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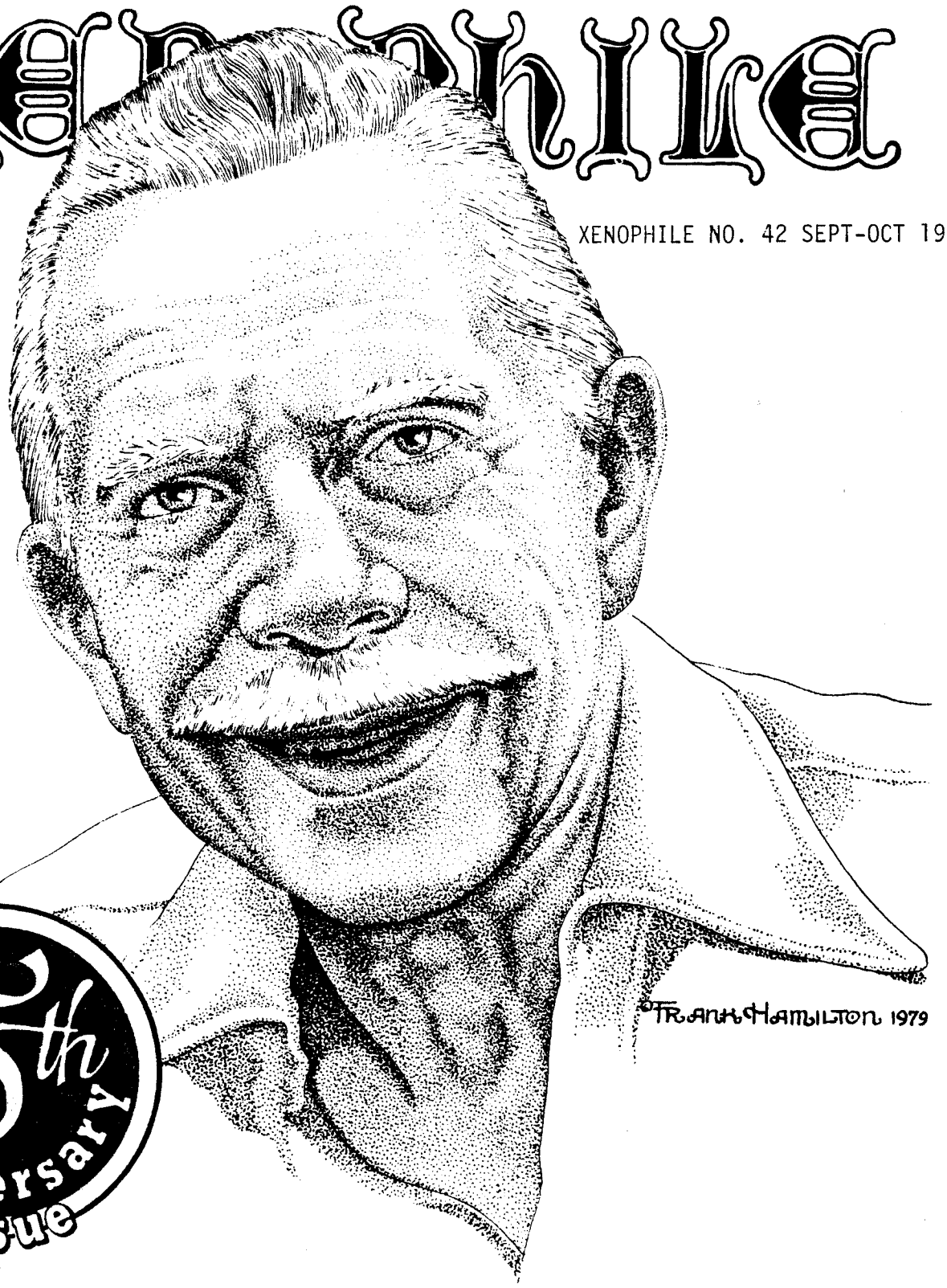

5th anniversary issue

Walter M. Baumhofer

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L. Ron Hubbard, A Living Legend

by Virgil Wilhite and Patricia Barnes Mintz

L. Ron Hubbard is also known to fiction audiences of the 30's and 40's as Rene' Lafayette, Kurt Von Rachen and a host of other names. Over 22 million copies of his fiction works have been sold over the years. He has published fiction in 90 publications, and at times he supplied entire magazines with stories, writing under different names and using different styles. His record shows over 94% of his work accepted by editors and publishers first time out. He would work three days a week, three months out of the year and make enough to live on the rest of the time. And he considered this quite a game.

