

# **Memoirs Of A Superfluous Fan**

**By  
T. Bruce Yerke**



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## SOME PREFATORY NOTES AND WARNINGS IN REAL TIME

This reissue of *Memoirs of a Superfluous Fan* is the result of an almost supernatural piece of telepathetic communication. I had just been thinking about revising and reviving this hoary document for its possible historical interest, and was about to call Forrie Ackerman for suggestions about a mailing list, when I was telephoned by Bruce Pelz, who asked for permission to reissue it. I was glad to give this, but suggested I might wish to review it first and make some comments that could clarify references in the text that after fifty years might be obscure to contemporary readers. He was amenable to this.

The *Memoirs* were written at a very rancorous period in the history of Los Angeles science fiction fandom, deep in wartime, when all of us were more stressed than we knew from the pressures and restrictions of life on the home front and the fatigue of sixty hour weeks in wartime jobs. I had just resigned from the Los Angeles Science Fantasy Society and was very bitter about a lot of things and about certain people. There was much criticism of Forrest J Ackerman by some of us; apparently no one stopped to think that for Forrie life in the military, even in so fortunate an assignment as editor of the newspaper of the 9th Service Command at Ft. MacArthur in San Pedro, was very stressful. He had to cope with this just as the rest of us coped with ours. These circumstances explain some of the remarks and asides in the *Memoirs*.

In looking over the text for the first time in many years, I see that it is really very poorly written. And of course the projected four volumes were never completed, for in January 1944 I went to work at North American Aviation and thereafter had little time for writing and publishing. In preparing this existing volume for reissue, I have cleaned up obscure syntax, corrected words used wrongly, and supplied footnotes to clarify references that are now obscure.

T. Bruce Yerke  
5 February 1992

UNIT 12: THE FUTURE OF WORK

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There are many people who are very interested in the history of Los Angeles, California, and they are very interested in the history of the city of Los Angeles, California. They are very interested in the history of the city of Los Angeles, California, and they are very interested in the history of the city of Los Angeles, California.

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## IN EXPLANATION

It has been my intention for some time now to record in as much and interesting detail as possible the long, long time during which I was an active member of the Los Angeles Science Fantasy Society (LASFS) and its predecessor, the Los Angeles Chapter, Number 4, of the Science Fiction League (LASFL). My recent action in resigning from this Society, and along with it all my active offices, is in no way the sole reason for the writing of these memoirs. For whatever good or bad science fiction fandom may eventually serve, it ought to have a comprehensive record of its oldest and largest component.

I was a member of the LASFL and LASFS for very nearly seven years. In it I met many of my best friends, and through it I passed many interesting hours and discovered many interesting things. The LASFL was beyond a doubt the greatest and most active scientifiction organization of all time...it had the most members, some of them well-known in their respective fields; the most publications, and very often the most fun.

I saw the twin clubs at their best and their worst: as a haven for wayward characters, as an inspiration for incipient authors and artists, as a storehouse of inestimable value to the serious scientifiction and fantasy hobbies, and as a gathering place for good fellows in general. But I have also seen the LASFL, and especially the LASFS, as a rotting ground for fine minds, a harbor for psychopaths and morbid misfits, a circle of futility and frustration, a trap full of bickering and petty jealousy for those within it. These two conditions have been existing side by side for virtually as long as the Society.

When I was very young and had first joined I used to wonder: in what manner would I finally leave this group of strange people? who would turn out to be my best friends? who would be the first of us to die? how long before something took me away from the entire environment? I spent seven years in intimate association with the group, and all my questions were answered. Now the seven years are a closed book, full of many fond and many disappointing memories.

Withal I feel a great vacancy in "fan" history will exist unless someone records the long years in which the LASFL and LASFS were at one and the same time the greatest and best, and yet often the smallest and worst, of all scientifiction fan groups.

What follows are my own personal memories. I do not pretend that they are unbiased or presented with hairline accuracy; but I do hope they will prove to be interesting to the followers of this avocational field. Since this is going to be a rather lengthy project, it is impractical to bind them under one cover. For this purpose it is my intention to divide these memoirs into four volumes of two years each. They more or less conveniently divide themselves as follows:

|              |                      |             |
|--------------|----------------------|-------------|
| Volume One.  | The Old LASFL        | (1937-1938) |
| Volume Two   | The Transition       | (1939-1940) |
| Volume Three | The LASFS            | (1941-1942) |
| Volume Four  | Beginning of the End | (1943-1944) |

I wish to have the bulk of these distributed through the F.A.P.A. because I believe that, with but a very few exceptions, the bulk of the more mature and responsible members of the field are covered by this instrumentality. For this purpose the press work for these volumes is proceeding under the FAPA frank of Mel Brown-Francis T. Laney-Phil R. Bronson, who have been kind enough to do the majority of the mimeographing for me as I am employed nights and unable to do so myself. The stencils, with the usual errors, were executed by the author.

This first volume is rather general, because it's a long ways back and specific incidents tend to blur into one another. But as we approach the present, conversations and anecdotes will be recalled in profusion, full of stories about Charlie Hornig, Jack Williamson, Bob Heinlein, Art Barnes, Henry Kuttner, Julie Schwartz, Otto Binder, Bill Crawford, George Hahn, Edmond Hamilton, E.E.Smith, Morrie Dollens, Erle Korshak, Milton Rothman, Kornbluth and Cohen...and many others who made Los Angeles a scientifiction fable. I was there with all these guys, drank with a lot of them...so bear through, chums! It might be worth it.

T. Bruce Yerke,  
May 14, 1944.

## I: 1937

Any person who has grown up to attain a reasonable position of achievement in the science fiction fan world through the constant and prolonged association with other science fiction fans in the same area must necessarily have a more personal outlook on the subject than the fan who at best has only been in sporadic contact with the specie. It was my own particular experience to have literally and actually "grown up" in the environment furnished by the Los Angeles Chapter of the Science Fiction League and subsequently the Los Angeles Science Fantasy Society.

From the last Thursday in January, 1937, until November 14, 1943, I was in constant association with the ever-changing membership of the club. This period of my life covers high school, a year of work, then a year of college, and lastly a year or so in the so-called "business world". Unlike many unfortunate cases in the fan world wherein the individual comes *out* of the larger world and gradually draws more and more into the veil of fantasy fiction and its hobby activities, it has been my experience to grow out of that world into the dull, presumedly plebeian planet of ordinary people.

My acquaintance with the literature of science fiction was firstly the usual juvenile books, followed by a comprehensive reading of Wells and Verne when I was about twelve years old. I somehow skipped Burroughs, and have never gone back to read him. It was in 1935 that I first came across a scientifiction pulp magazine, the April issue of *Astounding Stories*. The cover illustrated "Proxima Centauri" by Murray Leinster. As I was at the time an avid Buck Rogers follower, I immediately recognized a space ship control room for what it was. I purchased this issue with the thrill of discovering a long lost friend. The natural course of evolution set in, and I was shortly purchasing second-hand *Wonder Stories* and I quickly came across letters by Forrest J Ackerman. Meanwhile, my own first letter appeared in the May 1936 *Astounding*, right next to the first published letter of Leslie A. Crouch.

