

Doumond Hall, Editor

4/14/35

Dear Mr. Hall: —

It is probably known to you that readers of Astounding stories range from thrill seeking morons ^{and} dilettantes in pseudo-science, to educated, intelligent, and discriminating individuals. This last curious group ~~is~~ may be in the minority, but nevertheless I believe they ^{are} ^{strong} enough ~~to~~ ~~to~~ buy enough ~~to~~ ~~to~~ copies of the magazine each month to make their tastes merit your attention.

If I am presumptuous enough to ^{as wish} ~~to myself~~ ~~to~~ the privilege of speaking for this group, you will understand that it is not through a desire to see my name ^{is} ~~in~~ print in Brass Tacks, ~~nor~~ ^{is it} nor to have the privilege of launching any praise or blasting condemnation at a harassed editor. As a matter of fact, I would prefer not to see this letter in your discussion columns, but I should appreciate your personal attention to it.

Here ~~that~~ the science-fiction
 pulps have been able to acquire
 and retain a clientele of
 informed and cultured readers is
 a mystery to me. Frankly—and I
 think you will be the first to
 admit it—the majority of stories
 published (even in ~~your~~ ^{the} rejuvenated
 Astounding) are, from a literary
 + scientific standpoint, trash.
 With this conviction I still
 buy my Astounding every month, although
 I have long since given up in disgust
~~buying~~ buying or reading the others.
 Thousands of other university students
 like me do likewise. Why? Perhaps
^{because} we simply desire a temporary
 escape from ~~the~~ urgent facts. At
 any rate, fantastic fiction has
 a charm for us that is slow
 to fade—even under the
 the brutal discouragements caused
 by reading the stereotyped hesh that
 some of the hack writers grind out.

I wish to plead that you in
 your editorial capacity endeavor to

obtain stories in which situations are not entirely hackneyed; people and their emotions are real, or at least convincing; in which the five points of literary style and characterization are not entirely subordinated to the urgent demand for fast and furious action. Furthermore, may I plead for scientific consistency. Of course we must give the authors certain leeway as to the ~~possibilities~~^{probabilities} of their imaginings. However, ~~then~~ out and out inconsistencies, ~~and~~ contradictions with established fact, and muddled statements designed to give a pseudo-scientific air to an unconvincing yarn are absolutely superfluous.

To become specific and point out only one horrible example — "Age" by C. C. Campbell in the April Act. 57. : page 123, "That's heavy water, an isotope of water, water with a higher valence ----- than ordinary acqua pura...." #12 The process of electrolysis in some way added more electrons

to the water than should normally be. So, instead of the formula being H_2O , it is more like $H+O_2$. That's heavy water." !!!

Allah forbid! This jargon is misleading and possibly downright false in both statement and implication. I am a student of chemistry at the Calif. Inst. of Tech. I became acquainted with the conception of valence seven years ago. ~~But~~ Yet, this penetrating discussion of the valence of water is absolutely without meaning to me. It is gibberish.

"Two's bristles and the stilly toves" ...

~~At this point~~ We say that in H_2O , hydrogen has a valence of one and oxygen of two. A high school training in chemistry would be sufficient to point out to the author that valence is a term applied only to the combining power of each of the constituents of a compound, and is meaningless applied to a compound as a whole. Furthermore, the formula $H+O_2$

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implies no valence differences than ~~the~~
 H_2O . It is simply another way of
writing $(H_2O)_2$. As a matter of
fact, $(H_2O)_2$, and $(H_2O)_3$ are
quite respectable constituents of
ordinary water. It is only in
the gaseous phase (steam) that the
molecular formula H_2O applies to
ordinary water. The author seems
to be totally ignorant of the
fact that the greater density of
"heavy water" is attributed to
the atomic structure of an isotope
of hydrogen (not water!), deuterium,
whose nucleus contains 2 ~~neutrons~~
instead of one. To get ^{the} light
water invoked in the yarn, our
super-scientists would have to
split a neutron. (!) I think I
have said enough to indicate that
this ~~yarn~~ story is saturated
with idiotic inconsistencies and
misconceptions.

Many other examples ^{of the life} could be
pointed out. I chose this merely

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because it was closest to my specialty and rattled most recently in my mind. I have no desire to insult the author, who has previously done good work. But I do ~~wish~~^{expect} that you are going to lose readers not gain them by insulting their intelligence.

I should like to indicate that Feern is a most offensive author in this respect, why inflict him on us when writers like Dr. Miles T. Brewer, G. Peyton Werkenbaker, and J. Schlossel are available?

I would like to repeat my commendation for your ~~post~~ obtaining E. E. Smith's last Skylark story. Smith's science and pseudo-science ~~is~~^{are} practically flawless. The conceptions in this last tale were stupendous and awesome. Although the author seems to have felt compelled to stop in more action than necessary.

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while neglecting more interesting possibilities, "The Skylerk of Valeron" is in my opinion easily the best ~~and~~ long story ever published in Astounding Stories. Frankly, ~~the~~ I believe that the most perfectly constructed, best balanced, and best written story he ever wrote was "Spacehands of IPC." It was scientifically sound, and its plot was beautifully constructed with increasing surges of interest. Not too much space was wasted on the adventures of inhuman organisms, and the character portrayal was excellent. The yarn is wide open for a sequel.

I am also very happy to see your acquisition of John Taine's new story. This author, as you know, is one of America's most brilliant mathematicians; and when he writes for amusement, the product is clever, brilliant, and

is staggering ^{his} recent researches
in the theories of poly-valued logic
systems.

John W. Campbell, Sr.,
A word about Campbell;
His ^{conceptions} writing are spectacular, and he
has done some exceptionally fine
work. "The Nightiest Machine" is
very good, but not as fresh and
original as some of his earlier
works. Don't let him grow stale!

The work of Schuchner and
Vincent is usually excellent.
C. L. Moore is worth encouraging.

May I recommend to you:

P. Schuyler Miller, Charles Clokey,
Mike J. Brewer, ^{and} G. Peyton Wentworth
(one of the finest of the lot). I
suppose this is hopeless — but if
you published a story by A. Merritt,
I fancy your circulation would
jump by a but percent.

If you are as sincerely interested in
the quality of Ast St. or your editorial notes
indicate, you can see that these suggestions
are not those of just another kid slacking off
steam. May I have the privilege of a reply
from you as to the outlook ahead for quality