sphinx” published in the September issue of *Tales of Wonder*, came to be written, we invited the author, William F. Temple, to tell us the “Story Behind the Story”. Here it is.

• • •

When I read “The Smile of the Sphinx” on its publication the other day, I didn’t think it was anything like so good as I had imagined it to be when I wrote it. (But then, I wrote in the middle of moving, and hadn’t time to read what it was all about). And so, as I suffer from schizophrenia too, my mind split neatly into two halves: the Critical Reader and the Defensive Author. When the Reader’s eye alighted on the Editor’s panel of praise, he said “Bah!” emphatically. And again when he had read the story. “You seem to have got hold of an original idea, all right,” he remarked to the Author, “but the so-called story is just a mass of explanation; the plot is non-existent.”

Essential Explanation

Replied the Author indignantly: “All that explanation was necessary to put over the idea. It was sales-talk. The idea would simply not have been accepted without it. There was no room left for much of a plot.”

“Bad construction,” murmured the Reader, and the Author exploded. “What kind of a plot could there be?” he demanded. “The whole point of the thing is the doubt about the cats. A more elaborate plot would have to assume that either the cats were the villains of the piece, which would have been too steep for you to swallow; or else that they were just cats after all – in which case the story falls flat.”

“I don’t like stories that leave things up in the air,” asserted the Reader, doggedly. “I like all the ends tucked in ...”

The conflict waged on, and went whirling away down into the subconscious. I reflected on how the Author had come to write the story. He had been searching for a new science-fiction theme, and had been pondering vaguely on a “things-are-not-always-what-they-seem” notion. He thought the world took too much for granted from the external evidence. Might not some

very familiar and solid-seeming things be only shams, bluffs, mere facade? Concealing what?

In this frame of mind he went down to Ted Carnell's house at Plumstead on the eve of the SFA London Convention, to help plan that affair. There was a cheerful company in the front room – Ted, Les Johnson, Maurice Hanson, Eric Williams, Ken Chapman, Arthur Clarke, and Wally Gillings. Plenty of beer and talk. Fans aired their views on every conceivable subject under the sun – and above it.

Ted's big fat cat, a wise old animal in his late 'teens, sat half-dozing and purring benignly on a chair in the middle of the room, "a look of complacent felicity about him." The Author regarded him, and was suddenly struck with the idea: Suppose he can understand what we are saying, and is only pretending indifference? Suppose he has a greater mind than we give him credit for? Our estimate of his intelligence is only based on his behaviour. Suppose that is just "acting?"

Cats and Cataphysics

The Author voiced this thought to certain of the company. Les, Eric, Maurice, and Arthur sat around the cat, stroked and prodded and discussed it, and all the time it behaved just like a normal cat. The Author ventured that this behaviour was actually covering a profound chagrin and annoyance at being suspected, but that the cat's superb acting was preventing us from taking our own theory very seriously. And in fact the cat triumphed eventually, and the whole thing passed off as a joke.

The Author thought it was too preposterous an idea to use for a story, and it was not considered again until one evening some time later, during a discussion with Eric Williams in a homeward-bound suburban train. The arguments which came to light in that discussion persuaded the Author that the idea might after all be put over with a fair amount of credibility, but it depended upon the presentation. He decided to have a go at it, eventually producing "The Smile of the Sphinx".

Personally, without false modesty, I think he was only indifferently successful.

– *Tomorrow #7* (Autumn 1938)

3. SFA London Branch Meeting Reports

Editor's Note: While others wrote some reports, and all were unsigned, these five are clearly by Bill.

1. February 13th 1938. (13 members and 1 visitor).

After the usual Branch business Mr. Carnell was called upon to deliver the dope on U.S. fans – their activities, love lives, jail sentences etc. Unfortunately Mr. Carnell announced that he found it impossible to trace the life of any one fan in detail as Americans are so intensely active as to offer world-lines of extra-ordinary complexity; he therefore gave a reading from one of the current U.S. fan mags. In the middle of an important passage Mr. W.H. Gillings staggered in looking like an Abominable Snowman. Amidst vague mutterings between Mr. Carnell and the new arrival Mr. Sid Birchby opened his talk on “The Next War”. He so horrified us with the possibilities of nasty death to come that when he at length concluded on a note of hopeful despair, he netted not one appreciative hand-clap.

We all sat round feeling rather miserable until after one or two desultory questions, Mr. Gillings, now thawed out by the creeping glow of nourishing stout, was called upon to read the afternoon's classic story, Lovecraft's “The Colour Out of Space”. Mr. Gillings moved to a more convenient spot away from the beer and commenced reading. His audience sat enthralled, then interested, then passive, then replete, then a little fidgety. After 1½ hours heroic reading without a stop Mr. Gillings drew his story to a finish. Grunts and deep sighs sounded from about the table, of ecstasy or relief.

The big moment then arrived – a programme of s-f music offered by Arthur Clarke. Several faces became stonily resigned as the handle was wound, and as the first notes of *Things to Come* thundered out, eyes wandered to papers and magazines. And then as the maddening rhythm of Mossolov's *Steel Foundry* slammed and roared across the frosty air eyes became expressive once more, but alas, only with amusement and disgust ...

– *Novae Terrae* #21 (March 1938)

2. At a General Meeting at the A.O.D., Lamb's Conduit St., on Thursday

evening, Aug. 11th. Eric Williams gave Part 2 of his talk on “Time Travel in S-F”. He brought forward various conceptions of time and Religion, without, however, disclosing his own personal opinions, and ended with an idealistic and very well-written extract from Cummings’s *Exile of Time*. Ken Chapman gave biographical sketches of Hyatt Verrill and Oliver Saari (probably the oldest and youngest of living s-f authors). The information he had collected was certainly new to most present.

Amid a great crunching of potato crisps, Arthur Clarke arose to give the main lecture of the evening, on “The Fourth Dimension”. He had brought models of tetrahedra, a hyper-cross and a tesseract with him, and during his discourse twisted a cube about so complicatedly that the audience feared (or hoped) that he might accidentally rotate it through hyper-space and suddenly vanish with it. He didn’t, though, and brought his lecture and the meeting to a successful conclusion.

– *Novae Terrae* #25 (August 1938)

3. September 18th 1938.

Meeting held at A.O.D. Very welcome visitor was Les Johnson, Liverpool’s Prize Pessimist. Sid Birchby gave a short talk suggesting fans might find the principles of the IPU of interest. A brisk but (as usual) inconclusive discussion followed.

Frank Arnold held forth on the character of the s-f fan. Said from his personal experience he thought the average fan a hard-headed person with a “better grip” on life than most people, certainly not a mere escapist. Ken Chapman gave an interesting account of the career of Jack Williamson, and his home life on the ranch.

Then the company moved into the adjoining “Druid’s Temple”, which had been fitted as a cinema, and saw the famous s-f film *Metropolis*. Arthur Clarke in charge of projector, Messrs. Hanson & Temple managing accompanying music. Two mishaps:– Hanson & Temple ran out of “hurry” music during prolonged chase scenes: had villainous inventor chasing heroine to “Dead March”. In confusion Organiser Temple put Reel 5 on gramophone and “Basin Street Blues” in projector. But film ended successfully with nicely-timed *Things to Come* Epilogue, and was applauded loudly.

– *Novae Terrae* #26 (September 1938)

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Editor's Note: IPU most probably means the Inter-Parliamentary Union (established 1889 and still active) but might just be an error for PPU, the Peace Pledge Union, which had many supporters in fandom – see *Then*.

4. October 23rd 1938.

Fans from outlying parts came to swell the large attendance at the London Branch Anniversary Meeting, held at A.O.D., Lamb's Conduit St., Sun. Oct 23rd, including Doug. Mayer and Vic Gillard from Leeds, Harry Turner, Eric Needham, and G. Ellis from Manchester, Mr. Johnston from Farnborough, Hants., Laurie Harris from Bletchley, and Mr. S.H.P. Knight from Walsall. Ken as usual was in the chair.

Ted Carnell started off proceedings with his popular "Fans & Fan-Mags" flashes, and shed a tear over the recent death of *Imagination*. Sid Birchby read out a report (in Babu English) of an Indian doctor, Dr. Misra (nee Gherkin) and the mitogenic rays emitted by onions. Doug. Mayer, who had made a study of these emanations, rose to say the Doctor's conclusions were tripe. Eric Needham said it was a case of tripe and onions. Ken Chapman commented that you have only to eat onions for everyone else to know all about the emanations.

Mr. Devereaux delivered a lecture on Art and Architecture, tracing the various schools and phases, and coming to the conclusion that successful modern architecture depends upon (1) Its utility (2) Its environment. He thought the usual conception of the city of the future, a jumble of gigantic skyscrapers spanned with bridges, as seen in s-f mags, was most unlikely to ever become reality, except perhaps in the unique case of New York. This ended the afternoon session.

After tea, the evening session began at 7 p.m. Sid Birchby arose again, to give an Outline of History, which began with a Greek watching an egg and finished with the present high state of civilization. (Cries of "Question!")

Eric Williams paid a tribute to Jules Verne, surveying his works and commenting that the heroines in them were honest, virtuous girls, not the strip-tease wenches of today.

Doug. Mayer, on s-f films, complained of the recent lack of them, nothing in that line being made since *Lost Horizon*. He advocated that the SFA and similar societies should join in getting out a petition to present to the producers. Optimistically calculated that 50,000 signatures could be got this way.

Harry Turner spoke on “The Expanding Universe”, pointing out that the presumed recession of galaxies might be a spurious effect due to a reddening of light caused by gravitation or distance. Ted Carnell, or s-f illustrators, said it was idle to say one was better than another, as each was good in his own particular way.

Harold Kay gave the company another dose of history with a resume of the various dynasties of Ancient Egypt. It appeared that no one (except W.F. Temple) knew who built the Sphinx. Harold gave an interesting account of the battle tactics of the ancient races, from which it could be seen that those who fought on a definite method always won against those who fought haphazardly, even though the former were far outnumbered. (The reporter begs leave to apologise for omitting Mr. A.C. Ego Clarke’s lecture on “How to Build a Spaceship”. As most of the lecturer’s ideas were filched, the matter is of little import).

Frank Arnold, supplementing his recent talk about s-f fans and tolerance, said too much tolerance was weakness. It is a duty to be intolerant of evils, and science must follow that path.

Lastly, Wally Gillings rose to defend *Tales of Wonder* against unfair attacks. By force of circumstances he had to aim at the man in the street rather than the s-f fan (though he tried to please both) and that man did not care whether the stories were reprints or not. He could not afford to pay authors adequately for new and decent material. In conclusion he read out readers letters, of praise, criticism, or condemnation. Someone with a reprint complex had complained “The Prr-r-eet” was a reprint – it wasn’t. Another termed everything “lousy” and was signed “The Hooded Terror”. Then word came that Bob, the steward, wanted to get away before the pubs shut, so the meeting terminated.

– *Novae Terrae* #27 (November 1938)

5. December 18th 1938.

London Branch held an Xmas supper at AOD, Lamb’s Conduit St., Sun., Dec.18th. Many notables attended, including famous s-f. authors John Beynon Harris and W. J. Passingham, and famous fan Bert Lewis. First came a film show in the Druid’s Temple: *The Secret of the Loch*, accompanied by friendly but ribald comments (“Look behind yer!”) and the Loch Ness Monster was booed. It was an icy day, snowing, with the wind rattling over the roof, and the second film *White Hell of Pitz Palu* paralysed the audience

with sheer cold. When a character freezing to death on a blizzard-swept mountain took off his outer clothes and shivered in his shirt, uncontrollable teeth-chattering broke out. But the film was applauded (or was the audience warming its hands?)

At the supper table in the next room Ted Carnell gave a description of his forthcoming new fan-mag, *New Worlds*, and was followed by Mr. W.J. Passingham (author of the widely-read *Passing Show* s-f serials) who appealed for more humanity in s-f. He thought we weren't getting value for our money from the hack "super-science" of some pulps. We should get more carefully written stories showing the interplay of human emotions and reactions in strange surroundings (he instanced Sir A.C. Doyle as a master) and said, properly treated love interest should not be scoffed at. After all, human life was really the most interesting and complex thing in the universe – the cold mechanics of space-travel and the physics of stars and atoms were simply supplementary things. The best s-f was that which best combined the human and the scientific interest.

Then Mr. Harold Chibbett, spook-hunter of "The Probe", thrilled the company with seasonable ghost stories, which had the invaluable quality of being true: they were three of Harold's own experiences. (It was late now, and very dark, and the wind howled more loudly over the roof.) The first concerned the raising of an Elemental, the second an encounter with an evil spirit (the Devil?) one night on Hampstead Heath (H. solemnly exhibited the seat of his trousers, scorched and brimstoned), and the third, adventures in an old cottage haunted by a monk. He passed round an infra-red photo taken in the dark during the latter manifestations, and this showed a curious object apparently being thumped against the wall by a black hand without a body. No one hitherto knew what it was, but Mr. Passingham recognized it as a vessel of religious significance, and H. was highly, excited at this.

"Are you sure?" he kept repeating. "Why, this bears out the story of the monk!"

The company broke up soon after, and dispersed in twos and threes, hurrying down the shadowy stairs in a not-too-easy state of mind.

– *Novae Terrae* #29 (January 1939)

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Editor's Note: The Probe was an early UK occult investigation group founded by SF fan Harold Chibbett (1900-1978), who was

also involved in the Fortean movement.

The British Fan in His Natural Haunt



*Arthur C. Clarke, Bill Temple, John Wyndham, George Gallet
and E.J. "Ted" Carnell*

*Photo at the 1951 Festiventon from the album of Vince
Clarke*

1. Eric C. Williams

I arrived at Eric's place at Catford (most London SFA members will remember the house where the first big meeting took place) with a splitting headache. I mentioned this to Eric, asking sympathy. He immediately put *Steel Foundry* on the radio-gram. Now how can I write without prejudice about a bloke like that?

After I'd swallowed my indignation and an apple, Eric led the way importantly upstairs to his den. (He will expect a personal portrait here of course – the egotist. Well, Eric is a tall, good-looking, curly-hair photographer's mate, with doe-like brown eyes that can see cat-like in the darkrooms-like.)

This "den" was a little cubical room with bookshelves on three walls and a lot of rubbish on the floor. Eric had a lot of hand-picked treasures ready to show me. "No partiality" I said (I'd still got a headache) "General impressions only". Firstly I ranged along the bookshelves. Now Eric is a confirmed haunter-of-old-book-shops. He loves to mooch around in frowsty little curio-cum-pawnbroker shops digging out ancient scientific works, especially books of "facts". Lord knows why – the information in them is mostly out of date and fallacious. But he's got this queer collecting habit badly, and I counted 67 of these tomes, each with its distinctive musty aroma.

There were all the astronomical works of Proctor and Ball, *A Year-Book of Facts* (1855), *A Million Facts* by Sir R. Phillips, also 1855, odd volumes of *Knowledge*, *The Origin of Species*, and *Astronomy with an Opera-Glass* by the famous science-fiction author Garrett P. Serviss – dated 1892. This was intriguingly annotated with violent shorthand comments by some probably dead and buried genius. Also there were a number of aged Verne novels, well illustrated, including *Hector Servadac (Off on a Comet)*, which I'd been chasing unsuccessfully for years.

As anyone might have deduced from wads of newspaper articles pinned on the walls, Eric is (like myself) an H.G. Wells addict. Wells has written some 75 books, and Eric has 49 of 'em. (But here I score, he hasn't got Wells's best book *The Undying Fire*.) He thinks H.G.'s best stf work is his first, *The Time Machine*.

I think the volume I coveted most of all in his collection (because it's

unique) is a bound collection of stories and science-fantasy articles selected from the *Strand Magazine* for years back. There were the original short science-fiction yarns of Wells and Doyle, some of them finely illustrated in colour, the Sherlock Holmes stories and science-fiction stories by authors I'd never heard of, but which looked most interesting, besides many striking articles and the inevitable "facts".

This binding business is one of Eric's favourite rackets. He's got all the *Amazing*, *Wonder* and *Astounding* from 1930 to date in a serried row of mostly bound blue covers. He prizes them greatly and watched me anxiously as I peered into one. As I couldn't hold my breath indefinitely I didn't investigate these as thoroughly as I'd have liked. Previous to 1930 his collection was a bit ragged, he informed me shame-facedly. But, brightening up, added that his collection of *Tales of Wonder* was absolutely complete.

He keeps an ever-growing card index, already a yard long, of every magazine science-fiction story he's got, mostly hand-printed with title, author, personal comments, date and page, so that he can locate any story at a moment's notice. Of all those hundreds of cards the one he takes out most is "Paradise and Iron" by Miles J. Breuer (*Amazing Quarterly*, Summer 1930). That, he said, is definitely his favourite story.

Leaving another shelf of modern novels – Stapledon, Burroughs, Aldous Huxley etc. – I began to explore the floor. I pushed aside a trumpet, a stack of hot jazz records, a toy typewriter, a hundred reams of EX-LAX notepaper and Lo! there were treasures.

A French fantasy magazine with its interplanetary stories interspersed with improper (or proper) Gallic jokes and sketches, some old *Air Wonders*, one of the only two published *Miracle Tales*, and some *Science and Invention* (1923-4) containing "The Man on the Meteor" (Ray Cummings), "Dr. Hackenshaw's Secrets" (Clement Fezandié) and G. Peyton Wertenbaker's famous "Man from the Atom". This last lot was Eric's greatest bargain. In one of those old bric-a-brac shops he'd picked them up for a penny each.

Feeling myself a mere amateur in this collecting business I took my leave. Eric saw to it that that was all I did take. For when I thanked him on his doormat for letting me take such a lot of material for this article, he interpreted me literally, and wouldn't let me go before searching me thoroughly. He didn't discover anything (apart from my pawn tickets), but I voluntarily surrendered the volume of *Strand Magazine*, which had been concealed in my trouser turn-up all the time.

That's the nuisance of having a social conscience.

– *Novae Terrae* #22 (April 1938)

2. Ted Carnell

In the first place I must apologise to Ted (or he must apologise to me) for the distractions that interrupted my inspection of his den. Particularly that NUISANCE, Les Johnson, down from Liverpool. The NUISANCE thrust a card into my hand as soon as he saw – “V.H. Johnson for Science-Fiction Service. Represented by L.J. Johnson.” And thereafter he followed indefatigably at my heels, spouting sales talk, trying to get an order. I trod on his toes and kicked him in the face a few times, but he liked it.

Ted’s place is, of course, 17, Burwash Road., Plumstead, the London Branch of the Johnson Service unfortunately. The den is an attic under the inverted “V” of the roof, and you have to climb up a step-ladder and heave yourself through a trap-door to get into it – a fine opportunity for a bit of Johnson face-kicking which I didn’t miss.

Ted indicated a shelf with a row of *Astounding Stories* on edge – a row two yards long.

“A complete set of *Astounding* from No. 1,” he announced proudly.

“Unique!” I breathed.

He waved a bundle of horribly mimeographed paper at me.

“A complete set of *Novae Terrae* from No.1.”

“Unique!” I breathed.

He waved a bundle of highly coloured paper.

“A complete set of *Modern Wonder* and *Scoops* from no. 1.”

“Exceptional!” I breathed, thinking it time for a new one. My eye alighted on a tremendous collection of *Amazings* and *Wonders* on another shelf.

“Ah!” I said, striding over eagerly. “Why didn’t you mention these?”

The voice of the NUISANCE become urgent in my ear.

“All this belongs to the Johnson Service. Can I interest you in –”

I stabbed him there and then, and left him to bleed to death in the corner. Ted, crouching like a dog in the opposite corner, was disinterring fan mags by the hundred. He has, almost certainly, the biggest collection of them this side of the Atlantic. The *Science Fiction Fan – Critic* – i – I had never imagined there were so many industrious amateur editors.

“Here’s a curiosity”, said Ted, handing me a stubby little yellow book. It

was about an old friend, *Flash Gordon vs. The Emperor of Mongo* (Dell Publishing Co., 10 Cents.) The story was complete in the one volume, and it was profusely illustrated with some of the best black and white action pictures I've seen.

But Ted is not a collector of books, and apart from this one, he had only four books in the house. (Four! – when I think of Eric Williams' second B.M. Reading Room!) These four exceptions were: Prof. Low's *Adrift in the Stratosphere* (presented by the Author), Burroughs' *Warlord of Mars*, Stapledon's *Star Maker* (a proof copy), and Cleator's *Rockets through Space*.

Ted had cut out all the stf and fantasy stories that had appeared in the *Passing Show*. I remembered most of them as I riffled through them, but one, dated 1936, was a new one on me – “The Altar of the Moon” by Francis Dickie. My eye wandered from these to some *Weird Tales* and other horrific American mags. that were lying about. I could not help my eye from wandering like this, but it would not wander back. In fact, I seemed to have lost control of my eye altogether. For on the cover of these mags. were menacing but beautiful female vampires – apparently confirmed sun-bathers – and female inhabitants of other planets dressed in birthday suits and a bit of ribbon. Of course, I expressed my disgust at this sort of thing being in a stf fan's library, and Ted was shocked and contrite and couldn't imagine how they got there. We blamed it on the body in the corner. Ted opened a window, and after I'd had another disdainful examination of the things, we flung them contemptuously out. They slid down the tiles and came to rest safely in the gutter, from which Ted could quite easily rescue them in the morning.

The view from the window was grand. No. 17 is on a hill, and we could see over the grey Thames and over the squat buildings of Woolwich Arsenal, and far out across the flats of Essex, in the direction of Ilford, where lies the home of Walter Gillings. Remote but bold in the misty dusk stood the twin cable pylons at Barking, lit with great red warning lights. Each towered over a hundred feet higher than St. Paul's, and at this range looked like erections in some mystic future city. The whole scene would have inspired any stf artist possessed of feeling and imagination. And in the middle distance was a nice little gas-works.

“The bloke who owned this house before us was nutty on astronomy”, remarked Ted. “He had a telescope stuck out this window”.

He showed me the metal fittings, still there on the sill, where the

telescope had been fixed. Glamorous nights! Glamorous Saturday afternoons, too, for in the body corner, beside a pile of B.I.S. literature, reposed a duplicator, the duplicator on which this sheet of *Novae Terrae* was smudged out. For once a month, on Saturdays, Maurice Hanson comes down from London to turn the handle that produces *N.T.* The machine looked a bit rusty, but maybe that was the NUISANCE, who had been anything but anaemic.

There were photographs stuck all over the place, of Ted Carnell (looking very Anthony Eden-ish) but there was also one of Dan McPhail of Oklahoma, and a fantastic crayon drawing by Jack Baltadonis of Philadelphia. Ted knows some fans, I can tell you, and what's more he keeps a collection of photographs of them. I turned over the pages of his thick album and came across many familiar mugs (including Ted Carnell's) each neatly inscribed underneath with its prison record. There was a group taken at the inaugural meeting of the London Branch of the BIS, and I counted 9 faces that have never shown up there since. And there was a tiny photograph showing poor Stanley Weinbaum grinning happily. Ted thinks Weinbaum was the peer of them all.

You ignore the step-ladder in leaving this place, for there is a vertical metal rod, like the thing firemen slide down in a fire-station. I gaily exeunteed this way and slid door to the top landing. A spectral figure was waiting for me at the head of the stairs. It was the ghost of the NUISANCE, and it had some ghostly magazines under its arm.