Hubbard, like his characters, was adventurous. There seem to be very few occupations that he hasn't tried, from top sergeant in the Marines to radio crooner, newspaper reporter, goldminer, movie director, explorer, photographer, glider pilot, businessman, consultant, scientific researcher and educator. His stories did not come from sitting in an arm chair and philosophizing about the way they should run. Hubbard drew from a wealth of experiences and professional endeavors.

The first pulp story that Hubbard ever sold went to Leo Margulies' **Thrilling Adventures Magazine** of the Standard Magazines, Inc. Later, Margulies published Hubbard's "price of a hat," which was a game between Hubbard and Arthur J. Burks. The story is fully documented in two issues of **Writer's Digest**, December, 1935 and January, 1936. The gist of it was that Hubbard and 5 other writers all went to Burks' apartment one day because Burks said that if the writers picked out any object in his apartment, he would give them the plot of a story which they could then sell. Hubbard picked out a waste paper basket which Burks told him to put on his head. He went on to say that it reminded him of a *Kubanka*, a Russian fur hat. And he suggested the outline of a story. **Writer's Digest** offered to publish the results of each writer present telling what he did with Burks' idea and how the writer got it published. Hubbard did so and entitled his reply article, "Magic Out of a Hat." At the end of this article, Hubbard challenged Burks to get him to write a story out of the smallest particle of dust he could find in the apartment, and ends up by saying that Burks would probably sit right down and make a horror story out of it.

Hubbard tells us that, "I was born in Nebraska and three weeks later I went to Oklahoma. From there to Missouri, then to Montana. When I was a year old, they say I showed signs of settling down, but I think that is merely rumor." He goes on to say, "and it was not until I was sixteen that I headed for the China Coast."[1]

He was born in Tilden, Nebraskm in 1911 and grew up on a large cattle ranch in Montana. His mother, Dora May Hubbard (nee Waterbury de Wolfe) was very well educated, which was rare for a woman at that time. She, in fact, helped educate Ron. By the time he was 3½ years old he could read and write. And, by the time he was 12, he had read most of the world's great classics.

At age 20, Ron supported himself by writing, and soon established himself as a professional photographer and technical-articles writer in aviation and sports magazines including **The Sportman Pilot.** At the age of 25, he worked in Hollywood as a screen-writer on several films, including **The Secret of Treasure Island.**

One of Hubbard's early, exciting activities was glider flying. As a student at George Washington University Engineering School, he learned to fly. In **The Pilot,** July, 1934, it is noted that "he would come out of spins at an altitude of thirty inches and thumb his nose at the undertakers who used to come out to the field and titter." They called him "Flash" (he had flaming red hair) and it is said that he "made women scream and strong men weep by his aerial antics.[2]

Captain L. Ron Hubbard, as he is known by members of the Explorers Club of New York, is also famous for his yarns which begin or end with an exaggerated disclaimer that this could not possibly have happened and then goes on to tell a tale such as "It Bears Telling."[3] He had been fighting off rumors, he says, that he had been picking wrestling matches with and kissing Kodiak bears. He swears that this is not true and then tells a tale about some other poor fellow, and winds up the whole amusing story by coming back to his own problems of being teased from New York to Alaska, and asks that everyone please lay off.

In 1931 Hubbard headed the Caribbean Motion Picture Expedition and in 1932, at age 21, he conducted the West Indies Minerals Survey which made a complete mineralogical survey of Puerto Rico. By the time he was 29, because of his explorations and journeys, he was proposed Member of the prestigious Explorers Club of New York. He was duly elected a Member in 1940, and in the same year was awarded his first Explorers Club flag for conducting the Alaskan Radio Experimental Expedition. He also took his ship *Magician*, which he nicknamed "Maggie," along the coasts of Alaska among unfrequented navigational passages and islands in the northwest ocean waters.