Late in 1936 the family moved from the outlying suburb of Huntington Park into Los Angeles, and I realized with a sudden start that I was going to school two blocks from 236 1/2 N. New Hampshire Avenue! It was but a matter of course that I wrote this Mr. Ackerman a letter and quickly received an invitation to drop in at the fantastic place on my way home from school early in January 1937. From then on, things simply evolved, and as Little Abner would say: "It war most remarkable."

This is all the chronological history I care to indulge in. Any numbskull can sit down and write things by date and sequence. Since these are memoirs more than an attempt to write accurate history, I must have the liberty to look back on those days and events with the advantage gained by a more mature person<sup>1</sup> and with more insight than I possessed at the time of the occurrence. For that reason we are going to jump back and forth from now on.

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<sup>1</sup> I was age twenty when this was written. Nearly fifty years later, the phrase "mature person" comes across almost comically.

The names that were extant in the LASFL of early 1937 are strange to the eyes of current readers. They are, with a single exception, now non-active. Aside from myself, Forrest J Ackerman is the only survivor. Morojo and Paul Freehafer had not yet joined the Chapter; Daugherty and Bradbury were unheard of. The group that met at Clifton's Cafeteria in 1937 is no more the group that meets now at 637 1/2 Bixel Street than the Congress of 1776 resembled the Congress of 1943. The title is self-perpetuating, but outside fans should realize that the gang which made the LASFL the greatest without a doubt of all science fiction clubs then and now, has been broken apart for many a long month and year.

The minutes for the meeting of August 19, 1937, show the following persons to have been present: Forrest J Ackerman, Russell J. Hodgkins, Bob Olson (yes, the author), Henry Kuttner, Arthur K. Barnes, Morojo, Virgil Smith (her son), Roy A. Squires, Mr., Mrs. and Roy Test jr., Karl Edward Foerst von Lutz and wife, Hal and Victor Clark, Perry L. Lewis, Francis Fairchild, Bruce Yerke, Karl McNeil, Vernon W. Harry, Eddie Anderson, Maurice DuClose, Don Green, Al Mussen, and George Tullis.

That was the big meeting of 1937 at which Dr. David H. Keller was guest. As can be seen, there was a liberal sprinkling of authors present, all of whom were more or less regular attenders. It was a different crowd...not only by persons, but by deportment and behavior. The average age was perhaps twenty three. Average meetings ran about two-thirds of the above number of persons. I cite this meeting mainly to give a morphological cross-section of the membership of the LASFL during 1937.

When I first walked into the Little Brown Room in January of that year, Perry L. Lewis was my immediate discoverer. "Is Mr. Ackerman here?" I queried timorously. Mr. Lewis, enjoying the situation immensely, let out a whoop of "*Mr. Ackerman?!*" and shooed me down the room to where Forrie was sitting.

At the time I felt Lewis to be an obnoxious person. Now I wish I had been old enough to appreciate the character. Lewis was one of the "Glendale SFL", a triumvirate of Squires-Fox-Lewis. He worked in a stationary store. I imagine he was a typically aggressive, intelligent, cynical high school graduate of the day. My later impressions of him, up until he finally dropped out sometime late in 1939 or early 1940, were always enjoyable. He was sarcastic, but an interested fan of the type that existed then in large quantities, reading, corresponding, and collecting. Nothing much more.

That night I met David Fox, Roy Squires, Russ Hodgkins, Al Mussen, Roy Test and Vernon Wilfred Harry. The others who were present I have forgotten. The reason I remember these names is because I later had dealings with them, and with Russ Hodgkins a good friendship. My interest in science fiction magazines was avid. The sight of those huge quarterlies and old *Science Wonder Stories* which Squires and Ackerman, and I guess Test and Harry, were trading sent me reeling. I wanted to possess them, to read them! I presume an archaeologist being allowed to view undamaged Mayan relics drools and slobbers no less than I did when wallowing in piles of quarterlies and the like back in 1937.

I was immensely flattered when these "experts" asked me to read *The Tale Which Hath No*



*Title*, a sort of *Alicia in Blunderland* affair which was one of the projects of the Chapter at the time. When Ackerman asked me my opinion of it, I gave a very sober literary analysis, which must have been screamingly funny to the others. And my appreciation of these people knew no bounds when Vernon Wilfred Harry, with great magnanimity, asked me to join the *World Girdlers' International Science League Correspondence Club*. The conscienceless villain rooked me out of some dues on the spot, and I was given some stationary to boot. All in all I was very proud.

Other events at the meeting are lost in obscurity. The world of the future seemed awfully close, though. Here were people who thought about it, much as I did. Schoolmates laughed at such things, but when I could tell them that I knew adults who spent their time in such a manner, I felt my own interest was justified. There was something remarkably exhilarating in going up to the Ackerman den and looking at movie stills from *Metropolis*, *Deluge*, *Things to Come*, *The Golem*, *The Girl in the Moon*, and countless others. It seemed to make an interest in the future justified.

The Los Angeles Chapter, No. 4, of the Science Fiction League, led a most sedate sort of social life in 1937. The primary contact between members were the 1st and 3rd Thursday meetings at Clifton's Cafe, 648 S. Broadway, in downtown Los Angeles. On these occasions, when there was no scheduled speaker, the subject of current and past stories was a valid and always interesting topic for discussion. One of my earliest staunch friends at the Chapter was David L. Fox. We had a common interest in the exploits of Bill Barnes, an air ace who built his own forerunners of P-38s and Flying Fortresses back in 1934-35. His planes and activities were the central feature of a Street & Smith pulp, *Bill Barnes' Air Trails*. I remember that Bill Barnes' "Flying Fortress" carried a small Whippet tank, as did the American dirigibles the *Macon* and the *Akron*. It was all very amazing, and Fox and I could discuss this for hours.

Roy Test and Roy Squires were old-style scientifiction collectors. But much of the Chapter was "old style", in that there was a proper respect for visitors and authors. Even the director and secretary were paid attention. Guests were always introduced to the membership during the meeting. At a later date guests and even authors were left to shift for themselves. The impression I retain from those early days is that the crowd was a quite well-behaved bunch of serious-minded, intelligent science fiction readers and collectors. I carried then and now an admiration for these persons, since I had been taught to respect my elders.

It was my fortune to join the Society just at a time when it had its first deluge of celebrities passing through. The frequency of visiting authors and editors was not equalled or surpassed again until the summer of 1940. Aside from David H. Keller, we managed to lure Arthur J. Burks and Joe Skidmore, who died shortly afterwards. There were occasional lectures by such persons as H. Atlantis Sudburry, a well-known horologist, and Dr. Feeley [a professor of Astronomy at Los Angeles City College. In addition, we had the resident attendance of Henry Kuttner and the artist Tom Mooney, who lent their witty presence to the Chapter at frequent intervals. At the time the club was keeping a scrapbook of important advances in science, the prize item being the Los Angeles Herald-Express's account of the discovery of Pluto.

The club is different now. (NOTE: These lines are being written late in December, 1943.) Keller could drop in and he probably would be left standing around in the background, unintroduced, much as the eminent Dr. Adolph DeCastro<sup>2</sup>, who had known Lovecraft well, was neglected at the open house meeting in June 1943 when the present club quarters were dedicated. In 1937 there was usually someone new of interest to meet. Kuttner was always bringing in a character or so, and while I was much too young to appreciate the hilarious discussions that went on between these members, I know they were first rate. Current fans enjoyed no better in those riotous stags in Art Widner's room at the Shirley-Savoy during the Denvention.