"Can I interest you in these?" it said in a sepulchral voice. "Our Service has some remarkable *Supernatural Stories*."

– *Novae Terrae* #23 (May 1938)

3. Arthur C. Clarke

Arthur Clarke and his Ego live alone in a tiny divan bd. stg. rm. h & c. rnng. wtr., use of bthrm., in a house in Norfolk Square. W.2. The smallness of this room is a standing joke in the London Branch SFA – there is a tale that Arthur once wore a double-breasted suit for the first time and got wedged between the walls for three days. So, when one beery evening at the A.O.D., Arthur invited me to examine it, I accompanied him eagerly.

We toiled up many flights of stairs; A. lives on the top floor. (Funny how these astronomers like the roof.) At last we stood outside the door of the famous den. A. (hereinafter called “A.”) flung open the door with a magnificent gesture, snapped down the electric light switch and thundered “Behold!” But the effect was somewhat spoiled for he’d forgotten to leave a lamp in the light-socket, and the room remained obstinately in darkness. However he advanced boldly into the gloom, fumbled about and found the lamp (and a few other things by the sound of it) and had another go: “Behold!”

But again an anti-climax. My fault this time. I wasn’t there. You see, I’d noticed a small room on the stairs and had to retreat there urgently. It had been a *very* beery evening at the A.O.D. Still, I came panting back again commendably quickly, and at last entered the sanctum. Only just though. For there was hardly room for the two of us, and A’s Ego had to be left outside on the landing. A. himself generously opened the window and sat himself half outside it to allow me to look round freely.

Pinned on the wall was a yard-square photo of the Moon. Actually it was made up of four smaller sections, each of different sizes and parts, and the consequence was a moon that bulged badly in the wrong places, and one hemisphere missed the other completely and stuck out into space for several hundreds of miles. But A. knew his craters and rapped them out as I indicated them:

“Tycho, Aristullus, Copernicus ...”

“What’s this?” I asked, pointing out a strange, straight mark in the Alps.

“The Great Cleft” answered A. promptly. “Queer thing – there’s no debris in or around it. It’s dead straight, too. Like the slash of an atomic ray gun.”

“Ha! Let’s get on to science-fiction, then. What’s your favourite story?”

“One I wrote myself” interpolated the Ego, poking his head around the door. I batted it one and it retired with an even more swollen head than usual.

With true scientific indetermination, A. couldn’t decide upon his favourite story. I caught sight of more books piled on top of his cupboard and brought them down in a shower of sugar and grape-nuts – did I mention that A’s larder is on top of the cupboard too? The first book I looked at was *The Moon* by Professor Pickering. Impatiently I threw it aside and picked up the next. It was entitled *The Moon* by Nasmyth and Carpenter. “Heck!” I said and picked up the next. Yes, it was titled *The Moon* – this time by Neilson. I gave it up.

“You B.I.S. Moonatic!” I said “Haven’t you anything else less technical?”

A. replied: “My library is at Taunton, my home town. It contains complete sets of *Wonder*, *Astounding*, about 100 science-fiction novels and more than another 100 books of pure science”.

“Darned if I’m going to Taunton (if there is such a place) to check up on it” I said. “So I’ll have to take your word for it.”

Here A’s conscience smote him.

“Well, to tell you the truth, my *Astounding* collection is two short” he mumbled.

The Ego thrust its head into the room at this, and gave A. such a look of utter contempt that the poor fellow blushed.

“A fine chance to boost yourself without being detected – and you throw it away you weak twirp!” it remarked bitterly. And withdrew.

I made another desperate attempt to make something of the books A. had with him, and picked up a red one. It was *A Mathematical Theory of Relativity* by Koppf.

“Dammit, this is a bit too steep, ” I grumbled. “Can’t you remember what books you’ve got at Taunton, wherever that is?”

“I keep a list. That’s the best of having a methodical mind” answered A. brightly, yanking a drawer open.

I’ve never seen such a jumbled clutter of bric-a-brac as was in that drawer – buttons, pins, stamps, the B.I.S. cash box, cutlery, pamphlets, wool (A. darns his own socks), sardine-cans, tram-tickets, bits of well-worn chewing-gum – everything came flying out as the methodical mind searched for its list. There were, too, I remember, thick files of letters from Sam Youd

and Eric Frank Russell, and an especially thick file of carbon copies of letters written by A. himself. This last file was, I learned, the Ego's favourite reading material on Sunday afternoons.

At last the list. It was an exercise book printed neatly at first, and then degenerating into A's wildest scribble as it went on. Against every title was A's rating: "F", "G", "V.G." etc. There were all the familiar titles known to every s-f fan, and many that were new to me, such as Lance Sieveking's *Stampede* (illustrated by G. K. Chesterton) and Beresford's *Gods of the Purple Planet*. A. wouldn't venture to name his favourite book, but I noticed that though "V.V.G." (Very, Very Good) was not uncommon, against Stapledon's *Star Maker* was just the one word "Superb".

I had another glance round the room. There was a microscopic radio set in the cupboard – there was no room for it outside. But that was O.K., for A. when laying in bed could swing the cupboard door with his foot, thus regulating the volume of sound. It occurred to me rather belatedly that I ought to include a personal portrait of A. in the interview. So I looked at him. One must take the bad with the good in a reporter's life.

I beheld a tallish, rather clever-looking fellow (appearances are deceptive) whose eyes glinted at me through horn-rims with a condescending expression. He looks as if he hopes he looks like a scientist, does A. His hair cannot make up its mind whether it is dark or fair, is perfectly dry and sticks up like a wire brush. An over-zealous barber wandered about in it for days, and when the search-party found him told an astounding story which A. used as a plot for one of his yarns.

He's impatient and highly strung, and says he's not, and given to sudden violent explosions of mirth (mostly at his own jokes). This is sometimes embarrassing to we fans who meet in Lyons on Thursday evenings, and when he rolls on the floor convulsed in mad mirth we pretend he isn't with our party, and wonder why the manageress allows these queer people in. The bowls are soon empty of lump sugar on our table too, for A. eats pounds of it, ever since he heard that diabetic persons (e.g. H.G. Wells) are intellectually cleverer on the average.

While I was thus ruminating A. suddenly heard the call of the sugar-bowl, and invited me out to supper. So we tucked the Ego in the little bed (it was its turn tonight – A. was sleeping in the wash-bowl) and went to the cafe on the corner, and had some lump-sugar and crumbly sausage rolls. *I had to pay for myself*. I still don't know where Taunton is, but now I suspect it is

somewhere in Scotland.

POSTSCRIPT TO THE ABOVE: While they were still in blissful ignorance about this article A. and his Ego decided to share a flat with me at No. 88 Gray's Inn Road, W.C.1.

Letter to the Editor from William F. Temple

Dear Sore,

I am ½sorry to see th%t amother of my artickles in the b/last issue of NOVEA TERRAE has been spoilt by earless typing. How can a writer put hisn work in-to his heart wgen foonstant mifprintf mikr it appear ridiculousy? Please try to d@ butter in future.

William F. Simple

(EDDITOR'S NOTE: Sorry, Mr. Temple. Garet care has been takken to ilimin illumina cut oyt such erryrs in this 5/8issue. Mena#hile we would say xxxxxx and xxxxxx and sickerealy wish xxxxxx to you.)

– *Novae Terrae* #24 (June 1938)

4. Maurice K. Hanson

If at any SFA meeting where Eric Williams is declaiming speeches from *Things to Come*, Ken Chapman and Ted Carnell are whispering rude jokes to each other and sniggering, A.C. Clarke is having hysterics on the floor, and W.F. Temple is psycho-analyzing himself at the top of his voice, you notice a quiet and silent figure in the corner wearing a detached far-away expression, that will be Maurice K. Hanson. A reserved bloke, with a deep and thoughtful intellect. Yet he's got a keen sense of humour – I know because he laughs at my jokes sometimes.

His favourite book is Stapledon's *Odd John*, and that's because he was an infant prodigy himself. He amused himself in his cradle by working out the quotient of the curve of the hood above his head, and his first words were not the conventional "Da-da" but "Hail, paternal progenitor!" When I interviewed him in his "den", a bed-sitting room in Bernard St., W.C.1. (which he shares with a school-friend from his home-town, Leicester), I was cunningly palming the *New Oxford Dictionary* so as not to be at a loss. But, as usual, he said very little.

I looked at his book-shelves first. The top one was just his current reading. It held all the recent science-fiction mags and seven books. It shows you the mental grasp of the fellow – he was reading them all at once. Among them were De Quincey's *Opium Eater*, More's *Utopia* and Wells, Haldane and Pascal. He had No. 3 of *Amazing Stories* in the cupboard, but most of his collection is in Leicester. He has stacks of the Big Three there, but not one complete set. He's thirty copies short in all.

It was a warm and close evening, and the hand of Maurice's clock thermometer pointed to 70. The landlady came in and said "It's a warm evening isn't it?" We agreed. And then M.K. dug out his files. Gosh! you never saw such a conglomeration of indexes! He files everything, even his nails. (Yes, I'm aware the jest is superannuated.) No wonder he has been to see "The Index Play" so many times. (That's new). There were files (abandoned) of every stf story he'd read until recently, of books he'd read, music he'd heard, plays and films he'd seen, and jokes Ken Chapman had told him (some marked with a "?"). There were files of F.P.S.I. literature, of John Bull X-words, of articles cut from *The New Statesman* and lots of other

things I can't decipher from the notes I took at the time. (It was a warm evening.)

More interesting was a thick pile of little cardboard folders, each neatly labelled with its contents: "Art", "Beauty", "Science", "Reflection", "Quintessences", "Music", "Countryside" and what have you. Each contained sheets of paper with cuttings and photos from mags. and papers pasted on them, illustrating the classification of the label, often quirkishly. Like the *Lilliput* magazine. This is Maurice's odd way of filing his opinions and impressions.

I examined one labelled "Humour" and found several "Beachcomber" articles that I thought unfunny, and some letters chosen for their unconscious humour. Maurice had received them in all seriousness from correspondents whose names I dare not reveal. (But forward me 6d. in stamps and I'll send you a list.) Strangely enough, I could discover no humorous articles of mine in this file – only a serious one which had evidently got into the wrong file by mistake. Perhaps it had strayed from the next one which was labelled "The Great". There was just one letter in that, from Olaf Stapledon in his own writing.

Another file was labelled "Why Socialism?" and showed a big private mansion surrounded by thousands of acres of parkland ("Trespassers will be Prosecuted") contrasted with a picture of one of the worst slums. This was illustrated in actuality before us, for Bernard St. is a street of prosperous houses and hotels, yet from the open window of No. 25 I could see a street of slums opposite filled with shrieking, dirty children.

It was evident that Maurice had deep feelings about these things, and I had to admire the way he kept them under control. Despite his sensitiveness he was always quiet and reserved, with a slow, deliberate speech, and an imperturbable air that an earthquake would not unsettle. Really a self-controlled gentleman. Just then he dropped a packet of photos on the floor, and cried in a loud and terrible voice: BLAST! The windows rattled, the landlady came in again and remarked that it was a warm evening, and we said yes.

One of the photos was taken at the first S.F.A. Convention on a wet Sunday afternoon in Leeds, and showed Eric Frank Russell towering over a group of "kids".

But of course Maurice is most known as the Editor of *Novae Terrae*, and this room was where he edited. The typewriter held a half-cut stencil, Turner

and Dobby covers were lying about, there was a pile of MSS. in the raw, and the W.P.B. looked suspiciously full. *N.T.* is one of the most popular and widely read of the fan mags., and yet, you know, I managed to dig out of Maurice the reluctant confession that he was tired of editing it.

With my vast knowledge of psychology, I pounced on the reason like lightning. It was *lack of response*. For no one (with the exception of D. R. Smith and one or two other stalwarts) bothers to give their opinions of the issues. The issues of *Novae Terrae* sent out might just as well be blank sheets of paper (some of them *are* almost blank sometimes anyway) for all the response received.

Well, to return. We put our feet up on the absent friend's bed, and I told Maurice my ideas on philosophy and what makes a stf fan tick.

"It's a cardinal point –" began Maurice.

I told him my life story.

"It gives one food for thought –" tried Maurice again.

I told him my future life story.

He said "Um."

So you see, I could not get a word out the deep and taciturn fellow. As we came down the stairs we met the landlady and she said: "My! isn't it a warm evening?" We said we hadn't noticed it.

– *Novae Terrae* #25 (August 1938)

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Editor's Note: Soon after this, Hanson joined Clarke and Temple as a resident of the 88 Gray's Inn Road flat, and as of the next issue that was the editorial address for *Novae Terrae*.

5. Ken Chapman

I have always thought Ken Chapman one of the only two real gentlemen in the SFA. (The other is too modest to reveal his name, but his initials are W.F.T.) He is courteous, generous, thoughtful, and considerate for other people's feelings. There is another such person not in the SFA: that is John Beynon Harris. And there is a person in the SFA of exactly the opposite type: that is Ego Clarke. But I digress. [You also lie. – A.C.C., Assistant Stencil Cutter.]

Ken is, of course, Executive Secretary of the SFA, and he lives in an upper flat in a smallish house in South Norwood. I went there one Sunday recently for tea and anything that went with it – intentionally or not. (Since this series started, my sleight-of-hand has improved wonderfully. I think nothing now of palming the *Encyclopedia Britannica* and having the lines of my hands read at the same time.)

Ken had promised to meet my party at the station. But we met him instead, outside his front door. He had emerged with suspicious suddenness, like a cork popping from a bottle. He has just got spliced, you know, and his wife Joan is strong of mind and arm.... But perhaps he was just eager to welcome us. Certainly Joan displayed no black eyes. (I told you Ken was a gentleman.) After tea he showed me his den. It was a square room with a big new office desk under the only window, a tall, glass-doored bookcase on the left, rows of bookshelves in the niche beside the window, and a large bureau in another corner – Joan's corner, where she pursues her hobby of tracing and drawing out royal family trees (the plan of Henry VIII's offspring looked like a complete list of the people who didn't win the Irish Sweep.)

I took stock of the shelves by the window. "Mebbe you've got something there," I admitted, surveying a complete bound set of *Astounding*, anelluva lot of *Amazing* (but he was 10 short), anelluva lot of *Wonder* (but he was 7 short), a stretch of *Quarterlies*, and *Weird Tales* complete from Dec. '34. He told me his favourite story in that lot was "The Secret Kingdom" a 3-part serial in *Amazing* in the last months of 1929, by A.S. & O.A. Kline. For the first time my eyes beheld the almost legendary *Amazing* Vol.1 No.1 – it had stories by Wells, Verne, Poe, and G.A. England. There were some *Weirds* of 1925 vintage, and a whole pile of *The Argosy* – one of them, I

remember, was running Merritt's "Snake Mother" and another Garret Smith's famous "Finger of Doom". Other things I recall are a complete set, Nos.1 to 15, of those separate booklets Gernsback published, the "Science-Fiction Series"; both the two issues of *Miracle Tales*; an interesting proof copy of *Thrilling Wonder*; and a complete set of *Scoops* (but who hasn't got that – except me?)

I turned my attention to the books piled on the mantel-shelf. He had most of the *Century* series of creepy 'orrors, some Lord Dunsanys, a mysterious s-f novel called *A King of Mars* by Avis Hekking (according to the fly-leaf it had once belonged to an even more mysterious gent named Foggy Finn), and that inevitable pair *Station X* and *Lo!* Whilst he thought I wasn't looking, Ken hastily snatched up a book he evidently hadn't meant to leave about, and thrusting it under his coat stole silently from the room. But my eagle eye had noticed it. It was a *Flash Gordon!* I continued my investigations, and found a number of books on anthropology and golf. (These are two of Ken's hobbies, and he often combines them by digging for bones with his driver on the local golf course.)

Then I noticed a book placed reverently on the top of a pile of other books. It was bound in limp black leather, and had red-edged leaves. "A Bible. Well, I never," I murmured, picking it up. It was, and it wasn't, if you get me. It was what might be termed the "Bible of Science-Fiction" – the famous Memorial Volume of Stanley Weinbaum's works, *Dawn of Flame*. I opened it, and there was the title-story, a virgin, unread Weinbaum! I looked around with narrowed eyes. I was alone in the room. Ken hadn't returned yet. With an adept movement (learned from Harold Chibbett, London Branch's amateur magician and spook-hunter), I palmed the volume. Instantly there was a loud, indignant cry. Ken's voice.

"Bill, you thieving squirg! Come here, you —!!" *

I realised that I'd been watched; perhaps Ken had a peephole in the wall or a hidden television camera trained on me. So I put *Dawn of Flame* back in its place quite casually, as if I'd only been practising with it, and assuming a look of angelic innocence, strolled out and into the next room, from which the voice had come. It was the bedroom. With a bit of a shock I saw that it was empty. Then suddenly a lot of scuffling and muffled swearing began under the bed, a portion of Ken's anatomy appeared briefly on the far side, then vanished down under again. Abruptly the counterpane on the near side lifted up, and a tough barrel-chested kitten came marching out. It had one of

Ken's golfballs in its mouth. It halted and looked fiercely at me, as if it suspected I might start something. I tried to look as little like a golfer as possible. The kitten sniffed, and with eyes full of disdain and mouth full of ball, high-stepped past me and down the stairs. Ken's flushed face emerged from under the bed.

"Come back, Bill, you nasty thing!" he yelled. (Well, something like it.)

So it was Bill-the-kitten he'd been bawling at. What an unlucky mistake! And now I had lost my chance for good, for Ken came back with me into the den. I was too upset now, and even looked at his sexy *Marvel Tales* with lack-lustre eyes. I stepped over to the desk, using one of Ken's tees as a stepping-stone en route. He started swearing at that kitten again. I looked out of the window down into the street of little suburban villas; it was empty and quiet on this sultry Sunday afternoon, and another similar street started across the way and ran up to the local football ground, where Ken and Joan go regularly to cheer their favourite team. I thought of all the letters from all over the world that found their way here to this secluded backwater, from such far and wild places as Oshkosh, Minn., and Dishwash, Soho, and Opskotch, Giggleswick, with Ken sitting here like a spider (a tubby spider) in the centre of a quivering web of s-f communications.

For Ken takes his job seriously, and does a vast amount of work for the Association, keeping in touch with all corners of it, always planning things to keep the natives amused. Let me give you a sketch of this master-mind. Tall and well-built, with a horror of putting on weight, somewhat pale, but dark-haired and handsome, (I had promised Joan not to let the local barmaid get her hooks into him, and had a worrying time when we called in for a pint.) He has his own opinions about things, but doesn't air them unduly, and is quietly spoken. Although he can be very interested in such a superficial thing as football, his interests include much more profound subjects, and he finds it fascinating to delve among the origins of man. He has a fund of dubious stories that almost rivals Eric Frank Russell's collection, and yet, as far as I could judge, his idea of an ideal man is a clean-living, clean-spoken, clean-limbed sportsman, a pukka sahib full of wide-open spaces and things. I'm a few marks short there.

Well, after we'd had a game of billiards, and I had made a break of two cues and one vase, the time came for farewells. Ken and Joan shook me by the hand, and Bill-the-kitten sat up and spat in my eye, and off I went with my herd, *Dawn of Flame-less*, but quite content with a high-temperature

Weird Tales tucked in my fob-pocket. Well, anyway, the cover of it. Ken wouldn't miss a little thing like that.

* NOTE:— Although the deleted matter is unprintable in a respectable journal like N.T., the writer vouches that it was no more than ordinary, everyday golfing language, and not of a harmful nature.

NOTE. The next, and last, (cheers!) in this series will be WALTER H. GILLINGS.

— *Novae Terrae* #26 (September 1938)

6. Walter H. Gillings

15, Shere Rd., Ilford, is an address familiar to most SFA members. Those who have sent MSS there and had them returned will curse the inmate. Those who received *Scientifiction* from there will bless his name. And those who have read the last *Tales of Wonder* will probably do both.

I remember the tea-party I had there with hero-villain Wally Gillings. Ego Clarke was twinkling his eyes at Mrs Gillings across the bloater paste, and Wally was using ARP methods on the flies that had chosen his noble ears to buzz around. He brought down about one in ten. I was absorbing fancy cakes at a great rate, and Wally's son, little Ronnie ("Sunnyface") Gillings, was regarding me with admiration (I hope). Said Wally, knocking a blue-bottle into a tailspin:

"You'd be interested to hear the history of the struggle I had to bring out a British s-f mag. It all began ..."

I knew how it all began. In fact, I knew every word of the Epic Struggle by heart, for Wally is worse than the Ancient Mariner on this subject. But I listened politely, because my golden rule is: "Always keep an Editor in good humour – it pays." Suddenly, when Wally was going all purple and choky about the firm of Newnes, I noticed that Ego was going too far with Madge Gillings – holding her hand, in fact. I was dubious about bringing this Casanova along in the first place, and now I saw I'd made a bad mistake. Here was me trying to keep on good terms with an Editor, while my flat-mate was carrying on an intrigue with his wife. Thankfully, at this moment Wally collapsed on the floor in a fit, foaming and drooling, and crying one mysterious word over and over again:

"Sprigg! Sprigg!"

The others ignored him. Madge said he often went that way. I solemnly warned Ego, then carried Wally tenderly upstairs into his den, and shut the door on the cruel outside world.

While waiting for him to come to, I had a look around me. There was an inviting red curtain by the door, and I whisked it aside. For a moment I stood agape, then reverently went down on my knees. It was the Gillings collection of s-f mags, absolutely, utterly, and thoroughly COMPLETE! Bah to the Chapmans and Williamses! Here was a collection. Not a mag not a page, not

even a “They-Laughed-When-I-Sat-Down-on-the-Zither” Coupon missing. Cautiously I withdrew the *Amazing Annual* of fabulous value and slipped it under my left thumbnail, which I purposely hadn’t cut for a month. Then spread the other mags out a bit to hide the space. (Lessons in finesse by master-criminal, – 2/- per hour. – Advert.) I noted the *Pearson’s* of 1931 with G.K. Malloch’s serial “Winged Terror”, and an early *Chums* containing yarns by Ed Earl Repp and Jack Williamson, and in another bookcase *Once in a New Moon*, illustrated with photos from the very good, but little-known, Fox British s-f film George Griffith’s *Honeymoon in Space*, and Victor Rousseau’s *Apostle of the Cylinder*.

Wally was still aswoon on the floor, muttering deliriously (and backwards) the History of the Struggle. I investigated a tall pile of MSS submitted for *TOW* (pronounced “TOE”). Among them were some stories by Alfred Gordon Bennett which Wally liked tremendously but thought on too high a plane for the main body of the public he is aiming at with *TOW* (though he’s accepted one for the next issue). Also I remember a Dr. Keller MS “The Flying Fool” and a synopsis from that valiant trier Eric Williams, entitled “London Revisited 3037 A.D.” and still damp with its author’s tears.

There were some very hefty press-cutting albums. I looked through one. Wally has been a reporter on *The Ilford Recorder* for years, and pasted in here were hundreds of his early “stories” – he doesn’t bother to keep them now. There were reports of his old Ilford Literary Circle, and investigations by “Gillo” (as he called himself) into spiritualism. But mainly they were police-court cases, and one was smitten by such head-lines as: “HIT HIM WITH A CURLING-IRON, Husband’s Allegation.” Or “STOOD ON HIS HEAD IN GUTTER. Ilford Man Drunk and Disorderly.”