Some of Hubbard's fans used to wonder how he got such brilliant color description which characterized his stories in far away locations. The answer, of course, was that he had been there. He did travel extensively, especially in the far East and had the experience of studying with the most knowlegeable men of those cultures. And he was often called on to justify facts in his stories. He published a story, "Yellow Loot," with **Thrilling Adventures** in 1934 and in a letter to his readers he explains how the Chinese Great Wall was built and how big it is and how the emperor of China would expend a million workmen and criminals at a time, telling them to work until they dropped. He tells us that six hundred thousand of them died, and their bodies were entombed in the Great Wall. The loot itself apparently is still floating around the world, though most of it ended up in Lama temples in the Western Hills outside of Peking

Ron Hubbard has a very definite pholosophy about how to write—or about how to do anything else in the world for that matter—and that is to do it. He does not believe in suffering over a page for the sake of art. He once astounded a writing class at Harvard by telling them that no writer knows if he has a style until he has written a couple hundred-thousand words. Dickens, he says, wrote 5,000 words a day, and it is a misconception to think a writer should write painfully and with blood for 7 years. Most students, he says, are not properly grooved in to learning how to write because many teachers are failed writers and are engaged in making other would-be writers fail also. There is a way to write, Hubbard says, but it isn't taught. He says that he would write fifty-thousand words a month at least or his idea machine would break down, and that the best stories he ever did were done at a two to three-thousand words and hour clip which includes getting up, walking around the chair, lighting the pipe, etc.. He makes a strong claim that the greatest writers write at a phenomenal speed, and that it takes lots of physical energy to write. He also feels that writing is important to a society because the whole society runs on romances and imaginations of the writer.[4] He is widely known for his quote: "A culture is as great as its dreams and its dreams are dreamed by artists."

Buckskin Brigades was originally written in 1937 and was his first published novel. This novel takes the glory away from the fur traders of the north, and standing on "a library full of facts," he sets forth the robbing, debauching, betraying fur traders, "not as they are thought to have been, but as they were."[5]

It is a monument to the heroism of the Blackfeet (Pikuni) Indian nation which Hubbard grew up along side. As a child, he became blood brother to the Pikuni. The hero of the novel is a white Indian named Yellow Hair who has grown up as a member of the tribe. Because of his love for a Blackfoot maiden, for whom he needs more wealth than he has, he undertakes a dangerous mission for the tribe. He joins the white traders at Fort Chesterfield for a season to learn about their treacherous intentions with regard to the Blackfeet. Here we meet the antagonist, McGlincy, a drunken scoundrel in charge of the rape of not only the Indians, but the Northwesters' competitors, the Hudson Bay Company. Yellow Hair's only friend through the ordeal is one Father Marc Lettau, whose sense of humor and loyalty gets them through an otherwise unredemptive hell. The high point comes when Yellow Hair is forced to deliver a mestage to his people, lined up mounted warriors standing strung out along the bluffs above the fort. Instead of inviting his tribe into

what he is sure is a trap, he sings out the order to charge. In an instant, hundreds of Indians are killing off white men and vice versa. Yellow Hair gets his personal revenge when he grabs a cannon and blasts the gate so the Indians can enter the fort. The only refuge for the hated McGlincy and party is the trading house in the center of the fort. There they take refuge, but are covered with four cannons. This is a turn-the-tables victory for Yellow Hair, who was earlier caught by McGlincy in the same situation. In the end, Yellow Hair secures guns and ammunition that his tribe needs. He is awarded the grand coups. And he gets the Sits-beside-him woman who has held out for him all the time. The novel is as fresh now as it was when it was written, and it is full of the author's keen perception of life and his awareness of man's inhumanity to man.

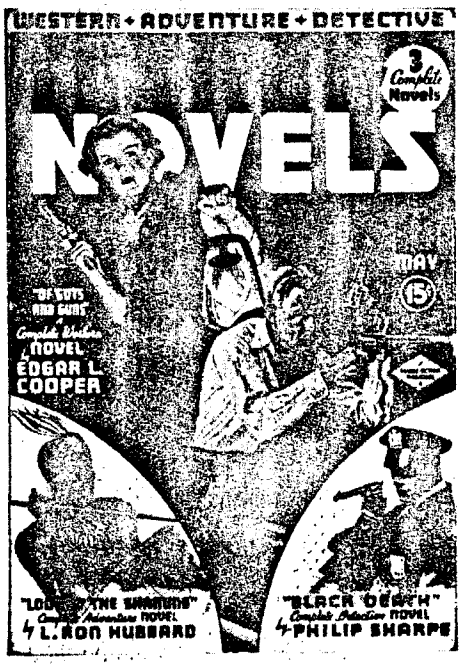
And yet, in Hubbard's fiction is the recurring theme that mankind and ethics will win out. His **Returns to Tomorrow**[8] is a strange tale about a long passage which takes men on a journey that travels so fast time is capsulized for those aboard the ship, though time moves on at its regular pace on earth. This is a tale of the unwilling capture and training of a bright young engineer-surveyor who is broughtaboard the *Hound of Heaven* and molded to take over command of the ship one day.

