

FUTURE SCIENCE FICTION

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35¢

● NOVELETS

HAUNTED CENTENNIAL *Wallace West* 26

The double-crosses of her grandfather were branded on Fredda Reynolds when she sought needed public approval — without which Trans-Planetary Spaceways Inc. was finished!

A BIRD IN THE HAND (illustrated on cover) *David Gordon* 70

A suspect in a criminal case, Ronan Hull was bound by tracers, but no one would tell him what he was suspected of doing; after all, he wasn't under arrest!

● SHORT STORIES

WHEELS *Michael Zuroy* 6

If Alph Agar competed in the exhibition, he'd probably lose, and forfeit his life; if he refused to compete, he'd be declared automatic loser — penalty, execution!

SQUEE *Margaret St. Clair* 99

Could men learn that some things were never justifiable?

SILLY ASSES *Isaac Asimov* 114

Why the Recorder scratched a certain planet from the list...

IDOL'S EYE *Carol Emshawiller* 115

An unusual tale of a woman unwanted, except by...

● FEATURES

AUTHOR, AUTHOR! (a run-down on contributors) 5

INSIDE SCIENCE FICTION (department) *Robert A. Madle* 25

THE EDITOR'S PAGE *Robert A. W. Lowndes* 65

Concluding our backward survey of "Yesterday's World of Tomorrow: 1927".

SCIENCE FICTION ALMANAC 121

January and February in science fiction magazines.

READERS' PREFERENCE COUPON (for your votes) 130

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SILLY ASSES

A Vignette
by Isaac Asimov

NARON of the long-lived Rigelian race was the fourth of his line to keep the Galactic records.

He had the large book which contained the list of the numerous races throughout the Galaxies that had developed intelligence, and the much smaller book listing those races that had reached maturity and had qualified for the Galactic Federation. In the first book, a number of those listed were crossed out; those that, for one reason or another, had failed. Misfortune; biochemical or biophysical shortcomings; social maladjustment, etc., took their toll. In the smaller book, however, no member listed had yet blanked out.

And now Naron, large and incredibly ancient, looked up as a messenger approached.

"Naron," said the messenger. "Great One!"

"Well, well, what is it? Less ceremony."

"Another group of organisms has attained maturity."

"Excellent. Excellent. They are coming up quickly now. Scarcely a year passes without a new one. And who are these?"

The messenger gave the code number of the Galaxy and the coordinates of the world within it.

"Ah, yes," said Naron. "I know the world." And in flowing script, he noted it in the first book and transferred its name into the sec-

ond—using, as was customary, the name by which the planet was known to the largest fraction of its populace. He wrote: Earth.

He said, "These new creatures have set a record. No other group has passed from intelligence to maturity so quickly. No mistake, I hope."

"None, sir," said the messenger.

"They have attained to thermonuclear power, have they?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, that's the criterion." Naro chuckled. "And soon their ships will probe out and contact the Federation."

"Actually, Great One," said the messenger, reluctantly, "the Observers tell us they have not yet penetrated space."

Naron was astonished. "Not at all? Not even a space station?"

"Not yet, sir."

"But if they have thermonuclear power, where then do they conduct their tests and detonations?"

"On their own planet, sir."

Naron rose to his full twenty feet of height and thundered, "On their own planet?"

"Yes, sir."

Slowly, Naron drew out his stylus and passed a line through the latest addition in the smaller book. It was an unprecedented act, but, then, Naron was very wise and could see the inevitable as well as anyone in the Galaxy.

"Silly asses," he muttered.