Unfortunately, I dropped this weighty tome on Wally’s Adam’s apple just as he struggled through the Struggle (sideways) for the tenth time. He sat up with a gulp. At that moment a series of loud smacks sounded from down the stairway. Realising what Ego and Madge were up to, I spoke hurriedly and loudly to drown the noise.

“What’s your favourite s-f story?” I asked.

“Stribling’s ‘The Green Splotches’,” gasped Wally, looking as if he had an attack of them himself. “*Amazing*, 1926.”

He indicated the complete collection.

“I’m reading right through that lot from the start, not missing a single story,” he went on. “I’ve reached the middle of 1930 now.”

“Don’t you ever get tired of s-f and nothing else?” I asked.

“Never!” he answered emphatically.

(I found that hard to understand. Personally, I have long periods of surfeit when words like “ray-gun” and “space-ship” get just too sickeningly familiar.)

“What’s your best bargain?” I asked.

He showed me a paper-covered French edition of Wells’ *War of the Worlds* (*La Guerre des Mondes*). The illustrations made it unique. By an artist named Dudouyt, they showed graphic scenes from the novel in a peculiar sweeping style – they seemed to be all curves, no straight lines at all. But the bizarre atmosphere he had achieved was remarkable. I particularly remember one showing the Wells hero tearing madly down a dusky country lane in his dog-cart right under the great whirling feet of a Martian fighting machine. It had cost 6d. (The book.)

Smack! Smack! Those two downstairs again! Wally was busily unearthing new treasures, so I stole out on to the landing. Ego and Madge were down in the hall. I gave Ego a cold stare. He returned it, I returned it, he returned it, and went off with Madge. I was left stuck with the cold stare. I re-entered the den quietly, carrying the cold stare, not knowing quite what to do with it. However, I dropped it in the waste paper bin when Willy wasn’t looking. It had got a bit threadbare with all that handling, anyway.

I felt extremely sympathetic towards Wally now that he was on the wrong corner of an Eternal triangle, and scribbled a eulogy to cheer him up: “Why I Like Wally Gillings” by W.F.T. (1) His air of frankness, and his simple, direct statements. (2) His leonine head, and steady frank eyes, and steady frank voice, and – steady, Frank! (3) His persevering energy in the cause of s-f, despite endless obstacles, including my own discouraging opinions. (The critics of his reprint policy would withdraw many of their remarks could they realise Wally’s straitened and restricted circumstances, the difficulty of getting reprints at all, and the amount of work he does rewriting those he does get.) I showed him this and he was touchingly grateful.

“I’ll tell you a secret in return” he whispered. “The author Thomas Sheridan – who wrote ‘The Midget from Mars’ in *TOW* No. 3, was really me!”

Wait a minute, you eager cynics. Wally has written quite a lot of stories himself, but he’s never considered them fit to print. When *TOW* No. 3 had

been delivered for press, Wally got a wire from the publishers saying they were short of so many words, send something at once. Now Wally had nothing on hand of that length that was suitable, and no time to get anything, except this little story of his written some time ago. So he sent it just for a fill-up.

Seeing that I'd got an Editor feeling warm-hearted to me, I looked eagerly around for more compliments to bestow. There were all the original cover paintings of *TOW* hanging on the wall. I scanned them. Five of them.

"Ah, I see you've got the cover for No. 5 done already," I said. "That brown monochrome is fine after the garishness of the others. What a nasty looking creature in the foreground! Mean, vulpine little face, and pop-eyes! The artist's got that well. Even better than the green horrors on No. 3. Believe me, Wally, that's the best cover yet!"

There was a deadly silence. Then:

"*That*," said Wally, giving me a cold stare, "is a photo of myself, aged 5, in a sailor's suit."

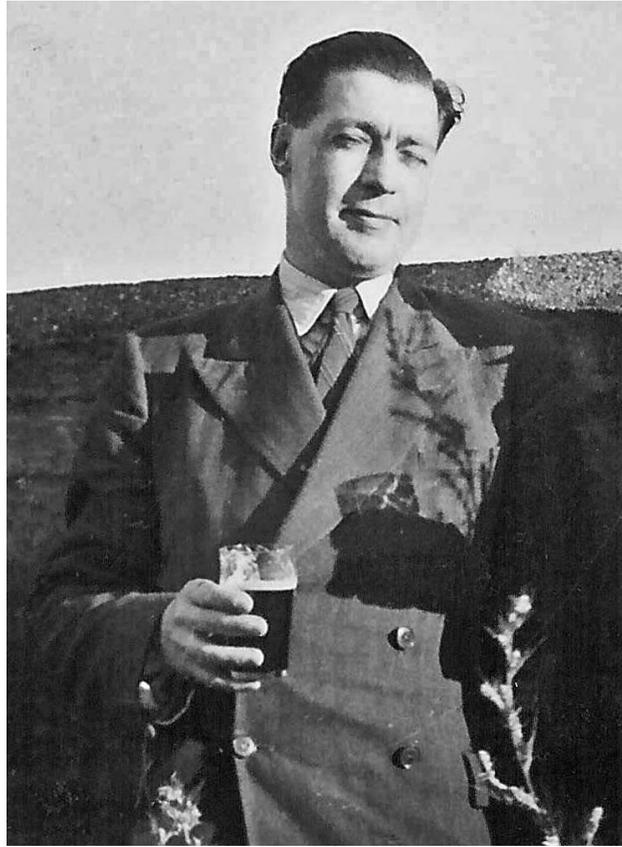
I took the cold stare and crept out.

– *Novae Terrae* #27 (November 1938)

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Editor's Note: Though Bill intended this to be the final entry in this series there was a surprise seventh, written by Arthur C. Clarke about Bill. It has not been included here but is available elsewhere, seeing print most recently in *Arthur C. Clarke: A Life Remembered* by Fred Clarke and published in conjunction with the BIS in 2013.

The Days of the Flat



*Bill Temple, 1950
Photo from the album of Anne and Joe
Patrizio*

Editor's Note: Except for the final one, all the pieces in this section were written by Bill during the eighteen months he lived at the Flat (as were the last two of the previous section). As for the Flat itself, that dwelling consisted of four rooms spread over two floors. The upper floor (or "attic" as Arthur C. Clarke referred to it) contained a small bedroom where Arthur slept, the kitchen and dining area, and a bathroom from whose window you could just about see the dome of St. Paul's Cathedral. The sitting room, where Bill slept, took up the floor below. One wall was devoted to bookshelves, another to a huge photo of the Moon, and furniture was sparse.

Nevertheless, in *Novae Terrae* #25 (August 1938) the pair made the following ...

Important Announcement

We have pleasure in announcing that Messrs. Clarke and Temple are throwing open their “den” in their flat for use as a London clubroom for all SFA members each Thursday evening from 6 p.m. onwards. The address is No.88, Gray’s Inn Road, W.C.1. (The entrance is a few yards below the junction of Gray’s Inn Rd. and Theobald’s Rd., towards Holborn. Look for the sign over the door, “FOOT CLINIC.”) This arrangement starts Thurs. Aug. 18th. It is hoped to transfer the library to the den shortly. No business will be transacted at these meetings: they are informal, and for fostering acquaintance between members. Please bring your own sandwiches, chocolate, booze, etc., if you wish to feed on the premises. All members who can get to these weekly meetings are genuinely welcome.

There was, however, one thing about their new home that always puzzled Clarke. As he later wrote in *Astounding Days* (Gollancz, 1989):

“Why everyone called it ‘the Flat’ I don’t know: it extended vertically over several floors, and getting around required considerable expenditure of energy. The only other time in my career when I lived in comparable circumstances was when I resided in a 100-foot-high lighthouse six miles off the south coast of Ceylon ...”

1. The British Fan in His Supernatural Haunt

The Editor has asked me to write a fictional account of a ghost hunt with Harold Chibbett, SFA's spook-tamer, and Secretary of "The Probe". But there is no need for it to be fictional. I once did ghost hunt with Harold. This happened some time ago, and I rely upon an unreliable memory. But I seem to remember it went something like this:—

Harold had asked Arthur and I to tea. We went. We found that Harold's house in Bowes Park stood facing a railway cutting and away to the right was Alexandra Palace, a grey-brown bulk on the dusky horizon, with its television tower pointing up at the early stars, as if trying to place among them its own red star of warning light, which ... Oi! I forgot I wasn't going to be paid a cent a word for this.

Mrs Chibbett was away. Harold was alone in the house. At tea (which I dimly remember was bloater-and-crab paste, bloater-and-ham paste, bloater paste, and bloater), we were talking about spooks. Harold said:

"This old house is simply thick with them. Such a nuisance. They sometimes get sucked into the vacuum cleaner. And come out all dirty, and wander about the place getting it dusty again."

Arthur said:

"Let's hunt some."

We agreed. Harold turned out all the lights, and we crept up the stairs which were most unusually placed in the centre of the house between two narrow walls. Suddenly we heard soft steps going up the stairs in front of us. We stopped with bated breath. Harold switched on his torch. He was trembling so much that the beam wavered about all over the place, shone into a place the door of which should *really* have been shut, and then all over the ceiling. I grasped his wrist firmly – I remember that part clearly – focused the light on that which was before us.

It was only Arthur's Ego, which had gone on ahead impatiently. I told Arthur to call it back; it was spoiling our sport. Arthur whistled it. It turned, and regarded him with outraged dignity.

"Don't whistle at *me* you sap. What are you hanging back for? *I'm* not

scared. Come on, up here. Show the others that you're a *man*."

It turned and tried to march into the table tennis room. But its chest was so puffed with pride that it got wedged in the doorway. It had to deflate itself to get through. We followed. This room contained only the table-tennis table and nothing else. But ... a strange, fetid odour suddenly spread in it. We choked. I took the torch and shone it around.

Something was materialising under the table. A large gray thing. I caught a glimpse of a scaly skin and great carved talons that contracted and reached again like eager fingers. And then ... the face of a devil! A reptilian head with horns and glowing red *intelligently evil* eyes – horrible – staring at me; and a snarling open mouth with long sharp fangs from which saliva dripped. The Ego gave a shriek and vanished up the chimney. Arthur looked like following it. Harold strangely enough, looked quite composed.

Then a strange thing happened. The long sharp fangs of the beast fell out of its mouth and clattered on the floor. Instantly it was covered with confusion.

"Cursh it!" it said, fumbling about for them with its talons. "Cah't get a shingle upper plate that'll shtay there theshe daysh. All dentishtsh are shwindlersh."

When it had replaced them. Harold introduced us – (to the beast not to the teeth).

"Arthur – Bill – meet the Thing. You must have read about him quite a lot. Especially in *Weird Tales*. He's an old friend of Lovecraft's."

"How do?" we chorused.

"Not bad" said the Thing modestly. "I still get around quite a bit. Mostly in amateur author's stories now, admittedly. But the professionals still use me as a stand-by quite a bit. Nothing like the old Thing for sure-fire horror, they say. But they sometimes put me in supporting roles now – I'm getting on in years for star roles."

"Yes, I remember when I was a boy" I said. "I always wondered how you produced the fetid odour".

"Well, it's a professional secret really. But as Harold is my host for a week, and you're his friends, I'll let you in on it."

It came closer and whispered confidentially to us:

"I *don't* use Lifebuoy Soap!"

At this moment the Ego emerged from the grate, rather sooty. "You've got a dickens of an up-draught up that chimney," it said to Harold

reproachfully. And then, with all the calmness in the world, it challenged the Thing to a game of table-tennis. So we left them play and went into Harold's little den.

But enough of this weak humour, the symptom of the Facetious Fan (see Smith's masterly analysis of Fandom in the last issue of *GG*). Let me tell you what actually happened when we went into the den that night. And please note that this is a truthful record, without any embroidery of exaggeration.

The little room was in a part of the house which jutted out from the rest of it, like a peninsula. There were two desks, a typewriter, a telephone, and a bookcase. On the walls hung, like bats, grey old stencils of the "Probe's" Bulletin. Also a calendar from "Mr and Mrs Dennis Wheatley", for they are acquaintances of Harold. The books were almost all about psychic research, and there was one big red tome (exceedingly rare and valuable) by a modern Master Adept of Black Magic, containing Fearful Secrets and Potent Spells. Unfortunately it was couched in extremely obscure metaphor: deliberately disguised meaning. Harold translated some, and it was pretty grim.

Then Harold began to tell us of his recent experiences, and they made us feel uneasy. Now Harold believes, as we believe, and as any unprejudiced person with any knowledge believes, that undoubtedly supernormal and inexplicable phenomena do occur. Harold can tell the most fantastic inventions when he's feeling humorous, but he wasn't feeling humorous at this particular time, and we knew that he was speaking truth.

After a most bloodcurdling affair of a rectory haunted by the malicious spirit of a murderer, and sounds of digging in the night, and of an eye appearing in the haunted bedroom and frightening the occupant, and of mysterious thumps around the walls, he went on to vampires. He was investigating the case of a woman who said she was being visited by a vampire which came through the window at night. She lived quite near in London. He had actually seen and examined the toothmarks on her neck. She was scared to death, and nearly scared Harold to death.

"But the worst thing about this vampire ..." began Harold and then we nearly jumped out of our skins.

For: *Thump. Thump. Thump.*

Three heavy, deliberate thumps came on the glass window of the den. Right beside us. The window which was on the first floor, and away from the rest of the house. And the house was empty.

For a moment we stood paralysed. I thought it might be a joke of

Harold's. But one glance at him, standing there with open mouth and startled eyes convinced me that it wasn't

Arthur, the scientist investigating, drew back the curtains. No, there was no horrible face peering at us through the glass. He threw up the window and leaned out into the dark night. We looked out after him. Not a thing moving in the little suburban gardens 'far as we could see. Not even a cat.

What had it been? Something had caused those loud, purposeful thumps.

"Well ..." I began, and then something seemed to occur to Harold. He opened the door of the den, and there in the table-tennis room was his brother-in-law, laughing very 'earty. He had a key to the house. He had come in and found the rooms empty downstairs. But, coming upstairs, and looking out of the table-tennis room window, he had seen the light in the den window (this was in the happy days before the black-out). He guessed we were there, talking about psychic research. Grabbing a common or garden broom, he had leant out the window and poked hard with the broom-head on the window, eight or nine feet away.

Harold has never been the same man since. Every time I see him at the "Red Bull" I have to buy him several drinks "for his nerves". I have observed that he keeps his nerves in his stomach.

– *Gargoyle* #3 (December 1940)

2. Celluloid Resurrection

The secret “strong arm” branch of the SFA got busy recently, and coerced the London cinema managers into reviving the stf film classics – “or else.” (We had threatened a boycott by the entire membership of the SFA, and a mass chalking of rude words in foyers. The managers quailed.) So for a fortnight the metropolis gloried in a flood of the old fantasies. As the roving reporter, I went the round of them to record my impressions for *Novae Terrae*.

King Kong was drawing great crowds in the Edgware Road – there were queues as long as those for *Snow White* – and Ego Clarke had to pay top price. Old man Kong was as spritely as ever; a bit too jerky in his first walk on, perhaps, but maybe he was highly strung, like Ego. We liked the monsters, but pointed out to each other superiorly that actually the brontosaurus was not carnivorous and couldn’t walk on land (it broke both rules in the film) and also that the other reptiles were probably voiceless (they kept screaming almost as much as Fay Wray). And we were a bit disappointed at not seeing Poppa Kong land in the street when he tumbled off the Empire State Building. We wanted to see what happened to the people who were in the way.

Bravely I went to see *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* all alone. The opening shots, seen through Dr. Jekyll’s own eyes, remain an original and effective piece of direction, but the rest of the film dates a bit. One scene is unconsciously funny, with Fredric March reclining on his back on the floor being rocked by sweetheart Rose Hobart, declaiming emotional dialogue at the same time. The audience cackled unfeelingly. But Fredric’s simian transformation (whilst he panted like a little dog out of breff) “got” the audience again, and I noticed several women gazing studiously at the floor, afraid to look at the screen.

Oscar Deutsch was on our secret list, and so the big Odeon in Leicester Square had raked up *Things to Come*. But they had cut chunks out of it. Mr. Wells must have been annoyed, but it certainly speeded up the action of the film. The rather boring dualogue in the cellar between John Cabal and Rozana was removed entirely, as was the Boss’s banquet (“Who wants books any more?”) There were other smaller cuts, not quite so discriminating, but my favourite piece of the film, the smashing air raid at the start, was

untampered with. And again I wished there was a gramophone record obtainable of the “Machine Music” accompanying the scenes of the building of the new world.

The other Wells film was revived in that quaint cinema under the railway arches in Villiers Street, the Forum. Mr. Fotheringay, *The Man Who Could Work Miracles*, was working 'em for all he was worth, with the aid of the old “stop camera” business (it could have been done with more care) while the trains rumbling overhead provided thunder which was quite atmospherically effective. But that Wellsian dialogue again! Full of sense, yes, but over-full. Again Wells had tried to bung too many of his ideas into one film at once, and the result was somewhat indigestible. People do not talk or act like that, and few of the characters came even remotely alive. As a Wells fan, I regret that he is sacrificing humanity so completely on the alter of propaganda. (Nicely put, lad, nicely put.)

I saw *Lost Horizon* again at Tussaud's, and came away wondering a few things: Who did the housework in Shangri-La? How did the High Lama come by a Middle-West accent? Did the thousands of pigeons who were constantly fluttering around Shangri-La treat that noble temple in the manner that pigeons treat park benches and the steps of St Paul's? Did Chang ever have to remark to the High Lama: “But they say it's lucky, you know.”? But it's easy to be hypercritical, and most of the highbrow critics had come down like a ton of bricks on Capra for “popularising” it too much. Certainly Edward Everett Horton's familiar brand of comedy made one almost expect Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers to suddenly pop from behind one of the pillars and do a tap-dance along the shining, art-strewn corridors. But I should like to see one of those fastidious critics make a higher-class rendering of the story, without slipping into long patches of boredom.

Frankenstein and *The Invisible Man* on together at the Leicester Square Theatre was a programme which overawed me. I managed to persuade Editor Maurice Hanson to come with me and hold my hand in the more terrifying sequences. But it wasn't really necessary, although they had labelled both films “Horrific.” *Frankenstein*, to me at least, appeared to creak along. The dialogue was as trite as the acting, the Grand Guignol stuff was mechanical, and the ceremony of the hoisting of the corpse out into the thunderstorm for no apparent reason was just ludicrous. (Yet when I saw the film years ago I thought it good.) I think the main trouble this time was that I couldn't believe in the Monster. It was just old friend Karloff gone all rheumatically. (Dear old

Boris, who literally wouldn't hurt a fly in real life, and who tried so hard to be a tough gangster in *Scarface* last week – and failed dismally.)

The Invisible Man was on a much higher plane. The same director, though in better form. I liked Claude Rains's voice, and the menace he infused into it; e.g. the scene where he is about to bump off Dr. Kemp:– “I'm afraid there's going to be a nasty accident in a minute – a very nasty accident.”

The famous unveiling scene caused its usual stir, though this time I watched with a knowing eye (having lately absorbed a lot of the technicalities of camera magic) and saw through it in more ways than one. I deplored certain faults again: the usual caricature of the British policeman (“Hah, wot's all this 'ere?”); the radio announcements (high speed dramatics in the best Radio City manner, but most un-BBC-like); and the American locomotive which the Invisible One wrecked in England – will these Yanks never learn?

Afterwards, Maurice and me wandered about the West End discussing a peculiar similarity shared by the power-drunk Griffin, the neurotic Frankenstein, and the harassed Dr. Jekyll – they all have girl friends who keep wailing about them being absorbed in their experiments (“I haven't seen him for weeks – he looked so ill – I'm so worried” etc.) And all these girls implore their heroes not to meddle in things he didn't oughter – (“There are boundaries we aren't meant to cross” ... etc.) And then these pseudo-scientists, after a dose of monsters, generally repent on their deathbeds, and gasp similar sentiments before rolling up their eyes.

Why this preaching of conservatism in films? In future we demand cinematic scientists who realise that it's their duty to “meddle”. And hearing that *The Lost World* is about to be remade, we are despatching our strong arm branch post-haste to Hollywood to prevent Professor Challenger gasping in the last reel that he shouldn't have meddled with monsters.

– *Novae Terrae* #25 (August 1938)

3. Chingford Chiaroscuro

(a layman's first experimental meeting)

It was Arthur Clarke who persuaded me to attend an Experimental Meeting at Headquarters. Being about as practically minded as a surrealist opium-eater, I'd hitherto shied at being involved with a lot of people who shot expressions like "adiabatic expansion" and "stoichiometric amount" at each other and, moreover, seemed to know what they meant. But Arthur is, of course, the Treasurer, and my sub being overdue I wanted to keep on the right side of him.

But he was on the right side of me on the Tuesday evening when we were walking up Larkswood Road together, en route for the meeting. I was talking brightly about my favorite subject, when suddenly I became aware that I was talking about myself to myself: Arthur had disappeared. Then I caught the glint of his spectacles down a fenced and hedged alley which ran away between the houses on this side of the road. This, apparently, was the Secret Passage to Headquarters. No. 92 is a sort of Pharisee house: "not as other houses." It stands aloof in the centre of a patch of wasteland (or am I libelling Mrs. Smith's garden?). Anyway, we got inside without any process of peculiar knocks or hoarsely whispered passwords, and were greeted by Mr. and Mrs. Smith and something outsize in the way of dogs. We professed our little gift of ham sandwiches (we'd been trying to get rid of that ham for a long time, but the weather had been against us) and it was kindly received, except by the dog, who exited with a hurt expression.

I fell to examining an intriguing but only partly completed model of spaceship altimeter on the table, a heavy disc of aluminium which spun smoothly on its bearings in a framework, and soon other members came trickling in: Messrs. Edwards, Ross, Bein, Day, Bramhill, Cowper-Essex and Janser.

A general discussion began, which ranged from the composition of a new steel which could withstand thermite to the composition of a dog's dinner. Mr. Smith, who knows only too well how these meetings persist in wandering miles from the point, called for order, and the meeting proper began. First on the agenda was the question whether to buy four small

magnets for the altimeter and alter them, or continue a so far unsuccessful search for a suitably large one. It was decided to get the four small ones if their jaws could be widened by cutting.

Mr. Smith had to tactfully redirect the attention of the company from a discussion of the falling birth-rate to Item Two of the agenda: the composition of a very light but efficient battery to heat the space-ship. Here Messrs. Edward and Janser started an argument on such a highly technical plane that I just sat there between them, agape, and the stream of words passed over my head like a beautiful rainbow. I gathered it was something about conductivity values. Arthur Clarke made occasional interjections which might or might not have been to the point, but at any rate showed us that Arthur grasped what was going on – which was what Arthur wanted to show us, anyway. It all ended with Mr. Janser promising to hunt through his books (all 2,000 of them) to find certain tables, and perhaps consult the National Physical Laboratory on this important subject. (Wish I knew *what* subject.)