I still don't know what to think of Vernon Harry. My own opinion is that he was a sort of genial scoundrel. I was interested in the first issue of *Science Wonder Quarterly*, and he offered to sell me his copy, inviting me over to his house on S. Grand Avenue one Saturday to pick it up. Once I arrived, after a few awkward moments, he produced the issue which I grabbed avidly. Then I discovered that he had no change. (I think I was to pay him seventy five cents for it.) While I stood sweating for fear he'd want the magazine back since he could not change the dollar bill I proffered, he generously offered to let me take the change as credit for dues in the *World Girdlers' International Science League Correspondence Club*. I gratefully accepted credit for several months' dues. Promptly thereafter, this great international organization folded completely as Harry went to work on a night shift.

Shep's Shop was a favorite hangout for SFL members in those days. Lucille B. Sheppard did have a fabulous collection of scientifiction magazines up on Hollywood Boulevard, and through the unending efforts of Ackerman, it was stocked with Esperanto literature, fan magazines, and a general welcome to SFL members. I considered the shop to be quite a paradise. I often dropped in after school to enjoy this rapture, this virtual wallowing in large piles of *Air Wonder Stories*, *Science Wonder Stories*, *Amazing Stories Quarterly*, and endless stacks of *Astounding* and *Wonder*. I often cursed the cruel fate that had left me too young to read these vast, thrilling magazines in the glorious days when they were newly published and on the magazine racks<sup>3</sup>.

Eventually by selling newspapers and the *Saturday Evening Post*, I was able from time to time to purchase one of these exotic magazines, and through much effort managed to acquire all of the *Science Wonder* and *Air Wonder Stories*, some issues of volume one of *Amazing Stories*, and a representative assortment of *Amazing Stories Quarterly*, along with some later issues of *Wonder Stories Quarterly*. For some reason, early issues of *Astounding Stories* held absolutely no fascination for me, and I never acquired any dated earlier than my first newsstand purchase in 1935.

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<sup>2</sup> Years later I discovered to my astonishment that "DeCastro" was actually Adolph Danziger, intimate friend of Ambrose Bierce, who, when Bierce was thought to be dying in New York, rushed across the country in a special train to be at his bedside!

<sup>3</sup> At the sight of the originals of many of the covers of those old magazines at the Ackerman mansion during a recent open house, I re-experienced the delicious thrill that I felt in my adolescence. No other relics from that epoch can do this for me.

I don't know if fans like Washington, Schmarje, Smith, Lazar, and a host of others who are newcomers to me, have ever seen an *Air Wonder*, or experienced the thrill which comes to a teenager through actually owning one. Perhaps it isn't necessary, but the experience of collecting and reading these stories of the future was an integral of my earlier political-sociological explorations. I did believe that mankind was capable of following these stories in a few years and making a glorious world of the future, where science and sanity would be the governing factors. The primary thing that science fiction did for me as a teenager was to make me think along sociological lines, and when my friends were all wearing Landon or Roosevelt buttons in 1936, I was looking far beyond this political party stuff.

The old-style science fiction novel with the emphasis on science had a definite educational value for the properly attuned mind. Through such reading I knew that mankind's lot could be better, and while I lacked all the data that subsequent years of study have given me, I at least had a glimpse then of what could be while the rest of my friends were busy swallowing the official version of the Revolutionary War.

At some meeting between my joining and August 1937 I was frightened by a lurid publication which either Roy Test or Roy Squires brought to a meeting. It was one of the last copies of Morris S. Dollens' *Science Fiction Collector*. Since I was studying journalism in school, the idea that people could publish little magazines on a hekto pad was eye-opening. I scanned the *Collector* at the meeting and was fascinated. Ever since I had been given a copy of Van Loon's *Story of Mankind* in 1935 for my birthday, I was possessed with a desire to write *apres* Van Loon. In fact, I had written many little booklets which I typed and sewed together by hand for the amusement of my immediate circle of friends. *Yerke's Almanac* and *Yerke's Hip-Pocket Dictionary* still evoke chuckles on my part. The possibility of making fifty copies of such a venture on a hektograph, for only a few dollars, was the sort of tinder that eventually produced *IMAGINATION!* I went without a hamburger the next day at lunch and sent a dime to Dollens for a copy of the *Collector*.

Meanwhile, my first fan correspondent turned up. As I was addicted to writing endless letters to the editors of the three scientifiction magazines then extant<sup>4</sup>, it was natural that I begin to receive letters from other fans. John L. Chapman, of the original Minneapolis SFL crowd, dropped me a letter saying he was looking for a pen pal. I wrote back that while I was not especially looking for a pen pal, I had no religious scruples against one. This began a correspondence lasting from the middle of 1937 through 1940. I suppose this could be selected as the particular connection that propelled me into the national fan area.

The languid tempo of my science fiction life began to increase after the middle of 1937. Shortly I was in touch with John V. Baltadonis through my new friend Chapman. By now I had received two issues of the *Collector* from Dollens, and by going through Ackerman's collection I acquainted myself with former amateur publishing ventures. Claire Beck

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<sup>4</sup> I was very successful in this activity, having an average of one letter every three months in each of the three magazines. In the lurid slang of the present, I would be called a "letter junkie", as were a number of other fans of the 1930s.

dropped me an issue of *Tesseract*, and I was seriously considering joining the Science Fiction Advancement Association, mainly to get that professional rubber seal that its members used to stamp MEMBER SFAA all over their letters. I also sent a silly and stupid article to Julie Schwartz's *Fantasy Magazine*, the theme of which was that science fiction was not widely recognized because it did not come out in books. I often get this ridiculous piece out and marvel at it.

By August 1937 I was fairly well established in the Los Angeles Chapter of the Science Fiction League as a rather young but not unduly obnoxious member. I even grew so bold as to contribute to the discussions and arguments. My good friend David Fox gave me much low-down on the dirt of the club, a hobby I have enjoyed ever since. My turn to write chapter number eight of "The Tale Which Hath No Title" came around, and I was highly gratified that the members judged it as good as any other. My introduction of the two moons "Oglethorp" and "Arglethorp" caused much hilarity.

I can never thank Russ Hodgkins enough for treating me in those days as an intelligent person. The condescending attitude of Perry Lewis and a few others kept me away from them at first, though in retrospect I cannot blame them in the least. Hodgkins managed to make me feel less a waif in the midst of all these activities. The same goes for Forrest J Ackerman. He was undeniably the leading and outstanding fan and figure in the field in those days. I could ask him questions about science fiction and fandom which I knew were inane and maybe stupid, but he always patiently explained the mysterious worlds to me. My admiration for Ackerman then as the prototype of a better kind of person was endless.

Sometime around April 1937 Myrtle R. Smith (or Douglas) was brought to a meeting by Ackerman. He had met her at an Esperanto Club meeting. At that time her scientifiction name was Morogo<sup>5</sup>. Her son, Virgil, was a schoolmate of mine, one or two grades behind me. This and the coming of Paul R. Freehafer, a pen pal of Ackerman's who was noted for his reading and collecting activities, rounded the few fans who have survived to the present day from 1937. Freehafer came from Payette, Idaho, to attend the California Institute of Technology, and his visits to the club were more or less sporadic until he commenced active membership in 1939 with the publication of *Polaris*.