It is harrowing for Alan Corday, upon his first return to New Chicago, planet earth, to find everything unrecognizable and his sweetheart in her dotage, dwelling in the fantasies of the hunsband and children she thinks she had after year upon year of waiting for his return. Each time back, the earth is in worse shape, and Corday learns to hate the long passage, the ship, its captain and its trade. This is not without humor, as the passage is so long that the cargo is often out-dated by the time they return to earth, or else the cheapest of substances are now selling for the richest of prices. In any event, the hated captain dies and leaves the ship's passage to Corday, along with a farewell note that reverses our opinion of him and professes the tone of the author. The long passage, the captain writes, safeguards man, a microcosm of them, against all the horrendous changes man and other things are putting earth through. It's a responsibility, he says, to carry on so that man will survive to help earth in order not to become overrun by technology, Achnoids or any crawling things. In the last, the *Hound of Heaven* must carry the hope of man.

We have wandered into talking about L. Ron Hubbard's science fiction for which he is perhaps the most well known in the pulps. His science fiction encompasses the past, the future, the depressing, the hopeful, the ugly, the humorous, as well as airy fantasy. In **Seven Steps to the Arbiter**, written in 1949, Hubbard wrote the famous **Star Wars** bar scene with his description of Spaceman's Rest:

> "Humanoids, demi-humans and decayed humans were here, all reeking with dak and Old Space Ranger. In an atmosphere no one could breathe, full of drinks no man could digest, telling each other things no mortal should hear, the spacemen were having their version of a very fine time. A sleepy orchestra composed wholly of outlandish fish-scale people sawed outraged notes through the babble and clang."[7]

Like the heroes of **Star Wars**, but a good 28 years earlier, Christopher Randolph Kellan finds a friend, a captain and a ship which will spirit him away with his cargo just in time, with watch dogs right on his heels.



One of the funniest of Hubbard's science fiction stories is **Typewriter in the Sky**,[8] a tale of a writer's friend who disappears from the writer's New York bathroom into the story the writer is writing, and whose fate is determined by the typewriter he hears buzzing in the sky. The reader reads the story as it is being typed, only we are following it from the point of view of the writer's friend (Mike de Wolf) who is now in the story. It seems that when the typewriter is not humming in the sky, our hero is free to make decisions and do what he pleases. And this is a world of pirates and doubloons, the Spanish Main, a beautiful maiden, and our part-Irish hero must defend an island from the wicked Spaniards. But all of his plans are foiled when the typewriter starts to hum again. The plot gets reversed, the other side starts to win, etc., etc.. After battling with the situation for a hundred and fifty pages, the hero's world explodes and he finds himself on the streets of New York again. He has returned, much to his astonished relief, but to the disappointment of those of us who have suspended disbelief in this amusing dilemma. In this tale more than in any other, we get a glimpse of Hubbard, the tall tale spinner, master of humor and master of suspense, but one who knows a great deal about the human mind, human emotion and its reactions.