After this, the talk turned to the firing system of cellular rockets, anti-aircraft and life-saving rockets, Hitler and his Nazi regime, and then split so many ways that I couldn't keep tag of them. Mr. Edwards has a habit of outlining home-made gadgets of a super Heath-Robinson nature at a moment's notice (and often there's real sense in them if you analyse them), and now his fertile mind threw off a little invention for drawing rocket performance curves with the greatest of ease. The heart of this brain-child, a proving stand, was an ink-bag that squirted graphs onto a peculiarly shaped revolving drum.

The company was wallowing in methods of running a bag-wash when the determined Mr. Smith grimly dragged the focus of attention round to Item Three: the COELOSTAT. (Let it always be written in capitals, for the invention deserves the greatest respect. Besides, it shows I can spell it.) It's a neat little trick, all done by mirrors. There are two fixed ones, and two that revolve. The idea of the thing is to give observers in a spinning spaceship a stationary view of their surroundings for navigational purposes. (The spaceship must revolve on its axis throughout the voyage to provide artificial gravity, and also for maintaining a straight course through the atmosphere after the take-off.)

Mr. Edwards started to make a cardboard model of the instrument. He wanted some scissors. Mr. Bein produced them like magic from his pocket. He wanted a needle. The amazing Mr. Bein carried one of those, too. But Mr.

E. wasn't satisfied with the model alone. He wanted to demonstrate the fundamental principles of the thing. He called for mirrors. Here Mr. Bein modestly pretended he was beaten. The place was combed for mirrors. Mrs. Smith produced her powder-compact; Mr. Smith his shaving mirror. People kept wandering in with wall-mirrors and hand-mirrors and great slabs of mirror lifted from dressing tables. The room scintillated.

Mr. Edwards disappeared into the midst of a huge pile of mirrors and was not seen for some time. Only occasional curls of tobacco smoke drifting up showed that somewhere in that mirror maze, life still existed. Presently his beard was observed to emerge from the N.E. corner, and Mr. E. followed it closely, clutching the powder compact. This was to be the viewing mirror. Mr. E. placed it carefully on the piano, and commissioned other people to stand around it, holding mirrors at various angles to represent the framework. Soon the room was full of living statuary, standing in graceful and artistic poses, holding mirrors above their heads.

Mr. E. squinted into his compact and complained that he could see nothing but the ceiling. He twisted it around, and still saw the ceiling. He peered into it upside down and saw – the ceiling. Fatigue began to overtake the living statues. Wobble set in. Here and there a member collapsed with a thud on the carpet, and lay twitching amidst the splinters of his mirror. But kind-hearted Mrs. Smith took over the role of Florence Nightingale, and came among the stricken Interplanetarians bearing a tray of tea and sandwiches. Gratefully I accepted my share of the refreshment and took a hearty mouthful of sandwich before I realised that it was my late ham come back to me. That was the unkindest cut of all.

I have no time to tell of the astonishing contortions of Mr. E. pursuing the mirror image of a pencil through four angles (he juggled simultaneously with a mirror, pencil, protractor, a cardboard model, a long cigarette holder and a cigarette, and his own reflection of all this in the mirror), nor of the serious discussion on bed-bugs, rabies, ice-cream and barnacles that followed. It was decided to construct a working model of the coelostat, and also to get out designs for a proving stand. Then the meeting broke up.

And if anyone believes that this account is in the least exaggerated, let them come and see for themselves any Experimental Tuesday evening (it's the fourth Tuesday in each month) at Number 92. Each and every B.I.S. member is welcome at these meetings: they are intended to interest the members in the practical side and, if possible, to recruit some of them to do

odd jobs. Anyway, that is the plea which is always brought up in their defense.

– *The Bulletin of the British Interplanetary Society* (September 1938)

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Jack Edwards ... was a short, bearded and excitable Welshman – and the nearest thing to a mad scientist I have ever met outside fiction. He was the director of a very small electronics firm which soon afterwards expired thanks to his assistance; but he had an altogether uncanny grasp of the principles of astronautics. He had invented, back in 1938, what is now called inertial guidance – the technique which allows a rocket to know just where it is, and how fast it is going, by continually keeping track of the accelerations acting upon it.

– Arthur C. Clarke, *Astounding Days* (Gollancz, 1989)

4. An Outsider at a Technical Meeting

As I mentioned in a previous article, I have a mind which refuses to grasp even the simplest technicality (I always throw away a fountain pen when it runs out of ink) and I felt quite ill at the thought of reporting a B.I.S. Technical Committee Meeting. However, duty is duty. Diligently, I swotted up some scientific textbooks to be forearmed, but only one phrase stuck in my mind; the Nebular Hypothesis. I thought that sounded good. I made a note of it.

The meeting was at Mr Janser's flat, and when Arthur Clarke and I arrived Messrs Janser, Smith and Ross were already there. Mr. Ross had painted a picture of the Earth as it should look from space, and was persuading the others to look at it from the other side of the room through a telescope – slightly out of focus to get the required hazy effect. I peered through the telescope and had some difficulty in getting anything clear at all. Then suddenly it came right, a lovely, indefinite picture of a globe floating in space. One got the thrill of looking through the observation port of a spaceship, three days out.

“It's fine,” I said, “though I think you've coloured it too red in the centre.”

I removed my optic from the eye-piece, and discovered that in my ignorance I had trained the telescope full on Mr Janser's cherubic countenance. He was standing there looking thoughtful, having just returned from a visit to his cocktail bar in a curtained recess.

Mr Janser is a many-sided genius. He has a bookcase which covers an entire wall, and it is full of books on every avenue of science, from chemistry to psychology, from astronomy to Biology. Hoping that he had not heard my remark I turned and pretended to look for knowledge among his book shelves. I noticed *How to be a Yogi*, *How to Prolong Life* and the *Complete Limerick Book*. I found that I already knew most of the verses in the latter, only with different last lines. A book titled *While Paris Laughed* caught my eye. I yanked at it and lo! a dozen others came with it. They were all just dummy-backs joined together, and they swung away to conceal a hidden

compartment behind.

I looked round furtively. Mr Edwards was just arriving, muffled up to the nose in a red scarf.

“I’b god flu” he was saying, “Cardn’t stob long.”

While the others sympathised, I took a peek into the secret compartment. There were several more books there and I observed *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*, *How to Do Your Own Laundry* and *Memoir of a Little Monkey*. Before I could investigate these intriguing volumes Mr Janser approached and I shut the secret panel hastily and pretended to be absorbed in *A Textbook on Dynamics*.

“This is an interesting one,” said Mr J, arriving, and pointing to *The Meteoric Hypothesis*. I snatched at the opportunity.

“Yes,” I said gravely, “I have always thought the Nebular Hypothesis purely hypothetical”.

“Some do, some don’t,” said Mr J, and vanished into a certain curtained recess.

I wandered back to the main body. They were discussing Weights.

“Does anyone know a shop that sells weights?” asked Clarke.

“I do,” I said brightly. “I usually get Woodbines, but they sell Weights.” They ignored me.

It seemed that the proving stand was now finished and ready for delivery. They wanted to buy a cheap set of weights, up to 50lbs, to use on it (see diagram, Jan. Bulletin). Mr Janser returned, and showed us his home-made set of chemical weights carved from odd sheets of zinc. For no reason whatsoever Mr Smith went on to describe how he had been lecturing on astronomy to Boy Scouts and introducing the B.I.S. space-ship to them.

“Catch ’em young – that’s the way,” he said.

Mr Janser vanished again, then suddenly returned with tea and cakes. The company helped itself and seated itself, and began to discuss the altimeter. Or rather, Mr Edwards began to discuss the altimeter. He had been making it, and described just how. This was a rather elaborate process, carried out with two expressive but empty hands and a patch of empty air. A swift circular sweep in the air meant “a wheel”, a corkscrew wiggle “a spring” and a Nazi salute “about so high”. Once “a long lever” nearly carried a vase off the mantelpiece. All this semaphoring was accompanied by a machine-gun fire commentary by Mr Edwards, somewhat indistinct from his cold (“two spriggs attadged to thad chaid”). I thought, supposing a foreigner

came in now, and Mr Edward's explanation was unintelligible to him – wouldn't he think Mr E's frantic catching of invisible flies rather funny? At this moment, Mr E. stuffed his mouth full of sausage-rolls and his explanation did become unintelligible, and it was funny.

Apparently the altimeter wouldn't behave. Sometimes when it was supposed to indicate the exact height to which it had been lifted, the indicator shot back past zero and pretended the thing was buried in the ground. Mr E. pointed out how embarrassing this would be if it happened at a public demonstration.

"We could always tell them that that proves space is curved," rapped out Clarke smartly, and everyone guffawed except me, who couldn't work out how it proved that.

Someone suggested we scrap the altimeter and use an egg-timer in the space-ship instead. [The Secretary noted that this wasn't as silly as it sounded and added some incomprehensible maths to prove it – ed.]. It would be the regular duty of one of the crew to keep turning it over. I volunteered at once for the post of Egg-Timer Watcher.

"I place my entire knowledge of the Nebular Hypothesis at your disposal," I said with emotion.

They ignored me.

Instead they talked about designing a rocket-aeroplane to be used as a super-fighter. It was to have the ability to put on a sudden spurt of 700 m.p.h. which would carry it out of any awkward corner of a dog-fight before any of the enemy pilots had realised it was gone. One difficulty, Mr Smith said, was that in such a spurt the pilot would overtake his own machine-gun bullets and shoot himself. Clarke said no, they would slide back down their respective barrels.

Messrs. Smith and Edwards went into the wing design of this plane at great length and detail, and the rest of us, after sundry attempts to bring the conversation back to normality, let it go on. It went on. Clarke awoke me at 11 p.m. by chucking my coat at me.

"Home," he said.

"Oh, but regarding that Nebular Hy—" I began.

"The higher the fewer", he interrupted enigmatically, and sent me on ahead to buy the fish and chips for supper.

– *The Bulletin of the British Interplanetary Society* (March 1939)

5. On the British Interplanetary Society

Let us stand back and take a detached view of the B.I.S. What is this miscellaneous group of people from all walks of life, from the hard-headed engineer and qualified architect to the enthusiastic schoolboy, from the City clerk to the sociological philosopher? What do they want?

There are the “technical” people, the mechanics and chemists, who believe in the future of the rocket motor as a means of swift transport. To them it is a new branch of engineering research, and accordingly must be developed as far as possible. So they join to keep in touch with the latest research, to keep track of the knotty problems as they are unravelled.

There are the idealists, the people who believe that one day man will cross outer space to the planets, and they join the B.I.S. to further that end. Whether or not a rocket will be the *Santa Maria* of Space they do not care, so long as a spaceship of some design is produced eventually. Generally their enthusiasm is equalled only by their ignorance of technical matters. They are the half-inarticulate lookers-on, eager to help, yet not quite knowing how, and constantly and unnecessarily fearful of a snub for their technical shortcomings.

But the most to be envied are those who are a combination of both the idealistic practical men, the practical idealists. For they have enough technical knowledge to know that Space can be crossed, and enough idealism to believe it worth while. And it is this group of people who have evolved the space-ship design presented in this Journal.

Space travel is not a dream of the far future, you idealists! And none of the practical problems is insoluble, you technicians! A voyage to the Moon is possible at this moment. If the rest of the B.I.S. had worked as hard as certain members of it have, if but a fraction of the money thrown away on armaments had been devoted to this purpose, the lunar trip would be an historical fact by now. Man would be conquering new worlds instead of destroying his own.

All along, the B.I.S. has been hobbled by lack of finance, by the narrow conservatism of the specialized scientists, by ridicule, by misunderstanding,

by lack of proper workshops and workmen, and largely by lack of time. There are members whose impatience with these obstacles has diverted their enthusiasm to things which give more immediate satisfaction. They have an excuse for life is overcrowded and uncertain today, and people are inclined to gather the rosebuds while they may under the threat of an approaching storm of war.

But Mr. Olaf Stapledon a member of the B.I.S., said of the hero of one of his novels: "He had already begun to feel an obscure impulse to devote himself to ends beyond private gratification."

That instinct to serve some cause which will outlast us is part of the make-up of normal man, and he seeks to satisfy it in various ways, through religion, art, patriotism, or social reform The B.I.S. has chosen exploration, to help in the work of pushing the boundaries of known territory as far as we can, sheer across the universe if possible.

This present civilization may collapse, as several have before it, and as more may after it. But sooner or later man will stand astride worlds, and the part, however small, the B.I.S. plays in achieving that end will have justified its existence.

– *Journal of the British Interplanetary Society* #11 (January 1939)

6. The Flat Truth

Well, the Flat has now been abandoned with eighteen months still to run on the lease of three years. The landlord said we mustn't leave, but there was no choice. So we packed up Maurice's things and sent them to Leicester. Ego divided his up for several fans to mind for him for the duration. I sent mine to Wembley. And then we left No 88, Gray's Inn Road, the London rendezvous for SF fans.

I feel all sentimental about the place because I have endless memories of the fun we had there. I first suggested the idea of getting a flat to Ego Clarke in a Lyons tea-shop, the former rendezvous for the fans. Almost as soon as we were in there began that unending stream of visitors which made the place more like a hotel than anything. About the first was Harold Gottliffe, brought along by Ted Carnell. I was trying to lay a huge roll of linoleum at the time, and had just come to the awful conclusion that it was really laying me. So it was a scared dishevelled object whom Gottliffe met.

Another early visitor was Maurice Hanson, who lived in a nearby bd.-sttg.-rm. I suggested he come and live with us. He did. I remember the afternoon he came to stay carrying two armfuls of typewriter down Gray's Inn Road. The ribbon spool had dropped off his machine and was clanking gaily along behind 30 feet of ribbon. A couple of cats were chasing it. When he crossed the tram-lines a train came along and ran over his ribbon. He was almost dragged to a horrible death.

But there is no space for a complete history. So here, though they may be of little interest to others, are a few things pulled at random out of my own ragbag of a memory:—

The long long nights writing, typing, duplicating *Novae Terrae* and the BIS Bulletin. Ego versus the Duplicator, First Round. Maurice drying up and dropping a cup over the banisters to watch it fall with the detached interest of a bomber pilot. Ego's expression of unbearable suffering when I put Judy Garland on the gramophone. "Gay" Tooze, the "Leopard Man", (who knew even more about black magic than Harold Chibbett, who had travelled all over the globe, seen a stake thrust through the heart of a suspected vampire in Warsaw, seen a vision of Isis in Egypt, was a gang chief in Cairo, been condemned to death by the Leopard Men of Africa, and experimented in

fostering life in test-tubes, to mention a few things) turning up at a fan supper with his wife Jo and a tremendous purple trifle of many layers and his own concoction – Harry Kay is still trying to rediscover the formula from which it was made.

A fish and chip supper with John Beynon Harris, followed by a discussion far into the night on writing, politics, science and what-have-you. How I came in after a pub-crawl one night and leant on the door, and Ego's puritan nostrils lifting as he said witheringly:

“You disgusting spectacle!”

A Peace Pledge Union friend of Mike Rosenblum's, named Von Nohlssen arriving one night, with a fascinating German-Scotch accent and only two conversational topics – Transport and Girls. Mike himself coming another night surveying our twenty or more shelves of books and magazines and commenting that he was disappointed at seeing such a scanty collection. Bert Lewis coming and indicating the same thing. Former co-editor of *Novae Terrae*, Denny Jacques, paying us a call on the stroke of midnight with a Marxist girl-friend, and talking about the coming war till about 2 am., when they left for Euston and Leicester. Doug Mayer coming out of the blue one day and talking films.

Countless BIS meetings, with “genius” Edwards and R.A. Smith inventing the most startling inventions and Arthur Janser telling us tales of old Vienna and of queer cranks he was always meeting. A crowded SFA meeting on a hot Sunday afternoon, with Frank Arnold in the chair, Ken Chapman in another chair asleep, Eric Hopkins squashed in the middle of six people on the divan, Ted Carnell shouting “Quiet!”, a little Russian girl handing out Russian cigarettes. Author D.J. Foster giving a talk on “Sf and Education” and the arrival of Sid Birchby, hot and dusty in hiking kit, and how he had to sit on the floor. Ego and I trying to make Johnny Burke *like* symphony, and how he wriggled. Dave McIlwain after the Convention, wandering around in the kitchen trying to find something to eat (and finding it – ed). We three and Eric Williams arriving in a taxi at 4am from a Leeds fan meeting, and Eric trying to fit his 6ft. length into a very small bed-chair with one cushion missing.

Ego and I being interviewed by a Nazi-journalist, who was certainly a spy, just before the war, and how the tall fellow with the quiet voice and the restless hazel eyes looked through our cuttings book ... and appeared very *uninterested* in those dealing with war rockets. The *Evening Standard*

columnist and film critic, Ian Coster, interviewing us, and how I told him more about films than he ever knew. The BBC commentator and film critic, F. Buckley Hargreaves interviewing us, and how he tried to tell me more about films than I ever knew. A *News Chronicle* reporter calling to interview me when I was in my bath. How I once let that same bath overflow, caused a cataract down the stairs, and swamped the Foot Clinic beneath us. How one night, Ted Carnell, merry from the “Red Bull”, pushed a chair so that it bumped steadily by itself all down those same stairs with a tremendous clatter. How Professor Low came one night and had to stop and rest halfway up those same stairs because his heart was overtaxed.

How a fan party returning from the “Red Bull” found they were barricaded out of the kitchen by the non-alcoholics, led by Ego. And how they stormed the barricade (a table on its side across the doorway) led by Ted Carnell and his umbrella. The countless games of table tennis played by Ego and I on that same 5-ft table, and how we thought we were good, and how George Medhurst came and knocked us both to hell. The night Harry Kay brought his dissection instruments along, and how he was laid out on that same table himself, struggling violently, for dissection – he escaped with the loss of an offside kidney. How we sent Ego out for the fish and chips and fixed a tea-tray booby trap over the door for his return, how it missed his head by a hair’s breadth and fell with a terrific crash, and Ego pretended he hadn’t even noticed it.

The supper-time when Maurice announced that he had a great idea for a sf story, but refused to divulge it. How Ego and I, bitten by curiosity, tried to force him to do so. How I sat by his bedside hour after hour playing gramophone records that he didn’t like, keeping him awake and in agony until at 2.a.m, bleary-eyed, he gave in and agreed on a compromise. How he told me part of the idea from which I “could deduce the rest.” And how I crawled to bed and lay awake all night trying to deduce the rest, and didn’t, and was a wreck in the morning.

Wally Gillings telling us of *Tales of Wonder*, wife Madge telling us of Wally. Maurice watering his window-box Myself dropping a teapot full of tea. Maurice dropping everything droppable. Myself dropping Maurice’s porridge dish of hideous design, and the great joy thereat. The fight for the bathroom every morning. Ego in the same bathroom with his array of syringes, bottles, and “preparations” – he is a hypochondriac. The coming to stay of my wife, Joan, and the subsequent appearance of new chintz curtains,

vases of flowers, original water-colours on the walls and unoriginal needles in chairs.

But I could go on for hours. My one regret is that I omitted to keep a journal during that period. However, when the war has ended, and if I am not in my dotage or Valhalla, I plan to write a novel based on that crowded year and a half on *Three Men in a Flat* lines. It ought to be fun to write, but probably not as much fun as it was to live it.

– *Gargoyle* #2 (April 1940)

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ARTHUR CLARKE: No.2 is definitely several points above No.1. Bill's article, of course, topped the issue. However, I must take up the cudgel in my defence on a couple of points.

1) I like Judy Garland, especially after seeing the *Wizard of Oz*. WHICH DON'T MISS!!!!

2) I didn't say "You disgusting spectacle!" What I did say was that next time I'd lock him out, or push him in the bath, or both.

3) After the first half dozen games Medhurst never beat me again at table-tennis. The only person in the SFA who can consistently beat me is Harold Chibbett, and the last time we clashed I managed to get away with it.

4) Doesn't the tale of the tray prove that I'm *not* highly strung after all?

5) I once took a catarrh course for a couple of months, which involved the use of two bottles and a nasal douche of indecent design. That can hardly be called hypochondriac!!

– *Forerunner* (October 1940)

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Editor's Note: Bill did in fact eventually write his *Three Men in a Flat* novel; originally titled *Bachelor Flat*, a later version of it was published as *88 Gray's Inn Road* in 2000 as part of an eponymous collection by the Sansato Press. Earlier versions of parts of it appeared in *Slant* #7 (1952, ed. Walt Willis & James White) and *Hyphens* #10, #15, #18 (1954/5/7, ed. Walt Willis & Chuck Harris). These have not been included here as they are in most cases no more than fictionalised reworkings of material included elsewhere in this volume.

The War Years



*Bill Temple in Rome, 1945
Photo from the album of Anne and Joe
Patrizio*

1. Despatches

Editor's Note: Being a contemporary chronicle of Bill's journey through the war, as reported at the time in Forrest J Ackerman's *VOM (Voice of the Imagi-Nation)* and in J. Michael Rosenblum's *FWD (Futurian War Digest, also nicknamed Fido)*, the fanzine in whose pages Britain's fans kept in touch during those dark days.

FWD #1 (October 1940)

WILLIAM F. TEMPLE CALLED UP – Fan and author Will Temple received his papers to report at Colchester early last month. He is in the Signals. Another good fan gone; still we wish him the very best of luck in his new environment, and a safe return in happier days.

FWD #3 (December 1940)

Gunner William F. Temple has now settled down in an obsolete printing works (it is just a lot of holes held together by a lot of bricks) at Whalley, Lancs; and has already paid a visit to Bert Lewis 10 miles away at Preston.

FWD #4 (January 1941)

Another 'blitz' victim is William F. Temple, whose Wembley home* has been damaged by 'enemy action'. Luckily William himself, who has been called up for military service, was then stationed at Whalley, Lancs with an RA Signal Training Regiment whilst Mrs. Temple and the already-famous Anne are evacuated to Cornwall.

* Temple's Wembley address was published as part of the BFS membership list in *British Fantasy Society Bulletin* #5, 14 December 1942, mailed with *FWD* #25 in January 1943: "c/o Mrs Joan Temple, 7 Elm Road, Wembley, Middlesex".
[Ed.]

FWD #7 (April 1941)

A word from Bill Temple: “Joan and Ann are doing fine. The latter now reads, writes, sings and drinks beer. I can’t think what’s been holding her back.” ’Tis truly said that the sins of the fathers ...

FWD #10 (July 1941)

William Frederick (Woof) Temple, after spending a leave with wife and family in Cornwall, is now in a Field Regt in Monmouth: “not doing at all badly; Mostly Scots, Hoots, What’s ma haggis”.

FWD #11 (August 1941)

A salvage squad led by B.I.S. treasurer Ego (Arthur Clarke), recently retrieved valuable (& probably incriminating) B.I.S. documents from their resting place on the floor of Bill Temple’s Wembley house, which was slightly damaged by air-raids last Autumn. The documents, which were found mixed up with fallen ceiling, had been there ever since.

VOM #17 (August 1941)

Having written you one letter which was returned by the Censor because it gave away my military address, I’ve been somewhat chary of venturing on another, but here goes and I hope this one gets through.

I am now in —— in the ——, and expect to soon be in a ——. Today we had —— for dinner. The weather has been ——. My opinion of army life is that it is —— awful.

– Bill Temple (4th July 1941)

FWD #14 (November 1941)

Sid Birchby:

“Million-to-one coincidence on my recent leave – Sitting by solitary inn in heart of Welsh mountains, where by chance I had arranged to meet a pal who was cycling to join me for the week, am I.