Late in the summer of 1937 my interest in the science fiction fan magazine period was at a high pitch, and I began to wonder why Los Angeles had never produced a fan magazine on its own initiative<sup>6</sup>. By brilliant reasoning I deduced that with Ackerman, Roy Test, Squires, Paul Freehafer, Russ Hodgkins and Morojo all here in Los Angeles, we should be able with little difficulty to put out a top flight fan publication. My correspondence with Baltadonis suddenly took a technical turn, as I pumped the obliging fellow dry of all the

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<sup>5</sup>This form of the name was shortly changed for phonetic reasons to the familiar "Morojo". The "g" had stood for "Grey", a family name.

<sup>6</sup> Actually, about two years earlier Roy Test had endeavored to produce a fan magazine, which I remember was called *The Tesseract*, not to be confused with a later fan magazine bearing the same name. One or two issues were actually produced but the attempt belongs to the cryptohistory of Los Angeles fan publishing.

information he could send by post on the subject of hektography. Older fan readers will recall the Baltadonis *Science Fiction Collector*<sup>7</sup> as one of the highest attainments of the hektographer's art. His color reproduction was superb, the pictures themselves far above the average, and the layout superlative. I still marvel at the results he obtained, especially as contrasted with the first issue of *IMAGINATION!*

One afternoon at Ackerman's, where I used to spend many of my afternoons (a nuisance which Forrie tolerated with a most admirable spirit) I broached the "elaborate" plans that I had conceived for a local fan magazine. The original title of the venture was to have been *Odds & Ends*. This was a carry over from a small one (typewritten) copy of a rag of fantastic Muenchhausen material I used to produce for my schoolmates. The first agreement was drawn up with Ackerman financing the effort, and he and I acting as co-editors. Material was collected and the work progressed through August 1937. I wrote and edited; Forrie did the proof reading and dummieing. He also obtained the title rights to *IMAGINATION!* from Roy Test, who had planned to use this title for the official magazine of the World Girdlers' International Science League Correspondence Club, which had folded earlier, along with my dues, when Vernon Harry went to work nights.

Just where the idea occurred that *IMAGINATION!* ought to be the Chapter organ, I do not know. I believe that this, too, was Ackerman's idea, but in any event, after I read to the Chapter letters from Baltadonis explaining in lurid details the use of the hektograph, Russ Hodgkins fell for the idea and the Chapter voted \$7.50 on September 2, 1937, to cover the cost of the initial hekto equipment.

The heroic story of the first issue of *IMAGINATION!* is related in my editorial in the second issue. It was a small-scale version of those New York publishing houses who do all their editorial work in Manhattan and then send their material to Chicago for the press run. In our reenactment, when I arrived home from school in the afternoon, I wrote up the material of the day, then took a streetcar to Ackerman's flat. My typewriter was an old three-decker Underwood portable with elite type, but the magazine was slated to come out in pica. Ackerman would have to spend an hour or so correcting spelling and making other editorial adjustments. He would then take a streetcar to Morojo's apartment where he could type the hekto carbon on her standard pica office typewriter. Then Morojo's son, Virgil, made the trip all the way back to my house, usually arriving at 10:00 PM. I would then reproduce the pages Forrie had typed on the hektograph. As the LASFL only had two hekto pads<sup>8</sup>, this madhouse routine continued for ten nights before the twenty pages of the first edition were printed. After this we were all quite ready to retire in grace from the publishing field.

It is said by the learned that ignorance of one's ignorance is the true ignorance. Up until the first issue of *IMAGINATION!* I had been ignorant that I did not know how to spell. I am still especially weak in the matter of double consonants and adverbial endings, but in 1937

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<sup>7</sup> Baltadonis took over the magazine from Morris Dollens, to whom it is ascribed earlier in the text.

<sup>8</sup> After being used, a hektograph pad has to sit overnight before it can be used again. The ink of the latest master carbon needs to diffuse into the jelly before a new one can be transferred onto the pad.

my spelling was incorrigible. In addition, I used British variations, as in "civilisation", "encoutre" and habitually doubled consonants as in "traveller". This was partly because in the formative years of early reading I used at home a Century dictionary rather than a Webster. Further, as a precocious young reader in elementary school I poured through books on chemistry and astronomy, not to mention reading Jules Verne, H.G. Wells and other English authors. Most of these books were printed in England and used English spelling.

It became obvious after the first issue of *IMAGINATION!* that my ideas exceeded my technical ability to carry them through. For this reason it was imperative that the club come to the rescue of the magazine before it was too late. Further, because Hodgkins was an addict of rigid punctuality and order, the magazine had not only to be letter perfect, but it must come out on a monthly schedule, and for this requirement, the hektograph was considered a far too ancient machine,

Whereas the first issue of *IMAGINATION!* had largely been between Ackerman, Morojo and myself, the entire club now burst forth with ideas and suggestions. In fact, all through October and November 1937 the club bickered and dickered over *IMAGINATION!*, though the contributions of such skilled cynics as Kuttner, Lewis, Fox, and Hodgkins made the entire debate sometimes less productive. Among the major battles was the Club vs. Ackerman re: simplified spelling.

This is a matter on which I have always been resolutely negative. One tendency about the club has always irritated me deeply throughout the many years I have associated with it. I have never been able to adopt anything but a strong distaste for simplified spelling, Esperanto nicknames, and the more rabid scientifiction abbreviations. One bit of hell I raised and kept raising for months was the changing of the club's name to the *Los Angeles Science Fantasy Society* on April 4, 1940. Perhaps because of my own faulty spelling, I have always stood in awe of a language so perverse and insular that it blithely ignores every sound and sane concept of orthography. The feeling of accomplishment at being able to spell English at all was strengthened after some dilatory investigation of such more phonetic languages as German, Dutch, Russian, Finnish and even French, which latter though not really phonetic, is far more so in its orthography than English.

I have always had a sane respect for language, and such prostitutions as Morojo, Fojak, Tobojo, stfan, stfette, etc., have merely called up a certain contempt for persons who try to make their observations interesting by jejune toying with the language under the guise of neo-modernism. I can see the legitimacy of *scientifiction*, a term I use myself, and I have accepted *stf.* as an unavoidable abbreviation of the same. But I do not pronounce the abbreviation "stuff". This mad desire to warp and spice-up the language on the part of a large faction of the local group has galled me for years.

The great battle of 1937 was Ackerman's mad desire for simplifying the English language. His rabid attempts became virtually out of control. There was editorial friction from the first as I flatly, at that early age, refused to dummy the magazine in his jargon. Forrie was equally insistent that simplified spelling be only one of the many unique things about

*IMAGINATION!* Even before the first issue was out the Happy-Acky was calling it "Madge".

As I recall, Russ Hodgkins and the Glendale SFL were with me to some extent; at least to the point of agreeing that Ackerman must limit his horrible mangling to his own work unless authors of other material requested their submissions be subject to the ravages of Ackermanese. To this stupid backwardness of the Chapter majority, Ackerman and his disciple (Morojo) condescended grudgingly.