Suspense, Hubbard says in an article on the subject in **Author and Journalist**, 1937, is what makes or breaks a story and is responsible for more rejects than almost anything else. He says that suspense is better than fight action, which is just a gap filler. A fight has to have an effect upon the characters or the reader will just say, "Well, what of it?" He goes on to say:

> "There is not, unhappily, any firm from which you can take out a suspense insurance policy. The only way you can do it is to make sure that the reader is sitting there tensely wondering which of two or three momentous things is going to happen first. If you can do that, adroitly to some manuscripts which have come bouncing back, they may be made to stay put."[9]

A suspenseful collection of dangerous occupations that Hubbard lived through and then wrote stories about is under negotiation to be reprinted late this year by Theta Publishing Company. The series originally appeared in **Argosy** in the 30's. Some of the readers wrote in to the magazine discussing the authenticity of the nomenclature used in these various occupations. Hubbard explained in an editorial column of **Argosy** that the nomenclature varied depending on what region the occupation came from. He challenged himself to live through these dangerous occupations so as not to get caught up in the common writer's habit of using familiar, though sometimes innacurate, facts and terminology for story after story which can give the reader a lot of innacurate information. Of course he says it wasn't always pleasant, gathering accurate data. Like going down off the end of a dock for "Deep-Sea Diver." It scared him to death. But, he says, it was lots of fun. And in the end he had stories chock full of technical descriptions, and he was ready to defend them.[10]

In 1941, as Master of Sail Vessels for the U.S. Navy Hydrographic Office, he was ordered to the Philippines. He spent the early part of the war in the South Pacific. In 1944 he was crippled and blinded and ended up in Oak Knoll Naval Hospital where he spent nearly a year. During the time in order to help himself recover, he developed techniques from his education in Freud's works and his knowledge of nuclear physics, along with his studies in Eastern philosophies. He did completely recover and returned to writing.

One fascinating arm of fiction writing is the chance to develop a dramatic possibility out of an historical situation where nobody knows the facts of the matter because of a lack of

(Contd. on p. 130)

Rick Ballard and the professor mount a vigil to keep the evil entity away. Later, they try to best the creature in his hideaway.

The story builds up in expectation effectively, with a harrowing scene as Tholl and Rick enter the house in search of Quoy, and find him in slumber. Tholl gives Rick the stake to kill him with, but at the last minute Rick stops himself . . . just in time to avoid a deadly mistake, for the sleeper turns out to be Tholl, while the pseudo-Tholl was in reality Quoy.

This Harry Bates-edited fantasy publication was not around long enough to establish its own familiar names, although, as we have seen, several authors appeared more than once. Among them was Robert E. Howard, with "People of the Dark" (June 1932), a Conan tale, and "Cairn on the Headland" (January 1933). In the January (final) issue was a letter by Clark Ashton Smith that proved more entertaining than his story in the same issue ("The Second Interment").

One of the readers earlier had asked for more characterization in the stories. Smith takes exception to his suggestion. He writes: "In a tale of the highest imaginative horror, the main object is the creation of the supernatural, extra-human atmosphere; the real actors are the terrible arcanic forces, the esoteric cosmic malignities; and the element of human character, if one is to achieve the highest, most objective artistry, is properly somewhat subordinated, as it cannot be subordinated in a tale of ordinary and natural happenings.

For this reason, I fear that the weird tale, if written as psychological analysis, would tend to forfeit some of its highest and rarest values." He singles out Algernon Blackwood and Walter de la Mare as examples of emphasis on character. In their stories, he says, he fails to find "the highest imaginative horror, the overwhelming sweep of black, gulf-arisen wings, such as is conveyed in the best tales of Ambrose Bierce, Poe and H.P. Lovecraft, where human character is treated more briefly and subversively."

Smith's letter provided food for thought and, unintentionally, served as a sign-off for **Strange Tales** – which, in a brief seven issues, story-for-story offered more good material than any other weird magazine of comparable length.

END

HUBBARD **(Contd. from p. 135)**

records, or because of a destruction which prevented witnesses to do the reporting. Such is the case with "Mr. Tidwell, Gunner," which appeared in **Adventure**, September, 1936. This is the story of Mr. Tidwell, a schoolmaster, whose duty during battle was in the cockpit (the place below the waterline where midshipmen slept during peace and surgeons dressed the wounded during battle). Mr. Tidwell held down the men while they were being dissected.

Hubbard stuck to known facts in this story. It includes Nelson's shout, "Now for a monument in Westminster Abbey," referring to St. Vincent's, "By this time tomorrow I shall have gained a peerage or Westminster Abbey." We also hear Perry's, "Don't give up the ship!" and Dewey's, "Damn the torpedoes."[11]

Apparently there are three historical versions of the explosion of the *Orient* which began the fall of the fleet, and after that the fleet was taken ship by ship. A poem, "A Boy Stood on the Burning Deck," was written about it, and three historians give three different reasons for the cause of the explosion, so Hubbard wrote his own version in which Mr. Tidwell, the schoolmaster, threw his bomb.