“Here by the pub pulls up an army lorry, also by chance, out on the days work. Crew starts sending messages on portable radio, and I talk to a

corporal. I mention how I know someone who used to be stationed in Wales, but I've lost track of him. He used to be in Monmouth – I reminisced. Good old Bill, we used to have grand times in London. 'Luvaduk,' says the corporal, 'are you Sid Birchby? Bill Temple's my room-mate and we're stationed not ten miles away!'

"And so it was, and that evening I visited the old maestro himself. He was only stationed there for the week that I happened to be there, which increases coincidence 100-fold. I gave him first hand report of SFA reunion the week before, which he had hoped to attend until leave was cancelled.

"He in turn wished all SF fans the compliments of the season and says (as usual) that army life browns him off. Can understand it too, after experiencing rigours of Welsh climate myself."

FWD #18 (March 1942)

Will Temple says:

"Dunno whether I mentioned it before, but I'm at Larkhill on Salisbury Plain, a couple of miles from Stonehenge. Ego (A.C. Clarke) is round about 20 miles away, I judge, at an RAF camp at Yatesbury. But the almost impassable Wasteland of the vast artillery ranges lies between us, & so far we haven't been able to bridge it.

"Had a couple of nice leaves with Joan and Anne at Wembley comparatively recently. Eric Frank Russell, George Medhurst, Arthur Williams, Joyce Fairbairn & James Rathbone came to tea which made it even nicer.

"Noticed the publicity the B.I.S. rocket ship has had recently, in Cassandra's column in the *Daily Mirror*, in the *London Evening Standard*, & of course in *Flight*? Good old Smithy! [R.A. Smith of the BIS, Ed.] He's doing this from his hospital bed, you know, where he's been stuck with a serious illness."

– Bill

FWD #24 (November 1942)

From old faithful Sidney L. Birchby:

"Bill Temple, home on embarkation leave recently, had just bought H.G.

Wells' new book, *The Conquest of Time*, described as a restatement of *First and Last Things*. In his opinion and mine, it is not one of his best and about as lucid as a blackout.

“A convivial evening was given at Frank Arnold's flat. Frank and Joan Temple discussed women's dresses, Bill and others sniggered over *Esquire* and tried to force the steel cabinet in which Frank keeps his 'Gay Books', while Harry Chibbett held forth upon the latest supernatural mystery; the Gremlins. – 'mysterious hobgoblins who pervade the upper atmosphere, where they plague unwary airmen by making the machinery go wrong.' (Anything but Stf apparently!!)”

• • •

Gunner William Frederick Temple has now shaken the dust of this country from his feet and departed overseas. Whence is, of course, as yet a mystery but it might, very appropriately, be Egypt and the Sphinx ...

FWD #25 (January 1943)

Ted Carnell:

“Canadian Bob Gibson landed in on us the other evening and we spent a pleasant time together. The next opening we (Irene & I) spent a soulful period with the Old Gang – Joan and Bill Temple, Joan and Ken Chapman, and Frank Arnold. The first time we had met since entering the Services. Bill, despite repeated rumours, and actually being on embarkation leave many times, had not left the country – but he will have done by the time you read this – and we expect to be away again ourselves, possibly on the same job. We nearly reached New York recently – last minute change of plan turned the convoy eastward for Britain – curse the luck!”

FWD #27 (August 1943)

From 998613 Sigmund Temple W.F., B.D.R.A.2, M.E.F. “Just to let you know that I'm still kicking around. Only a few miles from [censored] at the moment, though so far I've been kept too busy to amble along and examine the original [censored again, but I'll give you three guesses. JMR] – but I hope to do so soon ... You might publish my kindest regards to everyone, especially Ken Chapman, Ted Carnell (and their esteemed spouses) and

Frank Arnold in memory of our last drink together in the ‘Beehive’ and in hope of the next.” Glad to know you’ve landed safely, Will.

FWD #31 (October 1943)

September 3rd, Peter Douglas Temple arrived on this terrestrial sphere to keep sister Anne company. Congratulations and best wishes to all concerned.

FWD #32 (December 1943)

William F. Temple (Sept. 30th) – “Thanks again for *Fido*, which I receive & read in the most unlikely places, but though Joan always forwards it promptly, it often seems to toss about on the sea with no more direction than a cork, & the last issue I had, some time ago, was May. That included Ted signing off ‘Sands of Time’ starting in this direction, but his guess that I was in India was what we sharpshooters call a ‘washout’ – I am motoring in Italy: the grapes, the vino, the natives, the scenery are all very buona, as we Italian scholars say. You will have heard about Peter Douglas from Joan, no doubt. I won’t boast of my prowess: it just comes naturally, as we proud fathers say.

“I want to thank Forry Ackerman for the fan and other mags he sends, but I’ve lost his address and can’t for the life of me remember it. I don’t want to impinge too much on your valuable space in *Fido*, but if you could bung in an announcement (Bill Temple wishes to thank etc.) he’ll probably read it. Grazia, as we bi-linguists say. Incidentally, in the ruins of a bombed house in Sicily I came across a splendid and I should think complete (& that means plenty!) collection of Verne’s work in Italian, and quite a few Wells’ and Doyles in English. Never saw the owner, but maybe a prospective member, eh? AR – as we signallers say. ** YrsBill **”

VOM #29 (January 1944)

“Just to let you know that I seem to be getting most of what you’ve sent. The idiocies of *Shangri L’Affaires* and Forry’s mad serial (‘Madman of Mars’, in FAPA) contrast in a welcome way with the less pleasing idiocies out here. I have been devouring such pleasing idiocies and in imagination haunting the LASFS clubroom (which I have determined to see one day) while squatting

on the Egyptian sands (you can have 'em), traversing the Libyan desert (they can keep that), the shores of Tripoli (nothing to make a song about), Tunisia (who *wants* that?), Sicily (the grapes make it almost inhabitable) and, as now, touring Italy (doing as the Romans do, which is apparently scratching their mosquito bites and getting washed out in cloudbursts).”

FWD #35 (June 1944)

William F. Temple writes:

“Have been playing around in the Allied beachhead in Italy (a sticky business) for some time now. By the time you get this there may be plenty of ‘Allied beach-heads’, but just now this is the one and only original, refuse all substitutes. You may remember I lost all the MSS I’d written since leaving England, in action in Tunisia. And here I’ve just lost in similar chaotic circumstances all the MSS I’d written and re-written since. This brings me full circle to the zero mark. And don’t say it was good practice anyway, you Job’s comforter. I feel like a spider trying to climb out of a glass tumbler, and slipping back to the bottom with a bang every time he had. scrambled up so high. And don’t say ‘Remember Bruce!’ ’cos that spider was plain dumb. He couldn’t learn from experience. He should have moved his pitch & built his web elsewhere, away from interfering Scottish fingers. But I’m kind of stuck here. However, things can’t remain static for ever, can they? But they’re having a damned good try!

“Someone’s just sent me the Dec. 43 issue of the Leftish review *Our Time* (never ’eard of it!) and the first thing I see is a long letter of criticism in the correspondence columns by Osmond Robb. Is this a fan going serious? Are we to have something new – WORKERS’ SCIENCEFICTION? One sees titles: *Spacehounds of the International Brigade*, *The Socialist Sixth of the Cosmos*, *The Infra-Red Flag*, *The Human Parasites*, *The Oil Pool ...*”

• • •

We regret to have to announce sad news ... late in April Bill Temple’s second child and only son, Peter Douglas, died of pneumonia; deep condolences go to Joan and Bill.

2. A Letter from the Front

Dear 4e,

I've just re-read the April *VOM*, which means reading it for the first time properly. My first "reading" was a hasty skim through in the press of other business, a business dealing with bangs of varying intensities. But now I've been stranded with no reading material other than this *VOM*. So I re-read and re-re-read it, and your contributors would be flattered to know just how much consideration I gave to their every point. And there were plenty of points. But the only one I'll comment on now is this business of making the final break with fandom.

I guess most fans who have kept it up for 10 years or more now must often have come to the point of impatience where fandom is felt to be an incubus from which one must free oneself. Consider: the average fan has many other interests: music, poetry, philosophy, some branch of practical science, active politics, active sex, beer, baseball, sleep, for instance, and the time he can give to them is limited firstly by his bread 'n' butter job and secondly by fandom. And the greatest of these is fandom. Oh, the big, big bundle of long, long letters always to answer; the articles demanded by far-away editors; the stacks of not-so-good fan-mags to decode from near-illegibility, the endless (illegible adjective) arguments about religion, the storms in tea-cups over nudes, the vapourings about the Now World by children who don't even understand the character of the Old, the feuds and bickerings of "he said that I said that they said ... and who *paid* for it all in the end? I leave it to your imagination" style, and the strain to keep abreast of current gags and Slan Plans and follow Wilsey-Nilsey "speling" (no one wishes to keep abreast of current stf. these days – does anyone road it at all?) and be patient with cartoon jokes about robots! My old Flat-mate, Ego Clarke, once the most enthusiastic fan I knew, I now notice has finally stepped from under with characteristic decision, using, a logic-tight argument against *VOM* nudes as his lever. I cannot but agree with the argument. If you cannot employ Varga or Turner don't give us these appalling substitutes. Even sauciness needs a certain flair to be brought off successfully, and none of these show it – not even the flock of rump-branded little girls belonging to the K-Ranch. Taste is what is lacking (especially in that infantile conception,

the circus freak, with tripod legs and udder things too). I'm not pretending no nudes is good news, but please think of academy walls rather than latrine walls.

But a break with fandom is not just a break with these rather wearisome things I have listed above. It is a break with a whole world, a whole structure of romantic associations inhabited by old, known friends of affinitive outlook. And they are a rare group, these friends: I have travelled over 12,000 miles recently & met hundreds of new people, but I have met no one else who had that outlook or would not be lost and bewildered if put amid the group. This is not to say that I haven't made friends – life-long friends, I believe, in some cases – of many witty, amusing and intelligent & knowledgeable people. I have only to read *Alert* to see that you have made alert of new friends too, and perhaps are becoming conscious for the first time of the world existing outside stf. These people outside call that “reality.” It is the place we are supposed to be hiding from with our heads in the sands of stf.

When we come up against the hard “realities” of life our stf. nonsense is supposed to be knocked out of us, and we put away childish things and become men. “I have grown out of fandom ...” Actually in most cases these words mean the fellow has grown out of the more juvenile aspects of fandom: all the above list, and the badges and fancy-dress ups at conventions and such. I'm sorry for he who really has grown out of – which means grown away from – the fan outlook. There's nothing in that hard, real outer-world that is not enhanced and rose-lit and made wondrous by the cosmic view: every sunset may be made more significant when thoughts are aroused about Martian and Venusian sunsets or “The Further Vision” in Wells' *Time Machine*; every new discovery of science means so much more when the practised eye sees also the possibilities arising from it; the Moon is not just a lantern in the night sky: it is a challenge; the stars are not pin-pricks on paintings: they are parts of the key to the whole universe if they can only be examined and fitted together; music is not a pastime; it is a wordless, universal language; the great novels, e.g. *War and Peace*, are not something apart: they are attempts to see mankind whole, to classify it, to put it in relation with Time Past & Time to Come; even sitting in our little family groups around the fire, we are not just Pop & Mom & the kids: we are fellow travellers and explorers through Time and Space and the mysteries therein. Do I sound out of touch with reality: I have known reality. Once I lived on

bread and jam alone because I could afford nothing else, and walked miles to save car fares. I worked for 10 years at the Stock Exchange and saw the ways of wealth. I have been in the richest and poorest houses. In the Army I have grown intimate with all types of people from miners, labourers, slaughterhouse-men to professional soldiers, musicians, college men & boxers. I have watched these men in peril of death and I have seen them die, not always pleasantly or easily. I have been near enough to death myself more times than I can remember. I have known life at its greatest discomfort in water-logged fox-holes for months at Anzio, soaked in the unceasing rain with no hope of drying, hungry, freezing, and constantly shelled, bombed, machine-gunned and mortared for make-weight. In these conditions I have striven to write books and lost them. And re-written them painfully and lost them again. I have known utter loneliness and also the heart-warming comfort of gatherings of friends. I know what love, marriage, and parenthood is like, and what it is like to be separated from these things year after year, and what it is like to lose a son. I've crossed all the seas except the so-called Pacific, lived with Arabs, studied the teaming life in the very sower of civilization, the Nile Valley, gazed and wondered at the Sphinx and the Pyramids, crossed the Western Desert, fought through Tunisia, lived in Sicilian farmhouses on the slopes of Etna, travelled far and wide in Italy, seeing Naples and not dying, and witnessing Vesuvius in no pleasant mood, wandered the streets of dead Pompeii, seen the Grandeur That Was Rome, the Grandeur That Is St. Peter's, the anything-but-Grandeur that is the Italian peasant's home. Consider one evening not so long ago. I had just seen the Noel Coward film *This Happy Breed*. It was London in the raw, an actual slice of the real London I knew so well. I carried this environment into the Rome Opera House with me. There I saw an Italian opera with a largely Italian audience. My view passed from the Cockney's eyes to the dark brown Italian ones. I saw as they. After the opera the orchestra played Tchaikovsky's *Pathetique* Symphony. Now I saw Life & Death through the eyes of that great sentimental Russian. After that I got into intimate conversation with the fellow next to me. A lively talkative Hawaiian from Honolulu. He described his home-life so well and with such imagination that I spent the next half-hour in Honolulu. Join the Army and See the World!

All this sounds a bit melodramatic. I only want to prove that stf. is not just a bolthole for people escaping from life. I have lived a fair amount, and stf. has lost none of its essential meaning through that experience. To me the

imagination is somewhere nearer the heart of things than “reality”. Said Flecker: “Without vision, the people perish ...” The fan outlook is my idea of vision. I want to keep in contact with fans. Without strings of 4e puns, Bob Tucker’s inspired lunacy, the keen analysis of Speer, the good nature of the hardworking Morojo, the Rabeleisian (?) jocularly of Les Crouch, the immensely readable efforts of the Daughertys and Widners and many others – Lord; how ordinary life would become!

As one who several times nearly went with last lingering, longing looks, and would no doubt have soon done so had it not been for this evening alone with *VOM* and the meditation arising from same, I swear to you, 4e, who yourself are standing with one foot in Fort MacArthur and the other roughly in the direction of the LASFS I am separating from the Separatist Movement!

– *VOM* #36 (October 1944)

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Editor’s Note: The Alert was a Forces newspaper which Ackerman persuaded in November 1945 to devote a full page to science fiction. Bill’s letter above elicited the following response from an old friend:

FLIGHT LIEUTENANT ARTHUR CLARKE of the RAF: In *VOM* 36 I read Bill Temple’s letter with very great interest: it is one of the finest you’ve ever published, stating as it does so perfectly what every intelligent fan must feel when he leaves the twenties behind and the fiery enthusiasms of adolescence begin to fade away. Though there is so much in fandom that is juvenile – the bickering schoolboy feuds, the insipid vaporings of egocentric illiterates underneath all the froth is something of real importance. The persistence and even growth of fan organisations under the adverse conditions of war should be sufficient proof of this.

Like Bill, I shall never break completely with fandom. I do not believe I was ever as enthusiastic as Bill imagines: for me, the SFA was of secondary importance to the BIS. But enthusiastic I certainly was. I do not suppose I shall ever again experience such intense pleasure as I knew in the early days of my collecting. A whole new universe was opening before me: *Skylark III*, *Islands of Space*, *The Time Stream* – even now those names can send little shivers running up and down my spine. Feverishly I collected them all. When I moved to London and the centre of SFA (Science-Fiction Assn) life the collection was almost complete and by that very fact had begun to lose its

interest. But the light that never was on land or sea still lingers around those early tales and will never wholly die.

How long it would have taken for my active enthusiasm to fade away I cannot say: possibly many years. But then came the war – and “reality”. But the reality I experienced was very different from Bill’s. I have stood before shining control panels and thought:

“Five years ago I should have said that this machine lay a century in the future: now it is no more wonderful to me than an electric kettle.”

And a little later, I have stood before that same machine and known that it was already obsolete, completely superseded. To me, this war has not been an affair of battle-lines moving slowly across a map. Mine has been the secret war, of which the outer world still knows nothing – the breathless race up the electro-magnetic spectrum, past the frequencies that were once called ultra-high, ever closer and closer to the mysterious territory of the far infra-red. It is a race that has produced more marvels than any the world has known before. Some of them won the Battle of Britain and perhaps averted a second Dark Age. Their successors, in giant battleships driving across the Pacific and with the great bomber fleets hammering at Festung Europa, are not only winning this war but shaping the future of technology for generations to come.

And now, on top of this, the first man-made machines have reached space. Those of us who were working in astronautics before the war will have little time for active fandom in the years to come. The time when we talked of our dreams has gone: from now on, we shall be making them reality.

I shall continue to go to meetings for the grand company and I’ll read the better fanmags with undiminished interest. Sometimes I may even burst into print, but it won’t be often. Having sold my first stories (including a long one which you’ll be seeing when there is paper in England again) I shall try and limit my spare-time writing to the professional and technical fields. When the BIS (British Interplanetary Society) is under way again and I am trying to make a living in electronics any writing will be a much needed relaxation and so carefully rationed.

Bill seems to have been unlucky in the Army: here in the RAF I’ve met literally scores of potential fans. The Service is riddled with s.f. and I never show an *Astounding* because the tearful entreaties, the abandoned solicitations are too pitiful to contemplate. It no longer surprises me to run up against a colleague who knows the “Lensman” sagas from end to end – it’s

happened so often. But no doubt it would be very different in a less technical branch.

Looking through the rest of the issue I am pleased to see a considerable improvement in letters and general appearance. The removal of the nudes has contributed no small amount to this. I relent. If I may, I'd like to be put back on the pauper's list. In return, you will continue to receive approximately one letter every other issue, unless something provokes me more frequently. Thanks!

Looking at Speer's odd list of names, I find I know 18 of them. So what? They cover a rather restricted field and so prove nothing concerning general culture. When I was a kid my old nurse used to read me cheerful little stories from Krafft-Ebing, and I won a set of Huysmans at Sunday School. Andre Gide's old-fashioned morality I find a little tedious; for good, clean fun give me de Sade's snappy reminiscences any time. Rimbaud has always intrigued me: he is the only known case of a poet who has reformed. When I talk of Eisenstein I always have a horrid fear that I mean Pudovkin, and vice versa. (The same thing happens with Shostakovitch and Prokofiev.) Hindemith, Bartok (in spite of Menuhin), Schoenberg and Berg are just noises to me: and I decline to have anything to do with Spengler.

Maurice Hanson has just reminded me that in my "History of Fantocracy", written early in the war, I pictured you, Forrie, as a Colonel and myself as a Squadron Leader (= Major), sometime in the late 1940s. I was an A.C.2 (RAF G.I.) at the time and you were still a civilian, if you can remember that far back. The whole thing was supposed to be an outrageously improbable prophecy – but now I've only one more step to go and if the war lasts as long as I'm afraid it will I ought to make it. What about it, Forrie?

– VOM #40 (March 1945)

3. Home from the War

A profound impression was made on all by a wartime letter from Anglofan Wm Temple. On 13 Nov 45 he sent another letter which I have treasured all this time. It “has” almost as much as its predecessor. It is one of the most memorable letters I’ve had the privilege of presenting – 4e:

• • •

Some musings in my den, attained at last after three years in foreign climes, though occupied often enough, God knows, by my astral body projected from such places as the Red Sea or a slit trench on Etna’s slopes. Yes, it all looks the same: the same photos of Wells, the book-lined walls, the typewriter and my letter files, the batches of clippings about odd things, the carefully selected survivors of my once large collection of stf. mags. But does it *quite* feel the same? Nothing inside this room has changed, but the world outside, where I have been all this time, has changed. Have I changed with it? Some of the old wonder-thrill of these rows of books of stf., fantasy, and the weird-horror has hardened into lumpy fact for me. Do the pages of Bierce and Poe contain anything more gruesome than those four days and nights I spent, partly alone, in that cut off road tunnel in the Alps, with the bodies and parts of bodies of some thirty German engineers who, in attempting to blow up and block the tunnel, only succeeded in scattering themselves in unpleasant death along its length? I think I know now what it would be like to stand in a crater on the Moon. At one spot as you approach the Matterhorn via the Aosta Valley there are three gigantic rock-mountains in a row, upflung into jagged horns and sharp peaks, dead gray, utterly bare of vegetation and littered with volcanic rubble, and to the pigmy me who stood in the valley and gazed it was one of those “Imaginary Landscape on the Moon” illustrations of my astronomical books grown enormously into three dimensions. Except that the sky would be black instead of intensely blue, I’ve no doubt that it was almost exactly the first view of the Moon one would get on stepping out of a lunar spaceship.

Could any fantastic “rose-red city, half as old as time” be more, picturesque than the tiny fairy-like town of San Marino perched like a Disney castle, on the very summit of a great rock peak; or the minarets and domes of the Arab city of Takrouna, in the desert, also on a lone rocky height; or

Venice, a city of coloured floating bubbles in green water? That's Dunsany for you. As for Lovecraft and his ancient forgotten cities and haunted mausoleums: the silent streets of Pompeii – a time trip back some two thousand years; or the Colosseum at El Djein in the Tunisian desert, better preserved than the one in Rome, a huge bulk of masonry standing quite solitary and forgotten – “Round the decay of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare, the lone and level sands stretch far away”; or the tombs of Egypt. As Mr. Wells knows, the ruins of “Everytown” in *Things to Come* stand in London today. Which reminds me that all these books I'm looking at in this room once, in 1940, disappeared together with their shelves under the collapsed ceiling when a bomb landed at the end of the garden, and had to be dug out and cleaned patiently one by one. Which in turn reminds me of the time when one of the earliest bombs to fall in London fell near George Medhurst's house, and a lone bomb-splinter came in through the window and of all his collection of some 500 books of sf. and fantasy chose *The Shape of Things to Come* in which to embed itself.

Far away seemed the war when I stood above the clouds 11,000 feet upon a glacier on Pian Rosa, where the Swiss, Italian & French Alps meet and join, the most wonderful spectacle I've ever seen: in every direction, range upon range, the countless snow-veined summits stood up, and it wasn't hard to imagine that through one of those high and lonely passes, one might, by a geographical accident, stumble upon Shangri-La or the Country of the Blind.