The work of getting the new equipment for producing the Chapter's official magazine was outside my activities. The mimeograph and over \$50.00 worth of accessories were purchased over a period of time by Hodgkins and Morojo. I admit that I felt hurt when *IMAGINATION!* exploded out of my hands, but it was for the best. In any case, I can claim the honor of being the founder and co-editor of the first all-Los Angeles fan magazine, and God-father to all the rest.

The great difference between the Chapter Number Four of the Science Fiction League and the present Los Angeles Science Fantasy Society is the result of a complex evolution of several years' duration. It can be summed up in brief by the observation that in 1937 the club had no social life to speak of. The activities of the Chapter centered around meetings held every other Thursday. Otherwise the members contented themselves with occasional Sunday gatherings of an informal and unofficial nature. Often groups of three or four attended shows together or went out book hunting, but that was about the sum of it. For the most part, members had no contact with each other between the alternate Thursday meetings, save by the vicarious media of the post or telephone<sup>9</sup>.

Thus when *the* Thursday night rolled around, there was a lot of business to be transacted. Book and magazine trading occupied much time, discussion of the latest issues of the professional magazines received prime attention, and were followed eagerly and not with the cynicism often displayed by the present group. (These lines were written shortly after the Knanve resignation, but before those of Brown, Kepner, Laney, Fern, Lazar and Russell.)

The meeting itself was conducted along a modified parliamentary procedure which called for reports from the treasurer, the librarian, and the secretary's reading of the minutes. There was then the matter of business, which in 1937 consisted of little more than answering letters, collecting dues, and miscellaneous club transactions, mostly having to do with the library. After the publishing of *IMAGINATION!* began, the costs of the mimeograph and supplies became a major concern.

After the business meeting, we were our own source of never-ending entertainment, often riotously funny and sometimes biting, acerbic, but always well-contained. One thing which I have deplored about the Society of later years is the lack of mutual respect among the members, especially at meetings...a crime of which I am as guilty as any other. I believe that

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<sup>9</sup> And in 1937 not everyone could afford a telephone. I had none until 1944.

in 1937 and 1938 the members respected each other as fellow travellers, and they most certainly had a taciturn respect for author-members and their guests, who contributed to the conversations and discussions. There is no native wit left in the club such as was furnished by Henry Kuttner, Arthur Barnes, Fred Shroyer, Perry Lewis, Tom Mooney, and even Hodgkins himself. Each of these was an excellent conversationalist, any one of them capable of entertaining the Chapter for an entire evening. Kuttner many times led discussions on fantasy. Shroyer is an incomparable character; one is drawn to him in the manner of a bird hypnotized by a snake. One detests and at the same time envies Shroyer for his complete lack of anything faintly resembling conformity<sup>10</sup>.

Aside from this resident talent, we had a fortuitous string of professional authors visiting the club in 1937. But above all there was a pure, almost naive, interest in science fiction and through it the world to come; the world, I sadly say, that we did not see developing in the years between 1940 and 1950. Ackerman would give accounts of the latest movies to be released with scientific slants. He was always ready to alert us to news items and journal articles with a science fiction emphasis. And he was full of news about the activities of other fans in the United States and abroad, for he was in touch with virtually every fan of the time.

When the meeting adjourned, cliques of us would break off and drift down into the cafeteria part of Clifton's, again ordering giant malts or sponging off Mr. Clifton's free sherbet mine. A lot of members at the time were just out of high school and simply unemployed. Perhaps that is why we took such flagrant advantage of Mr. Clifton and his generous restaurant. There was no rent for the club room and lots of free nourishment, not only in the sherbet mine, but in the limeade waterfall. Both were nationally advertised features.

During this idyllic period, just before our fan magazine venture would profoundly change the future course of the club, the characters which would hold forth on this new stage began to filter into the Chapter. As editor of *IMAGINATION!*, I got in touch with a fan who had been discovered at Shep's shop by one Robert L. Cumnock, an avid but short-lived meteor on the local scene for two or three months in 1937<sup>11</sup>. I wrote to this Mr. Ray Bradbury, telling him of our club, invited him to visit us, and explained how I had heard of him in the first place. At the next meeting, a wild-haired, enthusiastic individual burst into the Little Brown Room, demanding: "Is Mr. Yerke here?" This fantastic creature became endeared to all of us henceforth, and though often the victim of assaults with trays and malted milk canisters by infuriated victims of his endless pranks and disturbances, Ray remained a primary figure in the club from 1938 through 1941.

Another fan who was destined to be active in the LASFL and LASFS for a long time made

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<sup>10</sup> Fred, an outspoken atheist, wanted to start a magazine to be called *God Busters*. This blatant title shocked some of us more pious atheists. After distinguished service in World War II, he went on to a successful academic career and it was my pleasure to know him in this capacity in later years.

<sup>11</sup> Short-lived because his mother, whom he brought to a meeting, determined that we were a bunch of nuts if not worse and certainly not persons whom she wanted influencing her son.



his first appearance at the meeting of November 17, 1937. A Beverly Hills late-adolescent, Franklyn Brady had somehow obtained Henry Kuttner's home address on Cañon Drive in Beverly Hills, presenting himself at Kuttner's door on a Thursday night just as he was about to leave for the club. Henry, at a loss to do anything else, brought him along to the meeting. Brady had a strong macabre streak and there are references to him in fan literature as "Dr. Acula". At the Denvention in 1941 he and I shared a hotel room in order to save on the heavy expense of accommodations. I think a room cost \$1.50 a night.

I can now see that *IMAGINATION!* couldn't have done anything but change the entire nature of the club. With the lack of social perception that seems to typify most of us, neither Ackerman nor I for a moment had imagined that *IMAGINATION!* would do more than require a bit of work from four or five of the regular members. Processes seem to have a natural way of finding their own evolutionary direction no matter how much or how little planning is done by those who set them in motion. From an old-style book and magazine collectors' clearing house, the energies of the club increasingly were diverted to amateur publishing.

After the first hektographed issue of *IMAGINATION!*, the second, and I believe the third, were run off on Saturday afternoons on a mimeograph at the office where Morojo worked. Inasmuch as I was still nursing my fancied wounds from my change of status with the magazine, I was not a part of this activity. It soon became apparent that *IMAGINATION!* was going to make a heavy demand on everyone's time and an especially heavy demand on the treasury. After considerable discussion at several meetings, it was decided to take a big jump and purchase our own mimeograph and equipment. This machine was acquired on a monthly installment contract and cost the Chapter \$50.00. After a short time, it found a permanent residence at Russ Hodgkins' home, far out at the southwestern end of the city<sup>12</sup>.

The national fan field at that time was going into a brief and temporary lull; at least that is how I recall it from the Los Angeles end of the continent. *Fantasy Magazine* had just officially folded, as had the *Tesseract* and the *Science Fiction Digest*. In addition the last vestiges of Gernsback's Science Fiction League were fading away under the new ownership of Margulise and Co. FAPA had hardly been set rolling. I had received an invitation to join, but turned it down on the grounds that the contents of the first mailing were the most abominable trash I had yet seen. With the exception of a few hektographed magazines such as Baltadonis's *Collector*, Wiggins's *Science Fiction Fan*, Richard Wilson's *The Atom*, and a very few others, late 1937 saw an ebb tide between one epoch and another.