Present day readers of L. Ron Hubbard's fiction must know him best for **Ole Doc Methuselah.**[12]. This series of science fiction stories first appeared in the 40's under the pen name Rene' Lafayette. Ole Doc Methuselah is a Soldier of Light. There are only six hundred Soldiers of Light, and there are about one hundred and seventy-six trillion human beings throughout the galaxy. The Soldiers give allegiance to no government and answer to no one. They are dedicated to the ultimate preservation of mankind no matter what cataclysm, but they do not take part in any political activity.

Ole Doc's adventures, aboard his trusty ship, the *Morgue*, give Hubbard's readers some of their favorite tales. Even the most sinister adversary thinks twice before trying to fool a Soldier of Light who is easily recognized by the crossed gold ray rods of the Univesal Medical Society. These identify the outside of the *Morgue* and are chained around Old Doc's throat as an unmistakable sign of the greatest of knowledge of men.

Hippocrates, squat 6-armed gypsum eater, is Doc's companion and has memorized everything he has read and filed it away in his photographic memory for future use when helping his master out of some rather sticky scrapes. Of course Hippocrates thinks that Ole Doc likes pretty girls too much. They are about the only thing that distract him from his more serious work in the galaxy.

"Fear," has been remarked by many as the best story in its genre. The craftsmanship with which Hubbard relates the lurid workings of an obsessed mind after a murder which can not be remembered (nor the victims yet dead in this mind), excels the usual story plot no matter how suspenseful.[13] In "Fear," the reader identifies with the main character, Professor James Lowry, and reads with curiosity the italicized comments of some demons at work (in Lowry's mind?) to destroy him. The end is told skillfully and without sentiment. A warning to first time readers of "Fear": Do not read the end first.

We are not attempting to evaluate the various periods and styles used by L. Ron Hubbard in his writing from the 30's through the 50's. From the tongue in cheek shirt sleeve English used in tall tales and bear stories, to the philosophical and sometimes seemingly impossible syntheses of incompatible elements such as seamanship, sorcery, mythology and astrology, each article, story or novel that Hubbard wrote had its own purpose and he wrote each one in the way that purpose would best be achieved. Of course there is some evident continuity because of the times during which the author wrote. For instance, erotic themes are very subdued—suggestive rather than descriptive. This is a pleasant relief in comparison with the overdone explicit sex of today's popular novel. Also, Hubbard's sentences are sentences. He knows how to communicate and doesn't get involved with the illogical, avante-garde writing many contemporary writers use. He has the ability to create more than one kind of effect. It is not exaggeration to say that most modern short story writers achieve only one effect, and that is a quandary of depression at the end of their stories. It is a pleasure to read early Hubbard stories (he is still writing today) and feel excited or uplifted or frightened or whatever he meant you to feel. Most people would say that to their favorite writers—a good reason to make a writer your favorite.

Footnotes

1. **"The Camp Fire," Adventure,** October 1, 1935, p. 117.
2. "Who's Who," **The Pilot,** July, 1934, p. 13.
3. **Through Hell and High Water,** Robert M. McBride & Company, 1941.
4. From "Study and Education," a taped lecture, 6406c18 Saint Hill Special 2, copyright, 1964.
5. From the preface, **Buckskin Brigades,** Theta Publishing Co., St. Louis, Mo., 1977, p. vii.
6. **Return to Tomorrow,** Ace Books, Inc., New York, New York, 1954.
7. **Seven Steps To The Arbiter,** Major Books, Chatsworth, Ca., 1975, p. 57; originally published as "The Kingslayer," 1949.
8. **Fear and Typewriter In The Sky,** reprint: Popular Library, CBS Publications, Hollywood, Ca., 1977.
9. "Suspense," **The Author and Journalist,** June, 1937, p. 5.
10. "Argonotes," **Argosy,** Oct. 24, 1936, pp. 141-142.
11. "Mr. Tidwell, Gunner," **Adventure,** September, 1936, p. 99.
12. **Ole Doc Methuselah,** reprint: Daw Books, Inc., New York, New York, 1970.
13. See footnote 9.

END

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