The Atomic Bomb of *The World Set Free* has come right out of the pages with a bang, together with atomic power and a shower of rockets of all sizes. I first met rockets coming the wrong way in Tunisia, in bunches of six at a time and with vampire howls – we called them the “Sobbing Sisters”. And talking of vampires, what Transylvanian roost could be more grim and foreboding than the Castle of Malatestiano in North Italy, the best-preserved, mediaeval castle in Europe? I had stood in that room over the drawbridge where Francesca da Rimini & Paolo were slain by the half-insane Conte (an episode which inspired a tone poem from Tchaikovsky and a drama from Dante). The torture chamber, in the dungeon, with th all its original ingenious fittings, is from the Poe of “The Pit and the Pendulum”, and there is a Pit too, from which the bones of scores of murdered victims are still being extracted. In one of the gloomy halls hang the original portraits of two of the Conte's wives: he strangled one and poisoned the other. Dracula had better take a

back seat. Yes, fantasy has grown more factual since I was last in this den. And yet, you know, these old romantic symbols, the very stuff of which it is woven, still hold their magic. These wanderings have if anything strengthened the fabric, given substance to smoke, made vantage points of possibility upon which credulity might stand. Which reflection inclines my eye to a newcomer on these shelves, *Jules Verne*, by Kenneth Allott. It is so much more than just a biography of Verne. It is also an analysis of the 19th century birth of science and the romantic literature which inspired Verne, by someone who knows what stf & fantasy mean and what they're made of. He lumps them together as "romanticism", as against the dry factual "classicism" of reason. And shows that, as always, the poets were in the vanguard. This exposition is mainly in a fascinating last chapter entitled "The Future of a Sentiment", the Sentiment being "romanticism". Herewith a taste of it:—

"The poets woke up from the anaesthetic of rationalism to cultivate their senses. They sought refreshment from the common sense and good taste of the coffee houses in the noisiest waterfalls, the most precipitous cliffs, the most wind-tortured trees. They followed nature ecstatically and invented a sixth sense, the sense of wonder, to enjoy her in her most mysterious moods.

*Next, when you are describing
A shape, or sound, or tint;
Don't state the matter plainly,
But put it in a hint;
And learn to look at all things
With a sort of mental squint.*

"The flash of lightning over a graveyard, the typhoon at sea, the owl hooting by the ruined seat of greatness – all these gave extreme pleasure to the senses, and the most refined sensibility collected new types of sense experience as 18th century earls collected antique marbles and as present-day monarchs collect stamps.

"The love of cruelty and of torture, the excitement over exotic loves, the passion for the new in exploration and adventure were in part an expression of the desire for new tracts of territory in which the sense could be exercised. 'I am tormented with an everlasting itch for things remote. I love to sail forbidden seas and land on barbarous coasts,' says Ishmael in *Moby Dick* ... The Gothic castle

by twilight became the symbol of the mysterious and around it were woven the supernatural or sexual-sadistic fantasies of the horror novelists. Hoffmann, Mrs. Radcliffe, Edgar Allan Poe are the hierophants of a cult.

“The romantic loved solitude. Wordsworth retreated to the Lake District. Hatteras (Captain Hatteras, of Verne’s *The English at the North Pole*) fled to the shaggy north like Frankenstein pursuing his monster....

“The sea, the ivory tower, the desert island, the wind, the artificial man, the poles, the doppelganger, the noble savage, the secret city of a lost civilisation, the ghost ship, the journey through space to the Moon or one of the planets, broken machinery, the Wandering Jew – these are a few common romantic symbols to which an almost sacramental mystery was attached.”

Adjacent to *Jules Verne* I see another stranger to me, i.e.: Speer’s monumental *Fancylopedia*. Only recently did I get my first view of it – I hadn’t dared have it sent out to me abroad lest it be lost, as so much else was. A perfect example of the wit and industry of American fandom. This leads me to compare mentally American and British fandom, which broadens into a general view of the respective fantasy-stf-doms. Who has done more for this “romanticism” – Americans or British? On the surface, the States: they produced a once enormous, and now still large, flood of magazines, against which the British produced only two, now both defunct (admittedly not because they failed to prosper, but because of DYKTAWO**).

But then the American public is magazine conscious: it buys comparatively few books. Whereas you can’t keep the British out of their bookshops and libraries, and they have no great interest in the ephemeral magazine. Again, having a population going on three times the size of Britain’s, naturally the Americans would produce more mags. Yet, nearer literature, Britain has produced more of the better class writers. Glancing along the backs of these books of mine I see the names Wells, Stapledon, Rider Haggard, Conan Doyle, M.P. Shiel, J.D. Beresford, M.R. James, Aldous Huxley, S. Fowler Wright, Arthur Machen, Victor MacClure, James Hilton, Lord Dunsany, G.K. Chesterton, Bram Stoker, Walter de la Mare, J.B. Priestley, William Hope Hodgson, Neil Bell, George Griffiths, Sax Rohmer, Eden Phillpotts, Algernon Blackwood. What American *book* authors can we place beside these? Bierce, Burroughs, Poe, Merritt, Jack London,

Lovecraft, Thorne Smith, John Taine. I'll gladly admit Weinbaum. But are the Heinleins and Campbells *human* enough to stand on their own with the public outside the covers of *Astounding*? I don't think so. You've got to be an old hand with plenty of technical knowledge before you can fully appreciate the very real merits of their work. They might arouse John Doe's sense of wonder all right, but he'll only wonder what the hell they're driving at. And here, of course, is where we do hand it to the Yanks: all the latest experimental work in, and development of stf, has been wrought in the States; thought variants and mutants and the super-terrifics hammered out in the E.E. Smithery, and refinement upon refinement (until in some cases the wonder has been refined out of it altogether).

Still, I maintain, the poets were in the vanguard – “Locksley Hall”, “Ozymandias”, “The Golden Road to Samarkand”, “Kubla Khan”, “The Music Makers”, “Omar Khayyam”, and so on. There's the font of our romanticism, the primary source of stf. & fantasy. Very British, you might notice. Line your poets up against Shakespeare, Milton, Wordsworth, Browning, Byron, Shelley, Keats, Burns, Coleridge, Gray, Tennyson, Swinburne. What, poor little Poe on his own again? Where's Whitman and Longfellow?

But all this isn't getting me anywhere (except in bad with my friends across the Atlantic). Tomorrow my furlough ends, and I must away back to Italy, to Bordighera on the Riviera where the thousand lights of Monte Carlo glitter all night across the bay. How much rather I'd just sit here! What new things to see, I wonder, ere I can dream in here again?

– VOM #50 (July 1947)

** Don't You Know There's A War On.

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Editor's Note: The quoted verse is from Lewis Carroll's 1869 comic poem “Poeta fit, non nascitur” (“A poet is made, not born”).

Post-War



*Bill Temple, 1957
Photo by Peter West*

1. Caught in a Convention

Harold Chibbett and myself came on the Saturday evening to the “White Horse” direct from visiting the one-time home of the late Maurice Hugi. His aged, deaf, and impoverished father lived there alone now, and was still missing his son badly. We missed him too. He had been a bright spot in the “White Horse” and – as Ted Carnell mentioned during his address – “Mo” would thoroughly have enjoyed this unconventional convention which John Newman seemed to have whipped up and thrown off on the spur of the moment.

A burglar alarm was ringing in the silversmiths opposite the pub when we arrived. It became the musical accompaniment to the whole evening. Squads of police were patrolling the street and frisking the fans as they arrived (they should have waited till they left). Treasures were laid out in the pub’s upper room: the latest books, rare magazines, original illustrations, the *Tales of Wonder* cover paintings from the National Gallery at Ilford: the entire Gillings family was guarding them (from assault?). Bodies were laid out in the bar. I got my radiator filled, but I had to underline my hints about how hot it was. Some people are slow.

Next thing I recall is sitting behind “Sandy” Sandfield’s ears regarding Wally Gillings addressing his shoes. Occasionally Wally looked up, and then one caught bits of what he was saying: “There are a lot of strange faces here tonight ...” (There certainly were, but he needn’t have been so blunt about it.) “We oldsters hand on the torch to the younger generation of fans ...” (With the rheum running from his eyes and dripping off his long white beard.) “You will find some interesting publications of ours on the table ...” (Including *Wordcraft*, prospectus of the ABC school of authorship – director, W. Gillings. Short story course by Stacy Aumonier, deceased, Elinor Mordaunt, deceased, and Sapper, deceased. Let the masters teach you how to become deceased.)

The fragments continued: “Science-fiction in this country ... I ... grim battle ... *Tales of Wonder* ... began again ... hard fight ... *Fantasy* ... carried on ... *Fantasy Review* ... I say with all modesty ...” (Here the publican began carrying endless trays of sausages to and fro in front of the speaker, who continued to address his audience every time it came into view.) “... a mission

... ever growing enthusiasm ... the future ... glorious ... triumph.” Wally sat down to a resounding peal of the burglar alarm.

Ted Carnell got up. “There are a lot of strange faces here tonight ...” (O.K., O.K., you’re no Robert Taylor.) “We of the older generation ...” (I find myself nervously plucking out my grey hairs.) “There are Seven Ages of Fan; (1) He starts with Flash Gordon. (2) Learns to read *Amazing*. (3) Moves on to the sexy cover mags. (4) Starts collecting mags. and reads the articles in *Astounding*. (5) Starts reading and collecting books. (6) Collects so much can’t read anything. (7) Becomes a publisher and goes bankrupt ... Gillings, Chapman, Eric Williams and myself are starting a company to finance *New Worlds*. We aren’t paying the artists anything. Nor – as a matter of precedent – the authors. In fact, they’ll be expected to buy 5/- shares ... Perhaps Bill Temple, with his Stock Exchange experience, can give us some assistance in floating this company?” (Bill Temple: “Certainly. Our office deals exclusively with companies that go broke”) “We’re starting a Big Pond Fund to get a British fan off on a goodwill visit to the States – I am not thinking of myself. This should promote international understanding, etc.,etc., and I am still not thinking of myself ...” Ted sat down. There were cheers. Which might have been for the publican with another tray of sausages.

Arthur C. Clarke, more commonly “Ego”, gave a talk nominally on “Stf. v. Astronautics”. Naturally, it was all really about Ego: how he’d just introduced *Thrilling Wonder Stories* to the Cavendish Laboratory, whose sole diet hitherto had been *Astounding*. How he’d ... and then he’d ... Next to me, Eric Hopkins was trying to take a photo of the speaker. Because of the light, he had to give it an exposure of 2 seconds. During which time Ego managed to assume 639 different postures. The result will probably look like a scrambled sheet of polyfotos. Ego sat down. Somebody clapped. It was probably Ego. Ken Chapman saw fit to get up and announce to the company that he was still wearing the same clothes in which he attended the last pre-war Convention. He waited expectantly, but nobody seemed able to do anything about it. He sat down with an Injured air. The interval was declared – by Charlie Duncombe in a voice like thunder. Everyone one rushed for the pickled onions. The alarm was still ringing, and in the street below the police were still keeping the pub under observation.

In the interval I chatted with Bertram (“Jack”) Chandler, who’d got a story coming up in the new *Argosy*, got a drink from Syd Bounds and another from Fred Brown, and was stung for one by Ken Chapman, and picked the

brains of Frank Fears and the other Clarke (A.V. – the sane one).

Then the auction started. Ted Tubb was the auctioneer. The aim: to raise the fare for the Big Pond passenger. Harold Chibbett hadn't known this. He thought it was for private profit. As his infallible racing system had proved exceptionally fallible that week, he'd brought along a couple of precious volumes from his library to raise the fare home. When he learned he was helping to raise someone else's fare instead, he sank from sight and was not seen again.

Pity I've not space to describe the whole auction. It was a riot: the hit of the evening. 1st Book Edition of *The Moon Pool* went for 2/-. The catch: 14 pages missing. Something else went for 2/- also: the original cover painting of *ToW* No.6 ("Robot Dance, on Guy Fawkes Night"). This was to be sacrificed for the good of the cause by Editor Gillings. The only bid was 1/-. Wally went white. That was too much of a sacrifice. Hastily he tried to buy it back, bid 1/6d., couldn't recognise his own voice, and Jumped it to 2/-. It was knocked down to him. Gillings had saved it from Gillings for Gillings. "Where can I put my face?" he moaned. "I make no suggestions," said Sandy, who was collecting the cash – but he did: he held up two fingers in a gesture that might have been the V sign, but he pretended it meant: "Two shillings, please." Wally paid.

Ted Tubb held up one book which he pronounced great.

"I agree. It is great," called out Ego.

Ron Gillings, Wally's 14-year old son (who, no doubt, the police were really looking for) shouted:

"It's lousy!"

"It's great!" bawled Ego.

"Lousy!"

"I'll speak to your father about you!" threatened Ego. But Wally had by now put his face downstairs at the bar.

Ted was soon auctioning books in bundles of 5. Alan Devereaux bought a bundle for just one book and threw the rest back in the sea. Then Ted exhibited the piece de resistance: an original drawing by Cyril Dennis of Eve and the Serpent. Virgil Finlay had nothing on it. Eve had nothing on either. But she had a pair of milkbars that made Jane Russell's look like concavities. Ron Gillings went up for a closer Inspection. The auctioneer said, "Now, this is just the thing you need if you have a young son to bring up ..." There was a shout that shook the pub, and the police sent for reinforcements ... The

burglar alarm gave it up, and stopped ringing.

I was bidding well for the Dennis when in came my wife. She'd been delayed – the police thought she was a gun moll. I parked her with the other wives – Irene Carnell, Joan Chapman, Madge Gillings, Joan Chandler. But by then it was too late. The guy next to me had bought the Dennis. He said his fancy had been taken by the serpent's expression. I went down to help Wally hide his face at the bar.

The auction, I'm told, brought about £18 just enough to carry the ambassador to a point a couple of hundred miles west of Ireland and drop him in the ocean. He'll have to walk the rest.

– *The Whitcon Booklet* (1948)

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Editor's Note: On Easter Saturday, 16th April 1949, The Lord Raglan pub on St. Martin-le-Grand, two minutes walk from St. Paul's Underground station, was the venue for the second post-war British convention. Bill was Guest of Honour and though the speech he gave to the assemblage has been lost to time we do still have Walter Gillings's (somewhat dry, alas) description of it:

As Guest of Honour, author Temple took full advantage of the privilege to indulge in some typically plain speaking laced with the ironic humour he infuses into his writings. Having been practically shanghaied into the limelight he had successfully avoided for years, he delivered a withering impeachment of the editor who had presented his first work in *Tales of Wonder* and who now sat helpless beside him. In lauding him by way of introduction, Chairman Gillings had reminded the meeting that the rising star editor Merwin had boosted in *Thrilling Wonder* was no newcomer to science fiction any more than Arthur C. Clarke, who sat patiently beside his old stablemate, Temple, prepared to lend weight to the assault on all editors who tended to become hidebound. Far from expressing undying gratitude to the man who had published his "The Smile of the Sphinx" and other early stories ten years before, Temple depicted Gillings as a conservative satyr who had declined to accept anything which did not conform with his conception of what a British public unfamiliar with magazine s-f could appreciate. Instead of encouraging new ideas, he had presented an endless succession of "menaces", in spite of the fact that "The Sphinx" which he had experimented with dubiously, had proved quite popular. With the post-war *Fantasy*, he

prepared to pursue much the same course, but it had only lasted three issues – and no wonder, Temple added grimly.

He then proceeded to blister the revived *New Worlds*, a copy of which reposed beneath a vase of daffodils on the table before him, editor John Carnell (“I don’t know why he calls himself John – his real name is Ted”) was not present to defend the charge, which he had half-anticipated, levelled by Temple at the sameness of its contents: he was down with vaccination fever following early preparations for his trip to U.S, to attend the World Science Fiction Convention, but Temple was merciless. All but one of the stories, he pointed out, was about deep space or space-ships, and reading between the lines, he saw the same thing happening in the next issue. Once again they were going to be deprived of a really liberal magazine; yet this was an enterprise in which British fandom was actively interested, and he urged them “not to let him get away with it.”

While venting most of his spleen upon home products, Temple kept a harsh word or two for the American magazines, whose editors he dismissed as mere cogs in a machine, at the same time crediting them with a certain amount of elasticity.

“They swing from one direction to another, every now and again, so that it’s difficult for the poor author to keep pace with their changing moods. Editors as a whole are extremists; they don’t have a balanced view at all. Actually, their job should be to pick the best of what the authors offer, not demand that they write this or that kind of story to suit their own ideas of what readers want.”

– *Fantasy Review* #15 (Summer 1949)

2. How It All Began

I see by the programme that the Convention began semi-officially on May 10th and officially on May 12th. But to me it seemed to have been beginning for a long time before. The first ominous sign was when Treasurer Charles Duncombe started demanding money with menaces every week at the White Horse. The peace was broken. Pleasant and amusing discussions about the imminent end of civilisation were darkened by interruptions from this fellow to the effect that we'd better pay up while money was still worth something and while we were still here to pay it.

He made our life miserable. He made us feel guilty about spending even a penny on beer. We became secret drinkers, hiding round corners and furtively gulping the stuff before he discovered us.

He'd attack us from all angles. He'd bully, importune, wheedle and cajole. He'd hector us on the evils of drink, remind us of our duty to science fiction, then drop his voice to a bellow and plead with us to walk home and give him the fare instead. His resourcefulness was unbounded. You'd find him opening the door for you, calling you "sir" and covertly displaying an expectant palm; or standing outside the toilet suggesting that the admission was a penny and he was an attendant; or calling you "sir" again and helping you on with someone else's overcoat; and when you got outside, there he was on the pavement again, selling flags.

He also got into the big time, cornering all the packets of crisps in the pub, and selling them to the hungry at twice the price. And he tried to sell Lew, the landlord, the idea that if the beer were diluted they could split fifty-fifty. This didn't come to anything only because water can't be diluted.

Then the Convention Committee kept going into huddles around one's favourite table to work out the agenda. They made heavier going of it than their rival committee in UNO. They not only disagreed about where to put asterisks but also how to spell asterisks. It was bedlam and chaos. The only thing they were methodical about was spilling beer on every magazine the owners had left on the table – they never missed.

People like Vince Clarke and Fred Brown went around wearing lost looks and lapel buttons labelled *Secretary* and *Committee* and long before Convention Week the White Horse was full of overseas visitors and

the sound of strange accents (including mine – Forry Ackerman accused me of speaking English with an English accent). So the Convention not so much began as grew up around us.

As part of it, Ted Carnell and myself took Forry and Lee Jacobs (the original “American in Paris”) to see *Things To Come*. Forry had already seen this film 26 times. Every time he goes to see it now, the characters wave “Hello” at him from the screen. As we entered this time, Ralph Richardson, as “The Boss”, was saying: “Now, this man hasn’t taken me by surprise. I knew he was coming – yes, I knew he was coming.” I’ll bet he did.

There was a hitch in the organisation on the way to the cinema. The route there was a rather complicated one on the Underground, and this was to be Forry’s and Lee’s initiation into the mysteries of London’s subway network. Ted and I, born Londoners, told them not to be alarmed there was nothing to it when you know your way around, as we did. Therefore, our aplomb was slightly dented when we found ourselves getting out at Mansion House instead of Victoria – we’d come a few miles in the diametrically opposite direction. All Ted’s fault of course. He can’t tell the difference between Westbound, Eastbound and Eggbound.

When Forry and I were casually passing the 20th-Century-Fox film studio at Wembley, I mentioned casually that they’d just completed six short films there of Algernon Blackwood’s weird short stories. Forry suggested we call in to see if they’d let us have some stills to show at the Convention. We called in. I said: “This is Mr. Forrest J Ackerman from Hollywood –”

At the magic word “Hollywood” the red carpet was instantly unrolled at our feet, and we followed it to the producer’s office. He parked us in the best chairs, scratched our backs, gave us cigarettes, and had slaves carry us to the projection theatre, where one of the Blackwood films was run through especially for us. We acted up, casually mentioned, our friend Zanuck, talked in millions, and promised to see what could be done when Mr Ackerman returned to Hollywood. Everyone shook hands all round and took everyone else’s telephone numbers, and we were ushered out with little boys holding umbrellas over our heads. And Mr Ackerman returned with dignity to his temporary home to resume his not so dignified struggle with Olde Englishe plumbing.

The following week I read in the papers that all 20th-Century-Fox film studios in Britain were to be closed down and their personnel fired. Gosh, we didn’t think the repercussions would be as drastic as that!

Such episodes as the Ackermans at the Folies Bergere trying to catch the nudes moving even one muscle (which, by British law, would instantly stamp them as rude nudes), or the Ackermans trudging over Plumstead Common in ten layers of clothes, blue-nosed and shivering in our balmy English summer, looking for the Carnell igloo, are really outside the province of this article.

Another hiatus in the preparations was when Arthur Clarke and I were detailed to find and fit appropriate gramophone record music to the silent film *Metropolis*, which had been procured and was to be shown. We had to go by our memories of the film, which were in fair shape, as we'd once had to provide a similar soundtrack to it before the war. The trouble was that we could remember the film but, not our original music programme. However, we fixed up a programme of modernistic and/or mechanistic music, took our heap of music along on the day, and found that at the last minute the film had been switched to *The Lost World*, about prehistoric monsters. Our music was a bit out of period but we were stuck with it. And so the allosaurus sparred with the triceratops, Professor Challenger fulminated, and the young lovers made eyes at each other – all to the impartial and deafening clangour of Mossolov's *Steel Foundry*.

Incidentally, Conan Doyle had kept it from us in the novel that Maple White (that cagey old defunct explorer) had a young and lovely daughter; also that Professor Summerlee's first love had not been science but the Church. When the young and lovely daughter is trapped, apparently for life, with reporter Malone (her sweetheart) on the plateau, they look at each other in horror. She gasps: "But we'll be here – *always!*" The resourceful Malone replies: "It's all right, Professor Summerlee will marry us – he used to be a minister."

As Arthur seemed to think *Steel Foundry* needn't ever be changed for another record during the film, there was little for me to do at the turntable. He suggested I went and sat in a corner and managed the volume control. I went. It was a dark corner. Ego hadn't mentioned that the platform ended suddenly there and the chair was perched on the edge of it. I sat down, and promptly went over backwards, and hit the floor in a shower of ashtrays, wires, abuse, and broken bones – all mine. It put *Steel Foundry* in the shade. On the screen a couple of monsters were having a fight at the time, and I was congratulated afterwards for my very sound sound effects.

That was after the Convention had really begun, of course – when all the plans and agenda had been abandoned, forgotten or ignored, and everyone

was running the Convention in their own way. Some of them had odd ideas. Lew, the White Horse landlord, spent a busman's holiday in the bar. Committee-man Jim Rattigan spent most of the first day in the washroom, having drunk a bottle of port in mistake for coca-cola. He was a strange and pitiful sight. Every time I paid a visit he seemed to groan louder and become more convulsed, with delicate colour effects. Sometimes he'd have his head in the sink, sometimes under the sink, sometimes under his arm, sometimes down a drain; and sometimes he was so contorted that he didn't seem to have a head at all. Chacun a son gout.

Wally Gillings opened the proceedings – and damn nigh finished them – with a funeral oration over the dead body of science-fiction, bewailing that it, or he, or anyone had ever been born. It was a tragic and powerful performance. He didn't have to play Hamlet with a false beard, like Alec Guinness, or with dyed hair, like Olivier, Wally IS Hamlet. The times are always out of joint for him. There's always something rotten in the state of almost anything. How all occasions do inform against him! I feel the same way, but gosh – if I could only act like that! Well, he killed some of us off and the rest committed suicide, and he tripped away happily and the Convention continued.

Messrs. Tubb and Duncombe, Auctioneers, got carried away by their own fervour and finished up by selling everything in sight, including the furniture and Audrey Lovett, who was sold as a slave-girl to Ego Clarke.

Before that, Ego had been playing continuously through the loudspeakers records of Yma Sumac, the Incan screech-owl. When the record was forcibly taken from him, so that other people might hear each other he grabbed the mike to register a public protest. Hearing his own voice emanating from the loud-speakers, Ego forgot Yma and became self-enchanted. The mike had to be torn away from him. It was given to John Keir Cross, who said he was sick of the sight of microphones, and spoke without it. On the other hand, Ted Carnell loved the mike and clung to it so intimately that several scenes had to be re-shot.