I think this period marked the close of the era of old-style science fiction fans: the readers and collectors who corresponded, many of whom were valid literary critics. Publishing in the amateur fan field prior to 1938 was of a much higher quality than the present day new fan magazines. For one thing, there were more printed magazines and they came out regularly. Their contents warranted thorough reading. In addition, the professional authors were willing to contribute, perhaps because most of the fan editors were older, mature persons.

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<sup>12</sup> Around Manchester Blvd. and Western Avenue. Beyond that in those days it was pretty open country.

The old *Fantasy* had set the standard for years. *The Science Fiction Critic*, Claire Beck's printed magazine, was of excellent quality, even by present standards, as was the first issue of Olon F. Wiggins's *Science Fiction Fan*, which was also printed, as was Richard Wilson's first *The Atom*. Wilson, by the way, was my third correspondent. We became involved through a trade ad for *IMAGINATION!* and wrote back and forth for a year or more.

*IMAGINATION!* had the luck to be uniquely blessed. Russ Hodgkins is one of the most methodical persons I have known. Under his exacting care the mechanical aspects of the magazine became rapidly superb. Morojo functioned as chief assistant in the early days in view of her experience and knowledge of office techniques. Besides mechanical excellence, the magazine was liberally blessed with such gifted and witty authors as Shroyer, Kuttner, Bloch, Mooney, Barnes and Russ himself, and later by the better fan writers of the time. Native talent also developed, giving Los Angeles a set of indigenous writers, one of whom became a professional, Ray Bradbury. All these contributors soon produced a zany and fantastic humor which had a style of its own.

The bulk of the editorial work on *IMAGINATION!* fell to Forrest J Ackerman. I have personally never much cared for his material because of my aversion to simplified spelling and googoo nicknames. But the content is, or *was*, sufficient to outweigh the abominable literary style. To Ackerman, who was fortunate in not having to find outside work to make a living, fell the job of stencilling, dummyming, corresponding and a good bit of the editing. The rest of us turned the crank, learned to use the Speed-O-Scope, assembled and stapled, or else sat on the side-lines and read from Hodgkins' collection of fantasy<sup>13</sup>, one which is certainly comparable to any of the best in the country.

The meeting of December 16, 1937, concluded my first year in the Chapter. Looking at the roster for that meeting, I see a list of names of people, most of whom not more than three persons presently affiliated with the Society could remember. And furthermore, knowing them as I did, I doubt they would fit into the Society of December 1943. They were a different kind of science fiction fan.

One of the very few social events of 1937 was an extra meeting at Morojo's to celebrate the first issue of *IMAGINATION!* It was here that Hal Clark introduced his brother Victor<sup>14</sup>. Hal Clark, an occasional attendee in those days, was a little, rotund red-faced person in his mid-thirties. Whence and whither of him I know nothing. I liked him for no especial reason, except that he reminded me of those small, round mannequins that teeter and loll precariously about on half-spherical bottoms, always smiling and never upsetting. His brother was quite the opposite. Like member Franklyn Brady, he had a speech impediment. His attempts to discuss complicated sociological or philosophical matters were thus rendered

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<sup>13</sup> By late 1937 the gatherings at the Hodgkins house once a month to finish putting the forthcoming issue of *IMAGINATION!* together had begun to rival if not surpass the downtown meetings in sociability, and sometimes in attendance.

<sup>14</sup> Incorrect. See p. 4, para. 3 re: meeting of August 19, 1937.

difficult<sup>15</sup>. Vic was working on his Ph.D. at UCLA, and came to meetings as late as 1943, still working on his thesis.

There were other characters that fit into the Chapter at the close of 1937. Corinne Grey was regular in attendance. A relative of Morojo, she was a junior at Los Angeles High School. She later became known as Pogo, and now signs her name as Mrs. Russell M. Wood. She has a baby son named Kurt.<sup>16</sup> Charles Gurnett was another obscure figure who flitted in and out of the club until late 1939; I remember him vividly for the sole reason that he reminded me of pictures I'd seen of Lovecraft. He seemed to have the respect of the Kuttner-Shroyer clique and they would all sit together talking over weighty matters by the hour at meetings.

Guests at that last meeting in 1937 included an obscure young artist friend of Ray Bradbury named Hannes Bok! Emil Petaja made his initial club appearance at this meeting. The officers of the club were as follows: Director, Russ Hodgkins, who was elected to a second term; a dual secretaryship represented alternately by Perry L. Lewis and Roy A. Squires; Treasurer, Hodgkins; and I believe Al Mussen (now missing on Bataan) as Librarian.

We used to have a Christmas party on the night of the election, which included a scientifiction grab bag. At the first party I received a Buck Rogers water pistol. The following year it was a bottle of whisky, which I was too young to drink. At the third and last such party, I made off with a useless book. By 1940 the club had other social outlets and the Christmas party in the Little Brown Room was abandoned.

As I look back at that first year and my impressions of it, I wonder if I would have remembered the club any other way. Had I been older I might have found it unutterably boring. But I don't think so<sup>17</sup>. I like to think that the Los Angeles Chapter of the Science Fiction League was at its best then and in the year following. I'm glad I knew that bunch of people, because it enables me to appreciate an aspect of fan history altogether missing from present day activities, be it for better or worse.

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<sup>15</sup> In the 1950s we had in the German Department at UCLA a native German graduate student with a serious lisp who insisted on studying Hegel. It is very difficult to pronounce "thesis, antithesis, synthesis" with a lisp.

<sup>16</sup> Pogo was present at the 70th birthday celebration party for Forrest J Ackerman in 1986, and appeared with a grown daughter at his 65th in 1981.

<sup>17</sup> Over half a century later I find those early LASFL years among my most delightful and cherished memories, and that is not the statement of a maudlin old sentimentalist.

## II: 1938

I think that 1938, at least in its earlier half, marked the period in the club during which the most members were in the most accord over the most things. *IMAGINATION!* was accepted without question as a serious project, necessitating the fullest support from the membership. There was no question raised, as there was two years later, over whether or not the club organ had first call on the spare time of the member. The biweekly and often weekly pilgrimages out to Hodgkins's house were made in high spirits by everyone.

The fourth issue of *IMAGINATION!* contained material by Ackerman, Bradbury, Kuttner, Lovecraft, and a cover by Mooney. It was dated January 1938. By now the Chapter had acquired many accessories to our original purchase, numbering mainly the Speed-O-Scope, numerous stencil alphabets, styli, and several pattern screens. These were kept out at Russ's, along with the paper stock and other materials, since the publishing activity was more or less permanently established there.

Here was the beginning of the trend that has over a period of years changed the LASFL from a biweekly meeting-night affair to (as of summer 1943) its present twenty four hours a day, seven days a week bedlam and circus. On a Sunday in 1938 by two in the afternoon upwards of fifteen persons would have congregated out at Hodgkins' house. During the week I had seen Ackerman occasionally in the afternoon while he was working on stencils for the magazine. Ackerman and Morojo were in constant consulting communication, along with Russ. On Sundays the various ideas that had been conceived during the week would be proposed at Hodgkins' rather than on Thursday's in the Little Brown Room.

The Glendale SFL was absent from all but a very few of these meetings, due to the extreme distance involved...something over twenty five miles including one interurban trip, a streetcar ride and a long bus ride. The gradual subordination of the club to *IMAGINATION!* and the preoccupation with the problems of running a regular monthly magazine which, with the exception of the British *NOVAE TERRAE* and its luminaries, was the largest fan magazine being produced, created a rift between the interests of the Glendale group and our own. It was only a matter of evolutionary course that Fox, Squires and Lewis would find less and less for them in the LASFL. By the end of the year, their attendance had become extremely irregular. However, there was no ill-feeling involved.

