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EDITED BY

DONALD A. WOLLHEIM

AN ORIGINAL POCKETBOOK EDITION

FANTASTIC TALES OF SUPER-SCIENCE

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THE POCKET BOOK  
OF  
SCIENCE-FICTION

*Edited by*

DONALD A. WOLLHEIM



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## INTRODUCTION

THERE are two kinds of adventure: first, that which actually happened—the discovery of America, for example; and, second, that which took place only in the mind of its narrator—and this second variety has variously been known through the ages as “myth,” “legend,” “fable,” “whopper,” “fish story,” “extraordinary voyage,” and also as “science-fiction.”

But whether it is called “myth” or “science-fiction,” whether it deals with a goddess with snakes where her hair ought to be, or with a voyage to the moon, it is still the same fascinating thing—the unalloyed figment of a curious, speculative, and ingenious imagination.

Before the age of reason and modern scientific discoveries, that which we now call superstition had a dominant part in the daily life of people like you and me. Great students of the Middle Ages have proven that magic and experimental science, which were then blended indistinguishably, were beyond peradventure the breeding-ground and the hiding-place of the ideas, the germs of notions and of the methods which have resulted—in our own day—in the radio, the airplane, sulfanilamide, and all our twentieth-century marvels. The relationship of Edison to Leonardo has been established and shown to be legitimate. But it might also be noted that much of the body of fifteenth-century “belief” exists today either as superstition (black cats—walking under ladders—lucky stars) or as the great unknown (life on other planets—undiscovered worlds—foretelling the future—thought transference—voyage in space—experiments

in time), a wilderness in which dauntless thinkers go exploring and adventuring with only their imaginations to guide them.

We've all heard or used the phrases "flight of fancy," "stretch of the imagination," "talking at random," and "what on earth." Well, they all apply to the stories in this book. So take these stories as you find them—as prophecy, as embroidery, as exaggeration, as possibility, as inconceivability, as romance, or as shadow on the wall. Remember, though, that the search for the unknown—the philosopher's stone, the fountain of youth, perpetual motion—has always intrigued mankind and always will. What a word "millennium" is, and always has been, to conjure with! And so with "Utopia."

Science has made much progress on the basis of what is called "the theory of outrageous hypotheses" because with it scientists have been able to block out areas of aridity, sterility, and fruitlessness—also it has enabled them to *prove* wrong what was previously only *believed* to be wrong. That which we believe is not to be confused with what we know—and that which we do not know is part of the area of ignorance.

But just as some of the things believed but not known in the dark ages were subsequently proved to be true—so many of the things today that we believe, but cannot logically or scientifically say we know, will some day be comprehended, and will pass out of the realm of science-fiction and into the body of human knowledge, and proved, scientific fact. This introduction is not to be construed as meaning that the editor believes that any of these stories actually holds the key to a great riddle. The unknown is unraveled nowadays by unexciting and hard-working technicians—a very prosaic business.

These are stories—pure fiction, fabulous, exciting, stimulating, incredible—written for pleasure and enjoyment.

But don't forget, strange things have come to pass in this world—and one of our hardest-working figures of speech is "What on earth!"

Grateful acknowledgment is made to Robert W. Lowndes, John B. Mitchel, and Philip Van Doren Stern for their valuable advice and criticism while this book was in preparation.

DONALD A. WOLLHEIM

## BY THE WATERS OF BABYLON

by Stephen Vincent Benét

THE north and the west and the south are good hunting ground, but it is forbidden to go east. It is forbidden to go to any of the Dead Places except to search for metal and then he who touches the metal must be a priest or the son of a priest. Afterwards, both the man and the metal must be purified. These are the rules and the laws; they are well made. It is forbidden to cross the great river and look upon the place that was the Place of the Gods—this is most strictly forbidden. We do not even say its name though we know its name. It is there that spirits live, and demons—it is there that there are the ashes of the Great Burning. These things are forbidden—they have been forbidden since the beginning of time.

My father is a priest; I am the son of a priest. I have been in the Dead Places near us, with my father—at first, I was afraid. When my father went into the house to search for the metal, I stood by the door and my heart felt small and weak. It was a dead man's house, a spirit house. It did not have the smell of man, though there were old bones in a corner. But it is not fitting that a priest's son should show fear. I looked at the bones in the shadow and kept my voice still.

Then my father came out with the metal—a good, strong piece. He looked at me with both eyes but I had not run away. He gave me the metal to hold—I took it and did not die. So he knew that I was truly his son and would be a