Serious notes were struck by Forry's hot-news bulletin; by his wife Wendayne's lecture on Dianetics; by Frank Arnold's erudite survey of the whole development of international science-fiction, rounding off the reports by the overseas visitors; and by Bill Temple's having to drink water in the middle of his speech when his tonsils gave out.

Another serious note was struck this morning when I had a letter from

Lee Jacobs asking when next year's Convention would be. Is this Thing going to begin all over again? If Charlie Duncombe calls me "sir" at the White Horse next week, I'll ... I'll emigrate. Perhaps I'll come back as an overseas visitor. It mightn't seem so bad if you can skip the beginning.

– *Hyphen* #1 (May 1952)

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Editor's Note: Although this piece wasn't published until 1952, Bill Temple is writing about the 1951 London "Festivention".

3. The *Hyphen* Letters

If it flatters your ego at all, I'm writing this in bed at 6am, and it's as cold as an editor's heart. Two of my fingers have just dropped off – frostbite – but I'm not worried: I still have six left (two dropped off yesterday also), which is enough to last the rest of the week.

If it unflatters your ego at all, I might mention that this 6am industry isn't entirely on your behalf. It's become a regular Thing. These days have a mountain of work to do at the office and another mountain at home. Both are higher than Everest. It's all right for Hillary and Tensing: they only climbed one mountain once, and now they can everest. I can't. This looks to be the Sherpa Things to Come indefinitely, and although I know I promised an article for *Hyphen* I'm glad I didn't say when. Shall we say 1984 – Orwell past that date?

If it flattens your ego at all, Mr White's "The Beacon" was as good as one of your own masterpieces; than which there can be no higher praise. It scintillated. It's an essay in sustained top-flight humour I shall never bring myself to part with. It goes Thurber than Thurber: it is Thurbest.

I was glad to see you'd noted my remarks at the Con. I was really high at the time and had little idea of what I was saying. En route to the Con I'd stopped at an inn or two to muster Dutch courage to face the ordeal of speaking. I overdid it. When I got there, Ted and Bea dragged me into the bar right away, and when I emerged, and had to speak a few minutes, later, I was really overdone. Afterwards, I couldn't remember what I'd said, so you've satisfied my curiosity.

Thank you also for the latest, or Campbell, issue. No doubt you know that the Campbell clan is now one bigger, by a lad pen-named Gregor. No doubt also you know that the last gathering at the "White Horse" takes place this week and that the next pub to be dismantled by degrees is "The Globe" in Hatton Garden.

Hell, my head just fell off. Oh, well, it'll make shaving easier.

– *Hyphen* #6 (January 1954)

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Thanks for *Hyphen*, which gave me a welcome lift of spirit in these dull, cold winter days. I'm glad most people enjoyed the Beacon report as much as I

did. But I'm not surprised to find D.R. Smith among the rare exceptions. Even before the war, in the days of *Novae Terrae* and *Tales of Wonder*, he was adept at throwing buckets of cold water over people as a reward for their hard work and self denial (same thing) in attempts to entertain him. Not that I can recall that he ever threw any over me.

I'm afraid he's a type. Sam Youd is also of it. But there are signs – straws in the wind – lately that they may both eventually grow out of it, if very belatedly. It's only a matter of growing up.

In her recent book, *Pleasure*, Doris Langley Moore mentions the type: “Disparagement is a relief to minds that are ill at ease – a relief which they grasp at eagerly – but like any other drug, when it wears off it leaves the addict at the mercy of his bitterness. The fundamental unhappiness of destructive people is usually transparent enough, and often very much to be pitied. People who are for some reason socially uneasy often think that it is a mark of superiority to be hard to please. The young just emerging from adolescence are almost always hypercritical, especially on subjects where they have only recently acquired knowledge, and the uneducated or half-educated do not like to show when they are impressed in case they should commit the faux pas of overvaluing, which is thought to subtract more from our prestige than undervaluing. Unfortunately, any pose that is long sustained is pretty sure to become second nature ...”

Let's hope John Roles won't let it grow on him as badly as Smith and Youd did.

If you publish this – and I have no objection – I may make another enemy, or even two (not of Sam – he's impervious), and therefore shall be unable to say, write, or do anything right in his or their eyes again. If this burden comes, I shall try to bear it with fortitude.

– *Hyphen* #7 (March 1954)

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I wonder how many Profen are nostalgic about their own Neofandom I am, sometimes. “There has passed way a glory from the Earth; where is it now, the vision and the dream?” But it was different in the old pre-war days. There were only a handful of sf mags being published. One had time not only to read them, but also re-read them. A new novel which had even a trace of sf in it – be it only *The Old Mad Professor* – was an EVENT. An sf film was so rare that it was a MOMENTOUS EVENT. When fan met, they could discuss their reading and be on common ground, for the other fellow was bound to

have read the story you were so enthusiastic about. Today sf batters you with more magazines and books than you could hope to read if you did nothing else all day. It's all over the cinema and tv screens, and drools from the radio. It infests advertisement hoardings, strip cartoons, kids' comics toy-shops, literary weeklies, and pantomimes. It's even been mentioned at "The Globe".

We always wanted to spread sf, and now, God help us, we've done it. And somehow in the stampede the magic has been trampled underfoot.

Maybe for many so-called: fans it's a just a passing craze. A difficulty the authors of *The Enchanted Duplicator* never thought up for Jophan was that of distinguishing the Trufan from the Flash-in-the-Fan.

"Science-fiction is too much with us; late and soon, getting and spending, we lay waste our powers."

– *Hyphen* #8 (April 1954)

• • •

D.R. Smith has said one of the nicest things about me that ever set me purring. He opines I'm "constitutionally unable of being effectively abusive." Please, Mr. Smith, continue to think so. Never, never come to "The Globe" and be horribly disillusioned. Most of the people there look withered and blistered, like mutants after an atomic war. All my doing.

The quoting of other people with similar views doesn't arise from lack of imagination, but from a desire to make the quotee feel he's outnumbered. Mr. Smith *would* fail to see any application to himself, naturally: the hypercritical, oddly enough, are seldom self-critical. It's childish (i.e. *not* adult) of him to instance the opposite extreme and pretend that I suggest he abandon all sense of proportion what ever.

As van Gogh said (here we go again: Mr. Smith, you're surrounded!) when accused of praising second-rate painters as well as first-rate ones: "People do not admire enough." I think "appreciate" would be the better word.

I hope you'll be conventionally happy. I doubt if I shall go. I gather that polar bears roam loose in the desolate latitudes north of London. I'm getting too old and fat to run.

– *Hyphen* #9 (July 1954)

• • •

One page of my copy is completely blank, like Ted Carnell's mind. You make it hard for me to tell you which one, because none of the pages is

numbered.

The exhaustive conreports were exhausting, as I gather the Con itself was. It seems the Manchester gathering let its repressions really rip and sublimation has gone out of fashion. Apparently, the ubiquitous water pistol is not so much a ray-gun as a phallic symbol. I prophesy If This Goes On that it will be replaced by a whirling spray.

I'm sorry to see the Official Programme die the death, as it appears now to have done – even though it means, thank heavens, I'll never have to make another speech. At least it was a framework holding things together and letting people feel they were sharing something with the rest apart from a bar and a bed. It was often dull, but it had elements of discipline and order without which a meeting becomes merely a mob. Knots of mobsters shambling from Bedroom 666 to Bedroom 101 and so on, while synthesizing interlineations and fighting rearguard actions with night porters, seems to me a pretty dismal and sordid prospect, if that were to be all.

– *Hyphen* #10 (September 1954)

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... a few remarks about Bob Bloch's criticism of critics in the Xmas number. He stressed the fact that they were so much driftwood on the tide of fashion, like a lot of aged women with too much money and too much time. I couldn't agree more. It's womanish to be fickle. *Ergo*, critics are mostly womanish types. However there was once an honest critic, Leslie Stephen, of the *Cornhill Magazine*. He wrote to Thomas Hardy after the latter was spinning because of six-and-twenty conflicting opinions from the Olympians (who agreed about only one thing: that they could have written Hardy's novels better than Hardy):–

“I think, as a critic, that the less authors read of criticism the better. You have a perfectly fresh and original vein and I think the less you bother yourself about critical canons the less chance there is of your becoming self-conscious and cramped ... we are generally a poor lot, horribly afraid of not being in the fashion, and disposed to give ourselves airs on very small grounds.”

A worse case than the fluctuating fortunes of Scott Fitzgerald is mentioned in Van Wyck Brooks' recent *Scenes and Portraits*. I forget the relevant names, but an influential art critic saw an oil painting in a Chelsea junk shop. He declared it to be a work of genius. The artist was found to be living on stale bread in a slum. He had been painting all his life without any

material success and was now in his seventies. But now he was officially “discovered”. Success story after all. For two years he was revered and everybody fought to buy his paintings. Rembrandt was a back number. Then the same critic opined that the old fool was overrated. The new genius’s stock slumped so suddenly he found himself in debt. So back into the slum crawled the old man and was never heard of again.

Again, there was the poet-dramatist Stephen Phillips, who in his time was seriously compared to Shakespeare. Then the same critics who had praised him all ganged up at once to ridicule him. End of Phillips.

And Henry James, Thackeray, Trollope, Conrad go in and out of critical fashion as regularly as the seasons.

Mr. Bloch says *Tender Is the Night* is Fitzgerald’s best book. But in fact it is, of course, *The Great Gatsby* – compact and powerful, where *Tender Is the Night* is weak and sprawling. What an uncritical ass Mr. Bloch is.

– *Hyphen* #14 (June 1955)

• • •

About this man Shaw.

We were motoring through Herts and came upon a village called Ayot St. Lawrence and a house on a corner with iron gates and “Shaw’s Corner” wrought in them. We’d often wondered where, as well as why, Bob Shaw lived, and it was exciting to stumble on his hide-out.

So we knocked, and then were ourselves knocked – for half a crown. And admitted. But the men said Mr. Shaw wasn’t at home that day. However, he showed us Bob’s Nobel Prize and Hollywood Oscar.

It was even more exciting when, sometime later, Bob Shaw knocked on our door – and was admitted. In our excitement we forgot to charge him half a crown.

I asked him how he’s won a Nobel Prize and an Oscar. He answered with a non-committal grunt. Such modesty. In fact, whatever I asked him (like “Isn’t it time you were going?”) he answered only with non committal grunts.

At last, I took him out for a walk. Being kind of absent-minded, it was possible I might lose him somewhere on the way. But he stuck with me to the top of Harrow Hill. Then a downpour poured down. We took shelter in the portico of a private house. The owner opened the door and asked if we’d care to wait in the hall. Bob Shaw gave a non-committal grunt. We went in – no charge.

When it stopped raining we were let out. Halfway down the Hill, I noticed Bob was carrying a barometer under his arm. It had been hanging in that hall. I said, jokingly, of course (of course):

“Is that how you won your Nobel Prize and Hollywood Oscar?”

I expected a non-committal grunt. Instead, Bob looked back up the Hill and said: “My Ghod, that was a Harrowing experience!”

I have been hoarding this crack for years, hoping to slip it into conversation at an appropriate chance. There never has been an appropriate chance. Sometimes I’ve tried to force one by asking people what school they went to, so that if they answered “Harrow” I could whip back:

“My God, that must have been a harrowing experience!”

But I never get the right answer. I don’t seem to know the Right Sort of People. Except Shaw, of course.

– *Hyphen* #25 (November 1960)

4. Anti-Social Notes

For more years than I have fingers I nursed a small private dream: that one day when Arthur Clarke was in full yap about Arthur Clarke I should discover some little knob on his knobbly person which, when turned, would switch him off. At least, switch the sound off. Came TV, and Ego Clarke, of course, was one of the first to peer at us from the far side of the screen. He and Gilbert Harding.

And my dream, in a way came true.

Every so often Ego's vocal chords were at my mercy. I could just reach out and turn a knob, and Arthur would be visibly talking but blessedly silent. Like a character in one of his own stories when all sounds were blotted out over a certain area (was it called "Silence Please"?). His lips would be opening and shutting soundlessly, and he looked like a goldfish in a bowl. Sometimes I'd amuse myself trying to lip-read, but I could only pick out the vowels: A, E, Y, O, U and always I.

The last time I saw him thus was in the springless spring of this summerless year. He was addressing the packed Festival Hall – something to do with this new-fangled space travel. After a time I reached out to extinguish him completely, for it makes no difference whether Arthur is audible or not: he's saying nothing in either case. And then Prince Philip suddenly appeared at Arthur's elbow and started talking also. I recognised him at once; he had slightly more hair.

I was transiently impressed by the better-class of company Arthur was keeping these days, then forgot about it until three days later when there was a ring at the front door. I opened it and Arthur was standing there. I said hastily:

"Not today, thank you."

And tried to close the door. But he'd got his feet inside. Val Cleaver, sometime Chairman of the British Interplanetary Society, was acting as his chauffeur that day. I peered out at the car and said:

"Don't tell me you didn't bring Phil!"

Arthur said, coldly: "Prince Philip and I aren't talking any more."

Then he explained that the Prince had asked him for his opinion on flying saucers. Arthur provided six scientific proofs of their non-existence

and Philip at once became markedly distant in his manner, for he believed in flying saucers.

Arthur said he'd talk him round some day.

Meanwhile, he preferred to talk about his favourite subject, and marched in and did so. He was incensed because the *Daily Mail*, reporting the Festival Hall meeting, had described him as "a bald scientist". Not "nearly bald" or "balding", but baldly "bald".

"I've a long way to go yet!" snarled Arthur, tugging at the one remaining tuft which is the only thing that distinguishes him from Sibelius. (Yes, I know Sibelius is dead.)

As he bestrode my hearthrug, with his tongue vibrating like a hummingbird's wing, and Val Cleaver as helpless as I to stop it, I itched for the little switch that wasn't there. At last he ran out of tape and left, after explaining that he'd merely dropped in for a cup of tea on his way to Damascus....

– *Hyphen* #22 (March 1959)

5. The Dubious Career of William F. Temple

It began with me, as I suppose it did with most of my fan generation, with Verne and Wells. I still think *The First Men in the Moon* the best of all lunar s-f for atmosphere and descriptive writing. I was 11 when I first read it. At 13, in a school essay, I was confidently predicting that man would reach the Moon well before the end of the century and the rocket was the answer. About that time (1927) I happened upon the old Hugo Gernsback large-size *Amazing Stories*. They were pages of sheer wonder to me then. I still have some of them, yellow with age – yellow as the corn I now discover them largely to be. But there were some pearls among them: “The Miracle of the Lily”, “The Ship That Turned Aside”, “The Gostak and the Doshes”. And others.

At 19 I started writing s-f and fantasy to amuse myself, and in the same year sold my first short story, “The Kosso”, about a pre-Triffid perambulating and man-murdering tree. It was included in a hard-cover collection of horror stories, *Thrills*. Then a s-f story was accepted by Gernsback for *Wonder Stories*, which folded just before it was due to appear. With the end of *Wonder*, there was no real s-f market until Walter Gillings, after a titanic battle with publishers’ apathy, brought out the British *Tales of Wonder*. I had a story in the second issue and in several subsequent ones. One of them, “The Smile of the Sphinx”, sought to persuade readers that cats were really visitors from the Moon, battenning upon our hospitality. Some people still mi-aow at me, and I got the blame for the cat on the sky-light at the last convention who watered the congregation.

About this time Arthur C. Clarke and I set up a flat in Grays Inn Road, Bloomsbury, and it became an open house for all s-f fans. The Science Fiction Association was running strongly then, there were regular meetings in our flat and plenty of irregular ones. The oddest people used to wander in at all hours of the day and night, from all parts of the country, especially as we were also running the British Interplanetary Society from there (Arthur was Treasurer and I was Editor of the B.I.S. *Journal*, and our den was the Council Chamber). Later, another fan, Maurice Hanson, came to live with us. He was

editor of the then leading British s-f fan-mag, *Novae Terrae*, and we were appointed assistant editors and chained to the duplicator, sometimes, under the whip, still turning its handle at 2 a.m.

By this time I was contributing to American magazines, including the revived *Amazing Stories*. One of my short stories in the latter was called “Four-Sided Triangle”. People seemed to like it – anyhow, it got a 50-dollar special award for the best-liked short in the issue.

The war clouds which had been gathering over the flat all through our occupation broke into a storm at last, and we had to scatter – in fact, the Army had already absorbed Maurice Hanson. It soon absorbed me, too, but not before I’d got married. Arthur went into the RAF.

On the troopship going out to Egypt I thought of writing a novel to take my mind off things. Willy Ley had opined that the plot of “Four-Sided Triangle” had been wasted as a short story, and should have been used for a novel. So I began it there and then on the troopship. The MSS. was half-finished when it was lost in a skirmish in the Libyan desert. I started again from the beginning, but progress was slow because the war kept butting in, in the form of the invasion of Sicily and then Italy. But somehow I got the MSS half-finished again before it was lost when my jeep was bogged and shelled on a wet, dark night on the Anzio beach-head. Third time lucky: I finished it somewhere up in the snowy Alps, with frozen fingers. But the war was over now. And the paper shortage was on, as I found when I came home. It was a long time before a publisher could be persuaded to gamble any paper on a little-known author of s-f.

Meanwhile, I returned to the Stock Exchange, where I worked before the war. I was now the father of two children, and their mouths always seemed to be open, either for yelling or for food, or for both. So to make a little extra I returned to writing for the American s-f mags, appearing in *Thrilling Wonder*, *Startling*, *Other Worlds*, *Worlds Beyond*, *Weird Tales*, *Super Science*, etc., and various anthologies. But it was for money, not love. Somehow, during the war, the will to write had left me. Writing had ceased to be fun: it had become grim, hard work, and I was never overfond of work.

John Long eventually published *Four-Sided Triangle* here in hard covers, following it with a crime novel of mine, *The Dangerous Edge*. Then the American hard-cover edition came out, followed by a *Galaxy* pocket-book edition. The French edition came out early this year, and the German edition is due at Xmas. A short Spanish edition came out in the Mexican

mag., *Los Cuentos Fantásticos*. At the time of writing, Exclusive Films are in course of filming the book, featuring Barbara Payton, Ronald Howard, Stephen Murray, and James Hayter. Although I was signed as technical advisor, most of my advice seems to have been ignored. I did not write the script, nor was I responsible for the casting. About all I seem responsible for is the title, so please don't try to hang anything on me.

The Hulton Press took up a deal of my time this year by getting me to edit a proposed Dan Dare Annual, which was to be a BIG thing. I collated first-class material from such people as Arthur C. Clarke, "John Christopher", E.C. Tubb, H.J. Campbell, Dr. J.G. Porter, and many leading scientific experts, and wrote the long main Dan Dare story myself. The book was dummied. It looked well. Then, in the way they have (they did it with the British s-f mag. for which H.J. Campbell prepared four issues for them) Hulton's changed their mind again. There was to be no *Dan Dare Annual* after all. Instead, there might be a small pocket-book using four of my articles and no fiction.

And so it goes on.

Apart from Dan Dare, I've done little actual writing this past year, though I have lead "novelets" coming up in *Other Worlds* and in the new *Nebula* mag. But the last of the film money is almost spent, and this morning I tripped over a wolf at the front door. He might have been just passing by, but to-day I've decided to remove the dust cover from the typewriter and get some of the rust out. It's as well to remember that pawnbrokers always look askance at rusty typewriters.

– *Space Diversions* #3 (October/November 1952)



Amazing Stories (November 1939)
Cover artwork by Harold W. McCauley

6. That Man Clarke

Inside my last *Inside* was a note from the editor: “Would you do that article on Arthur Clarke you mentioned to Ron a few years ago?”

If I ever did mention such a thing I must have been out of my mind.

Arthur Charles Clarke is an impossible subject, as the Queen of England once remarked. (Clarke had been hobnobbing with her husband, who was credulous about flying saucers at the time, and Clarke handled him firmly. This is true. Clarke told me so himself. “‘Now, look here, Phil,’ I said....”)

Once, long ago, when Clarke was unknown and the world was blissful in its ignorance, I shared a flat in London with him. It was a perfectly balanced arrangement: he did all the talking and I did all the housework. Both began to wear me down. In desperation one day I went out and married a girl and brought her to the flat to help me with the housework. But I couldn’t do a thing about Clarke’s talking, nobody could – then or now.

Correction. One man could: Clarke. But he was far too busy listening to himself talking about himself. I began to call him “Ego”. The name stuck. Which, unfortunately, Clarke’s tongue never did.

It was around that time that he began to write the Colossal American Novel. “Great” wasn’t great enough for Ego. Read his stuff, especially of that period, and you’ll find he went for the super-adjective every time. And it didn’t matter that he was British. He was always generous with himself. Clarke belonged to the world. In short, he was a one-man mankind. If the Americans wanted a Great or Colossal American Novel, he was willing to give them one.

The master opus was called *Raymond*. To begin with.

He wrote away at it on the kitchen table well into the small hours.

He drove himself hard and me mad. He neglected sleep, food, drink, and (of course) the housework. Around three every morning he’d kick open my bedroom door, kick me awake, and roar: “Listen to this, Bill, it’s naked genius.” Then he’d declaim from his manuscript, with the ink, sweat, blood and tears still wet on it.

It was all about a colossal spaceship which, some time at a colossal distance in the future, went out on a colossal journey to some colossal star....

It really moved me. Right out of bed, to throw him out.

Eventually he retitled it *Against the Fall of Night* and sold it to *Startling Stories*. Everyone was duly startled, especially the editor, Sam Merwin, who was so startled when he realised what he'd done, he resigned immediately.

Later, having found some new adjectives to stuff in, Ego rewrote it at great length, called it *The City and the Stars*, and sold it again.

He's currently rewriting it in three volumes. The new edition will be called *War and Peace*, and the Cinerama rights have already been sold. The premiere will be on the Moon in the crater named Bailly (naturally: it's the largest), It will be generally released on Jupiter.

I feel maybe I'm recording only the dark hours. There must have been odd moments when he was bearable, but they seem to have slipped through the holes in my memory. Surely he had some less trying, if not exactly redeeming, traits?

Well, he liked to have porridge for breakfast every day. Nothing wrong in that, except that he would shave with an electric razor at the same time, simultaneously reading his mail, the morning paper, while listening to the radio news and – naturally – talking. (About you know who.)

You see, he'd read Professor Whitehead, who maintained that the sign of the highest intelligence was the ability to perform six different operations simultaneously. Ego was merely demonstrating his intelligence.

He remains the only person I know able to digest hair-and-porridge.

Another trait: everything was a Challenge. (Hence *The Challenge of the Spaceship*, *The Challenge of the Sea*, etc.) He felt constrained to prove that he could best everybody and everything – except, unfortunately, it.

I taught him to play ping-pong on the kitchen table when it wasn't being used for the breakfast-time circus or having *Raymond* written on it. At first I beat him easily. But he improved with surprising rapidity, and soon was beating hell out of me. Later, I discovered he'd been spending every lunch-hour in a Civil Service games room, working up his game until he could prove he was Top Cat.