My own part in *IMAGINATION!* up to that time was negligible. It was not until April 1938 that I survived my early fiasco with the first issue of *IMAGINATION!* and wrote "A Reply to Michelism". This launched my writing career in the fan world, and unfortunately I seem to have been mixed up in controversial issues ever since. While my attitude on fan affairs, after my initial blind enthusiasm passed on in 1937, has been one of a detached armchair general, others who submerge themselves with deep emotion in fan fracas have made it rather hot at times. "Never a dull moment," I always say, and what with "Reply to Michelism", "The Tale of the Hooten", "Open Letter to Daugherty", "Stagger On, Pacificon!", "A Report to Science Fiction Fandom", and lastly "The Knanve", it is no wonder that Jack Speer, when he met me late in 1943, was moved to observe that I was surprisingly moderate in my opinions. However, I see I am getting ahead of the story.

Adolescence was very far along with me in 1938. At sixteen I am supposed to have looked nineteen, and from my eighteenth to my twenty first birthday only one bartender ever asked to see my draft card. The "youngster" outlook with which I entered the club gave way gradually to a more tempered view of the scene. While only a year before the sight of original cover illustrations, scientifiction cinema stills, and the rarer old paperbacks sent plain, unadulterated thrills of excitement throughout me, a year later I had a much more controlled view on the importance of fan activities in a person's life.

Contact with mature but unconventional persons like Kuttner, Shroyer and later Charles D. Hornig, quickly made me aware of the difference between teenage behavior and adult behavior. Naturally I can not say I grew up overnight, or that I ceased being stupid and juvenile at times, but my outlook not only on science fiction but "outside" life as well was greatly influenced by my role models and a premature desire to get over the growing up process. I wanted to be as urbane a conversationalist as the above-mentioned personalities in the old LASFL.

Russ Hodgkins had a meticulously well-kept scientifiction collection, plus a well-rounded library on technical and sociological subjects. One of his characteristics was an incessant filing, cross-filing, and counter-filing of all the various items on his shelves. One could find any given story by either magazine, author or title. There was still a fourth file where stories were listed by type. This order-mania was conveniently extended to the LASFL mimeograph and equipment, which received far better care than at any time since. Hodgkins' at the time was employed by the Bank of America, which may account for some of his preciseness. He had been there nine years since graduating from high school.

Ray Bradbury, who played a prominent role in the local chapter until late in 1941, was one of the many interesting persons to acquire the Sunday-at-Hodgkins's habit. In the same way that my outlook was influenced by contact with the older members, it was tempered by still closer association with the older adolescents of the club such as Bradbury<sup>1</sup> and Franklyn Brady. In 1938 Ray was attending Los Angeles High School. His interests and ambitions were in the theatre, but the trait that marked him among club members was his mad, insane, hackneyed humor which was the especial anathema of Russ Hodgkins. But underneath this ribald and uncontrollable humor, which produced such pieces as "Hollerbochen", "Hollerbochen Returns", "Mathematica Minus:", "Formula for a Stf.-story", "Verse of the Imagi-nation" and many others in the club magazine, was a deep understanding of people and the signs of the times.

Bradbury was a natural semanticist, and had a natural ability to see through the shams of the political and economic games that characterized those last years before the outbreak of the war<sup>2</sup>. We knew that this present war was coming, that it was a deliberate machination, and that we i.e. our age group would have to fight it. And yet at the same time we were thinking and talking about man's possibilities, of the world that we could build. In early 1938

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<sup>1</sup> Ray is three years older than I.

<sup>2</sup> His burlesque of President Roosevelt's "I hate war" speech was a devastatingly funny classic.

I wrote an article for my high school newspaper speculating on the effects on Los Angeles if war was declared with Japan and the city bombed. The Dean of Boys called me to his office at the request of the journalism instructor and asked me if I didn't think this was too fantastic and disturbing a subject to put before the tender minds of high school children? In the club we knew which way the wind was blowing, but unlike our equally perceptive and intelligent non-scientifiction friends we had the despair of seeing the world we believed possible threatened by the likelihood of world war.

Aside from a few pictures taken at Hodgkins's house, there is little to record those days in official LASFL archives. Squires and Fox, who were the secretaries until May, 1938, could not include these extra-meeting activities in the minutes because they were not present at them. Before *IMAGINATION!* all discussions and decisions were made at the meeting at Clifton's. Now the club's center of gravity was moving out to 84th Place and Western Avenue. While official motions and disbursement of monies took place at the business meeting in the Little Brown Room, most of the spontaneous discussions started out at Russ's place. This was more or less natural, since they evolved out of the publishing activities of the club, and problems which arose from them were considered there on the spot. As a result, at the Thursday night meetings in downtown Los Angeles, members had less to talk about and subjects ranged far afield from scientifiction. The business meetings often became cut and dried affairs, all the details having been worked out in advance. While this trend continued until late 1941 when the club rented its own quarters on Wilshire Boulevard and consolidated all activity there it had its beginning back in 1938. However, there was still lots of good, interesting talk and personalities at the downtown meetings in 1938.

George Tullis, who later made a splash in Chicago scientifiction circles, came intermittently to LASFL meetings as early as mid-1937. He made another brief appearance in February 1938. I rather liked him; he was genial and down and out along with many others of us then. At the meeting of February 3, he deluge us with accounts of Sun Valley, Idaho. At a subsequent meeting Tullis and I amused the gathering with a concert played on two ten cent fifes. We were amazed with each other's dexterity on the instrument, each having assumed himself to be the only person who ever attempted to play classical music on a toy fife.

Other meetings featured talks by Shroyer, Kuttner and Hodgkins; then in mid-spring 1938 the Michelist movement broke upon fandom. My journalistic venture in *IMAGINATION!*, "A Reply to Michelism" caused me to be hailed by the opposition as "the first to take the Michelist bull by the horns". My information at the time consisted of the January issue of *Novae Terrae*, the monthly journal of the British Science Fiction Association, which I along with most of the members of the Chapter had joined. What I was actually trying to do then was not to take a political position pro or con over the Michelist issue, but to question the advisability of attaching to fandom any pseudo-political importance, a stand I have maintained to the present day.

Time dims my familiarity with the Michelist movement. Since it inescapably involves the New Fandom movement, it is not my desire to stir up this ancient and bitter feud now. My article at the time started the ball of criticism and dispute rolling, but in subsequent correspondence with Wollheim we both reached an agreement as to aims, and the entire

affair was settled without enmity on either side. At the same time, the Michelist/New Fandom controversies were the first attempt by science fiction fandom to attach a sociological significance to the hobby.

Through the maturing influence of Russ Hodgkins and others I have mentioned, I managed not to make an ass of myself in this short-lived furor. My career as a science fiction fan might have taken a different turn at this time, however, if another event of local importance had not happened in May 1938. The Squires-Lewis Secretariat at last petered out. Squires resigned as an active member and officer, and Lewis, his unofficial aide-de-camp followed suit.