Again: being reasonably normal, when I came up out of the local subway station I used the Up escalator. But not Ego. He would make for the Down escalator, and race like mad up the descending stairs, trying to beat me to the upper level and show that he could give me a handicap and still win. He'd damn near kill himself with the effort. Often I had to let him win, just to save his life.

Okay, tell me now that I was a fool. I could have saved the world from

Clarke. He would never have lived to invent Telstar, and the world would never have been afflicted with the peril of Instant *Bronco*. Maybe, even, Russia and the States wouldn't be spitting Sputniks at each other. For he was Top Cat in the British Interplanetary Society. They used to meet in our flat to lay the foundations of space travel. God help me, I *encouraged* him and them: I used to hand around the doughnuts.

He's still at it. Only the other day I had a letter from him saying he'd been writing (in the intervals between having a round one hundred photos taken of him by *Playboy*) his reminiscences of those early days of the BIS in our flat. He'd just sold the said article to *Holiday* at a rate of some three hundred dollars per thousand words.

And here I am expected to write an article about him for nothing. I won't do it. Like I said, he's an impossible subject, anyhow.

Inside #2 (June 1963)

7. This Little O, the Earth

O

It's nothing.

It's everything.

An invocation. A cry of exquisite pain. Or exquisite pleasure. Or surprise. Or wonder. Or admiration. Or contempt.

St. Paul spoke of himself "As having nothing, and yet possessing all things."

It's the nothing you came from, and it's all you can take with you when you go.

In the beginning was the Word. The greatest poets chose its smooth and flawless shape for the word beginning their loveliest verses:

Keats: "O what can ail thee, knight-at-arms ..."

And Burns: "O my Luve's like a red, red rose ..."

And Shakespeare: "O Mistress mine, where are you roaming?"

It's the mark you got at school for composing your own lovely verses:

O.

It's the hoop you bowled along the street in those days. And the hoop you tossed over the alarm clock at the hoop-la stall. (But you never got the clock because the guy said the hoop wasn't lying flat.)

It's the golden hoop *he* slipped over your third finger on the most important day of your life (and then slipped off again to put on the *left* hand).

It is beauty – the ring through the nose of a cannibal.

It is Time Itself, in the form of an annular ring.

It is perfection. It is the O Giotto drew with one free sweep of his brush and sent to the Pope as proof sufficient of his skill.

And St. Augustine said, "The nature of God is a circle whose centre is everywhere and its circumference nowhere."

It is everything. And it is nothing. The sum on the credit side of your bank book. The hole in your pocket.

It is the chemical symbol for oxygen. You can live without food for a month. You can live without water for days. But you can't live for five minutes without O.

Emerson said, "The eye is the first circle; the horizon which it forms is

the second; and throughout nature this primary figure is repeated without end.”

But nature never used the O for a wheel. The credit for that adaptation is man’s alone. His main use of it is fixing it in groups of four on automobiles and running himself down. It is also the wheel on his cigarette lighter, which spins and produces beautiful sparks – but no light.

It’s a nickel, a dime, a silver dollar.

It’s a Flying Saucer.

It’s a revolving stage, the sawdust ring, the Pantheon. It’s πr^2 .

It might be your halo.

It is the globe itself. Shakespeare, in *Antony and Cleopatra*, refers to it as “The little O, the Earth.”

It is more than the Earth – it’s infinity. Travel away from Earth, out into space, and you can go on for ever. And ever. You can’t imagine going on for ever? And ever? Look at this O. Put a pencil point on its circumference – anywhere. (Charles Fort wrote: “One measures a circle, beginning anywhere.”) Trace the circumference around. And around. And around. Your pencil point can go on for ever. And ever. (Unfortunately, you won’t.) So is space curved in a great circle through the space-time continuum – ask Einstein.

Lots of circles are essential if you are to contemplate space. You put them after ordinary figures in batches of six, so; 1,000,000. Or 2,000,000. But if you want to contemplate the space beyond the Solar System (which, incidentally, is merely a series of O’s one inside the other) you must put your circles in batches of twelve – to begin with.

The nearest star is 25,000,000,000,000 miles away. There is a nebula in the constellation of Boötes which is 1,380,000,000,000,000,000,000 miles away.

There is one drawback about using these O’s to measure stellar distances. If you use enough of them, they don’t convey anything at all. The brain cannot grasp them. They become meaningless. They all add up to –

O.

Fantastic Worlds #3 (Spring 1953)

8. How to Write a Science Fiction Serial

Speech delivered at Festivention, the 1951 UK national convention held in London, at which the cover photograph was taken.

This story begins in 1960, when Man (for some unknown reason Man is always with a capital “M”) is entering the great Golden Age of Space-travel – that is, he’s being kicked and shoved and bullied from behind by one Arthur C. Clarke, who will never let anyone just sit down and rest and take things easy, least of all Man, who has to keep to Mr. Clarke’s schedule – or else.

The first real space-ship is about to make an attempt to get to the Moon. It’s an atomic-powered rocket, designed by the British Interplanetary Society, for a crew of two. If they succeed, these two will be the first men in the Moon. Needless to say, one of these men is Arthur C. Clarke – and that is only because even he can’t be both of them. In passing, I might mention that in the course of his career, Mr. Clarke somehow acquired the label of “Ego” Clarke – or perhaps I should say he *earned* that name.

Actually, of course, Clarke could pilot and navigate this whole ship single-handed, and indeed, he intends to. He’s only taking the other fellow along to do the housework. He picks William F. Temple for this honour. This isn’t strange. I’ve had a lot of experience in that type of work. There was one dark interlude in my life when I had to share a flat with Arthur C. Clarke. One day, when I’m strong enough, I’ll write a book about it. I think I’ll call it, *The Ego and I*.

Naturally, in those days, as now, Mr. Clarke couldn’t squander his peculiar talents on just housework. He lived a life of pure thought – well, thought, anyway. This higher cerebration was concerned exclusively with the problem of getting to the Moon. *His Moon*. Few people know that Mr. Clarke annexed the Moon in the name of Mr. Clarke – for the benefit of all mankind – the moment he first saw it through his nursery window. So, at the Flat, it was I, who had to do all the shopping, mending, and dusting – I had to dust the Great Brain itself twice a day.

Right, then, the rocket-ship is ready. Clarke and Temple get in – Clarke carrying a notice board saying “Trespassers Will Be Prosecuted – By Order –

The Grand Lunar”. Everyone starts to count – 10, 9, 8, 7, 6, 5, etc. Then someone takes away the number he first thought of, and the ship starts with a bang and a flash. And it mounts upon a vast pillar of smoke with the roar of a million Niagaras, a gleaming speck, while the Earth trembles at its passing ... (see any Arthur Clarke Sunday newspaper article).

Up and up the ship goes, to the top of the atmosphere. And now we come to Climax I – the ship won’t go any further. Despite Clarke having made it a law of nature that rockets will travel in a vacuum, it turns out, after all, that they won’t. To everyone’s astonishment, the ship starts to climb *down* the vast pillar of smoke, etc.

This is a terrible blow for Clarke. He’s spent half his lifetime expounding the principle of the recoil of the rocket, and in fact, he’s got a permanently frostbitten foot from continually demonstrating that principle with a machine gun on sheets of ice.

He says sharply to Temple: “This is quite impossible. Don’t believe it.”

But unfortunately, Temple *does* believe it. He knew that “up” was the way they *were* going, and it isn’t the way they’re going now. The ship is falling headlong back to Earth. There seems no escape – Temple is doomed to be smashed to pieces in that frightful impact. Is there any hope? Can he get out of it alive? (You’ll notice here that the author, to increase dramatic tension, skilfully concentrates on the more important character.) This is Climax I. To be continued next week ...

Next week, of course, we can’t just let Temple smash to pieces on the ground. It would spoil the story – to say nothing of spoiling Temple. So we have to think up a way out.

Clarke is pretty hot stuff with mathematics, as we know from his writings – I enjoyed every figure of his last article. So here he does some lightning calculations and finds that if the ship be rotated three times rapidly about its own axis at a height of 7.77 recurring miles above the Earth’s surface, it will, at that point in the gravitational field, owing to the Doppler Effect, the Nebular Hypothesis, and Bode’s Law, rotate through hyper-space, and so reach the Moon that way.

At that height, Clarke fires the side-jets and rotates the ship. The ship instantly vanishes and is never seen again by mortal eye.

The world honours the two martyrs – these valiant men who fell in the cause of space-travel, etc., these heroes in the vanguard of human progress, etc., these symbols of man’s unconquerable Mind, and so forth. And mankind

builds noble monuments to them, hallows their names in biographies, prints articles about them in the *Reader's Digest* and – Greatest honour – *New Worlds*.

And then mankind makes no more attempts to get to the Moon because (a) if Clarke couldn't do it, nobody else could hope to do it; (b) rockets don't work in a vacuum; (c) who the devil wants to go to the Moon, anyway? They just sit back and cultivate their gardens and enjoy the boon of a Clarke-less world.

A couple of generations pass, and now we borrow an angle from the film, *Things to Come*, and pick up the story again with the grandsons of Clarke and Temple respectively. (As Mr. Clarke isn't married, we shan't go too deeply into family history.)

Clarke III has inherited all of his grandfather's enthusiasm for getting to the Moon. Indeed, he wants to vindicate his grandfather's great project. Rockets won't work, but there must be other ways.

Now we introduce our solitary completely original idea. Clarke III happens upon a scientific discovery that was made as long ago as the 1930s, not that anyone took much notice then. Common or garden vegetables emit certain peculiar rays, called mitogenetic rays. These rays have a definite measurable thrust – not much, but detectable and measurable by scientific instruments. And easily the strongest emitter of these rays is the Spanish onion. It's really fierce! Clarke reasons, logically enough, that the larger the onion, the larger the output of these thrusting mitogenetic rays. So he employs a champion marrow-grower to grow a champion onion. This fellow is really good at his job and grows an onion as big as a house. Its output of rays is so strong, it develops such a thrust, that steel cables have to be fastened around the thing to hold it down.

Clarke III conscripts Temple III. More housework. Also, he shoots him a line about, "It's our duty to carry on the traditions of our grandfathers and conquer the Moon for the benefit of me and all humanity, etc." In fact, he sounds just like his father's old man.

So the two scoop out a small egg-shaped cavity in the interior of the onion, fix it up as a cabin for navigation, and get in. The cables are thrown off. Propelled by the rays from the onion, the onion-ship rises rapidly and speeds off toward the Moon.

Now we're getting near the end of the instalment. We've got to provide Climax II. So we borrow a remarkable idea from a remarkable film called

Rocket Ship XM. The crew has underestimated the speed of their ship. It misses the Moon altogether and flies on into outer space – toward Mars.

For the next instalment we can work up towards a climax over the food situation. Naturally the voyages have taken only enough food for the short trip to the Moon. Now they're committed to the far longer trip to Mars. They run out of food. The last baked bean is gone. They're forced to live on the onion itself. They start nibbling at the walls.

The cabin becomes larger and larger. But never large enough for them. Not when they're eating onion all the time. Their respective breaths smell of onion so strongly that the atmosphere becomes insupportable. They're choking each other.

Then Temple remembers that in the medicine chest there's a bag of cachous. Faint and weak, almost overcome, he crawls toward it. Will he reach it in time? Climax III. To be continued next week. If your breath has a smell, you can't feel well.

Next week, of course, the cachous *are* reached in time. The voyage goes on. At last the ship begins to fall towards Mars. The two men have now eaten so much of the body of the ship, that the output of rays has fallen enormously. It's not strong enough to resist the gravity pull of Mars.

The ship lands with a bounce, settling in a patch of queer-looking plants, like lettuces thirty feet tall.

Now just about here, we ought to introduce another original idea just to show that we don't borrow all the time. But new ideas don't grow on trees – nor in lettuces. However, it's quite easy to form an artificial new idea. One of the commonest ways to get a reputation for startling originality is to take something that's very familiar and merely turn it back to front.. Anything suddenly presented backwards looks novel, and is often mistaken for a sign of wit or genius. George Bernard Shaw built his reputation for profundity and wit largely by the employment of this trick. So did G.K. Chesterton and Oscar Wilde. It's because there's always some gleam of an unrealized truth in the converse of the accepted and familiar. For instance, I know only too well from my own experience the truth in Oscar Wilde's typical remark: "Work is the curse of the drinking classes."

I've noticed that Mr. Clarke in his stories very often employs this method. Sometimes he goes the whole hog, turns *himself* back to front, and talks out of the back of his neck.

So here we need to present *some* inhabitants of Mars with a new angle.

We want something *different*. At first, I thought of making these Martians all vegetarians, but that seemed tame – especially as in this country we’re all vegetarians now. So then I applied this reversal technique. Instead of Man Eats Vegetable, let’s have Vegetable Eats Man.

Temple III and Clarke III look out of their ship and see that these huge lettuces are slowly perambulating around on their roots. Then, to their horror, they see neat little rows of living humanoid heads on the ground. And it dawns on them that these are the heads of men and women buried in the earth up to their heads.

A lettuce comes along, and with its strong leaves pulls up a man, much as one pulls up a carrot, and begins to eat him. Temple and Clarke shrink back in terror.

Now the lettuces notice this great new vegetable – the onion – which has suddenly appeared like magic in their midst. It is a vegetable like themselves but so much bigger, so much more beautiful, and so silent and strong – very strong. So they imagine it must be the god of all the vegetables and begin to worship it as such, and they lay offerings before it – men and women slightly chewed.

Temple and Clarke are still cowering inside, too frightened to move. Now it’s time for us to work up the suspense for Climax IV. Temple and Clarke dare not get out of the onion. They have to stay in there – but they also have to eat. And there’s nothing to eat but the onion. As they nibble away inside, its walls get thinner and thinner. It’s an awful predicament. The choice is between starving to death or eating away their camouflage.

At last the ship is reduced to little more than a balloon of onion-skin fabric, and it begins to waver in and out in time with their breathing. The lettuces start to take notice, thinking the onion is making signs at them, and they begin to wave back. Temple and Clarke, scared of the attention they’re drawing, start a system of planned breathing – that is, one inhales as the other exhales, so that the onion-skin remains distended. But they get out of synchronization. They both start inhaling together. The walls of the ship begin to flap wildly. The lettuces approach to investigate, reach out with their leaves ... Climax IV.

Final Instalment.

The leaves of one of the lettuces suddenly part, and a crowd of men come rushing out, brandishing ray-guns, and blast the other lettuces out of existence. Their own lettuce was merely an imitation one, so that they could

creep up within ray-gun range of the real carnivorous ones. In short, their plant was a plant.

These newcomers dig up their own kind and dust them off. Clarke III and Temple III break out of their ship, and their rescuers are surprised but friendly. The leader of the men looks at them curiously and asks: “Ooway areyay ooyay?”

Clarke and Temple are amazed. English backslang.

They’re conducted to a Martian city. Clarke III is told that he’s to be interviewed personally by the Master. He’s led into a long hall and left alone with the Master, who’s sitting on a throne at the far end of the hall. He approaches. The figure on the throne is quite bald but has a long white beard.

Here we have a fine chance to steal a bit from the film *Lost Horizon*.

Clarke looks at the old man and sees that coyly peeping from under the beard is ... a frostbitten foot!

In awe, he drops to his knees and says: “You are old, Father William – I mean Grandfather. It’s incredible. You are still alive after 100 years.”

Then old Arthur Clarke tells his story. He has difficulty in speaking straightforward English. He has a tendency to slip into backslang. It appears that when he rotated the rocket-ship and journeyed through the fourth dimension, he and Temple got their speech-centres reversed in hyper-space. Also, not being able to count, he miscalculated and rotated the ship only twice instead of three times, and it was flung through hyper-space at Mars instead of the Moon.

They’d found the Martian people friendly, when they’d dug up a few and taught them their idea of English. They also found that these men and women were being grown by the lettuces for the purpose of being eaten, and the lettuces were so greedy that there weren’t too many of these people left. So Temple gave them a little talk on the facts of life and told them that they were silly to allow themselves to be grown by others, and that it was much more fun growing themselves. So they tried it – and liked it.

And Clarke and Temple took over the burden of reviving this vanishing race of humanoids, and when they had sufficient numbers, they declared war on the tyrannous lettuces and liberated their own kind.

“But the building of a great race from a handful of people is a colossal task,” says old Clarke to his grandson, “and Temple died from exhaustion. I’ve been carrying on alone, extending my life with faith, hope, and an elixir. But my day is almost done, my son. In your hands I must now place the

future of Shangri-la. Here is the key of the production room.”

He gets up, trips over his beard, falls, and dies.

Clarke III walks sadly and soberly away, carrying the key.

Temple III is waiting anxiously in the anteroom. “Well,” he says, “is he going to let us have the porters?”

In a quiet hushed voice Clarke tells him the story of their grandfathers. And he adds: “An immense responsibility now rests on us. We must dedicate ourselves to this task of spreading seeds of mankind over Mars.”

And Temple says gravely: “Yes. Our duty lies clearly before us. We must not shirk it. The third door on the right, did you say?”

They square their shoulders resolutely, and set out to fulfil their momentous destiny.

The End

You’ll notice that the final climax lifts the entire story on to a nobler, more inspiring plane than the previous smaller climaxes, which were only sensational in essence. And that is as it should be.

Well, I hope you’ve now got some idea of how to construct a s-f serial. And if there is any editor who is sufficiently interested to commission me to write this one – well, he can always contact me at the bar.

– *Rhodomagnetic Digest* #17 (November/December 1951)



*Bill Temple and Walt Willis at Ella Parker's flat, 1964
Photo by Wally Weber*

Afterword

For those of you wondering what happened to the “Three Men in a Flat” ...

After being sent to France with the BEF on the outbreak of WWII, Maurice Kimpton Hanson was among the thousands of young men evacuated from the beaches at Dunkirk in May/June 1940. He was born in 1918, so at the time he would have been 22 years old. Hanson was one of the first British fans (if not the first) to be conscripted, and was not demobilised until early in 1946 after serving in the armed forces for six and a half years. He drifted away from fandom soon after the war but kept up a correspondence with D.R. Smith (his old friend from their days as fans together in Nuneaton in the 1930s) until his death in May 1981 at his lodgings in London (his home was in Kettering). Hanson, who never married, was the librarian in the transport library at Imperial College. To this day the college’s 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”. The prize was established in his memory in 1983 from money raised by friends and colleagues after his death.

I don’t think I need tell you what Arthur C. Clarke went on to do.

As for Bill, he worked his day job in the City while continuing to write and sell SF in his spare time. Eventually, he and Joan moved down to Folkestone on the Kent coast, where Bill spent the rest of his days (Joan moved to Edinburgh after his death in 1989). On 12th November 1987, at their invitation, Vince Clarke and I visited Bill and Joan in their Folkestone home when we were doing research for *Then*, my history of SF fandom in the UK. It was a gloriously sunny day, but torrential rains over the previous few had left the fields our train passed through heavily flooded “submerging large sections of landscape and producing Ballardian surrealist vistas” according to my diary! This was less than a month after the Great Hurricane in which the country lost an estimated fifteen million trees, and many of the roofs of Folkestone still showed signs of the damage the winds had inflicted on them. From my diary:

“Bill and Joan were charming hosts. Though Bill wasn’t as mobile as he’d have liked and kept losing the thread of conversations, they supplied a lot of useful information.”

One thing Bill told me that I never used but remember well concerned the BIS. When that organisation was reconstituted after the war, those doing so reissued the membership numbers, assigning themselves the low ones that had previously belonged to early members. Bill was one of those early members and now found himself with a much higher number, something he was still aggrieved about all those years later.

This was the only time I ever met Bill and Joan. Bill lent us issues of *Novae Terrae* that Vince didn't have in his collection, and I remember reading these on the journey back to London that evening. Now, thirty years later, I'm editing this volume, my tribute to someone who helped create the fandom I know and love.

– Rob Hansen, October 2017



*Bill & Joan Temple in Folkestone,
1987*

Photo by Rob Hansen

Original Appearances

- “Anti-Social Notes” – *Hyphen* #22 (March 1959) edited by Walt Willis.
- “The British Fan in His Supernatural Haunt” – *Gargoyle* #3 (December 1940) edited by Dave McIlwain.
- “Ted Carnell” – *Novae Terrae* #23 (May 1938) edited by Maurice K. Hanson.
- “Caught in a Convention” – *The Whitcon Booklet* (1948) edited anonymously, perhaps by Vinç Clarke; and *Fantasy Review* #15 (Summer 1949) edited by Walter Gillings.
- “Celluloid Resurrection” – *Novae Terrae* #25 (August 1938) edited by Maurice K. Hanson.
- “Ken Chapman” – *Novae Terrae* #26 (September 1938) edited by Maurice K. Hanson.
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- “Arthur C. Clarke” – *Novae Terrae* #24 (June 1938) edited by Maurice K. Hanson.
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- “The Flat Truth” – *Forerunner*, “a preface to *Gargoyle* #3” (October 1940) edited by Dave McIlwain.
- “Home from the War” – *VOM (Voice of the Imagi-Nation)* #50 (July 1947) edited by Forrest J Ackerman.

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- “Walter H. Gillings” – *Novae Terrae* #27 (November 1938) edited by Maurice K. Hanson.
- “That Man Clarke” – *Inside* #2 (June 1963) edited by Jon White.
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- “The Smile of the Sphinx” – *Tomorrow* #7 (Autumn 1938) edited by Douglas W.F. Mayer for the SFA.
- “SFA London Branch Meeting Reports” – *Novae Terrae* #21 (March 1938), #25 (August 1938), #26 (September 1938), #27 (November 1938) and #29 (January 1939), all edited by Maurice K. Hanson.
- “This Little O, the Earth” – *Fantastic Worlds* #3 (Spring 1953), edited by Sam Sackett.
- “Eric C. Williams” – *Novae Terrae* #22 (April 1938) edited by Maurice K. Hanson.

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More about Bill Temple online:

- *The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction*
http://www.sf-encyclopedia.com/entry/temple_william_f
- *Fancylopedia 3*
<http://fancylopedia.org/william-f-temple>
- Internet Speculative Fiction Database
<http://www.isfdb.org/cgi-bin/ea.cgi?1241>
- Special Temple issue of *Lan's Lantern*
https://fanac.org/fanzines/Lans_Lantern/Lans_Lantern29.pdf

The End

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Table of Contents

Temple at the Bar

Contents

Foreword

Matters of Interest

1. The Diary of a Supper
2. The Smile of the Sphinx
3. SFA London Branch Meeting Reports

The British Fan in His Natural Haunt

1. Eric C. Williams
2. Ted Carnell
3. Arthur C. Clarke
4. Maurice K. Hanson
5. Ken Chapman
6. Walter H. Gillings

The Days of the Flat

1. The British Fan in His Supernatural Haunt
2. Celluloid Resurrection
3. Chingford Chiaroscuro
4. An Outsider at a Technical Meeting
5. On the British Interplanetary Society
6. The Flat Truth

The War Years

1. Despatches
2. A Letter from the Front
3. Home from the War

Post-War

1. Caught in a Convention
2. How It All Began
3. The Hyphen Letters
4. Anti-Social Notes
5. The Dubious Career of William F. Temple
6. That Man Clarke
7. This Little O, the Earth
8. How to Write a Science Fiction Serial

[Afterword](#)
[Original Appearances](#)
[Photo Credits and Links](#)