When this vacancy occurred, Hodgkins, acting under the authority of the Chapter's constitution, appointed me Secretary. This was at the meeting of May 8. I was so elated at the prospects that I did not stop to consider whether my elevation was one of well-considered forethought after looking over several prospects or simply due to a dearth of prospects. Either Brady or Bradbury were regular and enthusiastic attendees at the time and would have been logical candidates. This new responsibility quickly turned my interest in fan activities from growing involvement in the national field to those of the local chapter. For that reason my reclame as a national fan has been rather neglected. For the next five and a half years it was augmented only by *The Damn Thing* of 1940-41, the two Fywert Kinge pamphlets produced by Arthur Louis Joquel, and occasional items in other magazines, namely Bronson's *Fantasite*. For the next three years after my appointment my activities were devoted to recording in all their humorous phases the activities and exploits of the members of the Los Angeles Chapter of the Science Fiction League and its metamorphosis into the Los Angeles Science Fantasy Society.

Since many others have not constrained themselves in praise of the Yerke minutes, I do not feel it indecorous to make a few remarks about them myself. As a Secretary, I had no training whatever in business procedures or in the proper form and method of keeping minutes. Like my literary idol of the time Hendrik Willem Van Loon, I wrote history as I thought it should be written, with emphasis on the personalities involved rather than the dull business proceedings in all their monotony. I was at this time the assistant editor of the school newspaper, and author of a very popular column *Moozic Nooz*, which was devoted to the activities of the music department, though more often featuring the gaffs and scandals of prominent orchestra and band members. I simply adapted my journalistic tactics to writing the minutes, growing bolder and bolder as my confidence in my task increased. The "task" lasted in an unbroken stretch from May 8, 1938, to March 31, 1941. Due to a real lack of candidates for the job, I was reappointed Secretary in 1942, and remained in office irregularly through 1943.

Being in the position of club historian for this lengthy period I recorded the coming and going of many familiar faces but above all this protracted tenure gave me an insight into the club and its membership possessed by none of the other members<sup>3</sup>. Ackerman and Moroyo,

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<sup>3</sup> This was written in late 1943 when other persons of comparable seniority were no longer members of the

the only others with similar club longevity, have no ability to view these years from a perspective, being too thoroughly wrapped up in the club itself. I watched the club change in purpose, membership, concept and nature. Within two years after our entry into the war, it seemed to me that the club ceased to be a "club" at all, and had become a kind of crash pad for displaced fans moving about the country in the war-economy and an asylum for a new breed of local fans, some of whom seemed almost to live in the clubroom and, in my opinion, had emotional problems<sup>4</sup>.

In the latter half of my secretarial tour most of the stimulating characters of the Kuttner-Shroyer class had all but completely disappeared from the scene. Their places were taken members of a different order: Helen Finn, Jack Dowdle, Henry Hasse, Arthur L. Joquel II, Walt Daugherty, Ed Camerlain, George Hahn and Bill Crawford. I observed the antics of this kaleidoscopic procession sitting in the chair next to Director Hodgkins, and then Directors Finn, Wilmorth and lastly Paul. I feel I put in a good turn of work for the Chapter in those three years plus one, though the extent of this service is mainly unknown to fans outside of Los Angeles.

In June 1938 Charles D. Hornig arrived in Los Angeles for one of his more lengthy stays, the first in a series of shuttles between Elizabeth, N.J. and California. These lasted until March 1942, at which time he was sent to a camp for conscientious objectors. Hornig is probably not remembered by newer fans as the founder of the Science Fiction League, who as such signed the charter that brought the LASFL into existence. Between 1938 and the present time it has been my pleasure to enjoy a very staunch friendship with Charlie<sup>5</sup>, though this did not occur immediately in the first year. Though Hornig and I attended much of the foolery of the American Legion Convention together that year, it was not until his stay in the city two years later, when I was a significantly older adolescent that we were able to cement an enduring relationship.

Those who have known Hornig will recall him as a man of uncommon conversational wit, able to talk delightfully on any subject likely to be brought up. His witty observations and parodies endeared him to virtually every member of the LASFL, while his interest in Esperanto and World Peace, both lost causes, put him on firm grounds with Ackerman and Morojo.

Hornig's arrival in town brought some life into the club at a moment when it was ever so slightly dull. He guest edited the July 1938 issue of *IMAGINATION!* and engaged in some interesting excursions in the direction of Pogo. However, the Hornig influence over the club in general and Bradbury and myself in particular did not become very important until his second long visit in 1940.

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club or completely dormant, e.g. Hodgkins, Bradbury, Shroyer, Brady, etc.

<sup>4</sup> My original paragraph about this aspect of the club in 1943 is overblown and reflects my own prejudices about the turn things were taking. It was written from anything but an unbiased perspective, as I tried to imagine I was doing.

<sup>5</sup> Which continues to this day. He lives in San Jose, and we see each other several times a year.



While the summer of 1938 saw the chapter organ, *IMAGINATION!* ascend ever higher on the list of the top fan magazines, the first in what has since become periodic slumps in attendance at meetings began. The non-publishing activity of the club simply reached a very low ebb, with meetings attracting only six or eight persons. The minutes of the meetings record despair at this trend, which became a familiar cry as occasional slumps happened every year following. At the same time the summer of 1938 inaugurated the first of many all-club social adventures. The classic Southern California beach party, which took place on August 13 (and into the morning of August 14) was recorded with unusual and spontaneous enthusiasm by myself as Secretary. As I am at the moment without the convenience of the Minutes Book, I remember only a few of those attending. I know that the whole affair was remarkably enlivened by our rapidly forming group of impromptu entertainers. Brady, a Pepsi-Cola fiend, waded down on the shore to watch the grunions come in and stepped into an open clam. Kuttner was seen chasing a scantily clad Pogo, brandishing a simmering wiener on a long stick pointed at her buttocks. Persons interested in wry accounts of LASFL social events may visit the clubroom and read the whole story in the Special Events section of the Minutes book.

Incidentally, the beach party set off a reorganization of the Minutes book, to which I had fallen heir. In August I set about in a burst of enthusiasm to record and transcribe the pre-historic Secretaries, such as Wanda Test, extant in 1936. These Minutes had been irregularly kept in a notebook, but in a handwriting not conducive to leisurely reading. My enthusiasm lasted long enough to transcribe several such sets about ancient days when the Chapter met in the Pacific Electric building on Main Street with William L. Hoffard as Director.

After the beach party my high school-trained news instinct detected an interesting story for future generations. However there was no tradition or provision in our constitution for holding, let alone recording, such events. So I introduced the Special Events section. This section includes to date three more beach parties, numerous picnics, theatre excursions, including the private showing of Fritz Lang's *Metropolis*, and various publishing sessions. It was my habit to record these extra activities in as interesting a detail as possible until 1940, after which they became too commonplace in the club to merit special attention.

So far in this account, I have stressed the tempo of events rather than amusing the reader with illuminating anecdotes. My effort has been so far as possible to trace the transition from a biweekly meeting literary LASFL to a full-time madhouse LASFL and second home for many of its members. I will back-track for a moment and recount some of the more interesting events of 1938 though it was, on the whole, a quiet year, lacking either the addition of notable personalities to the club or an imposing list of visiting celebrities such as we had had in 1937.

On January 20, 1938, copies of a new mimeographed constitution were passed around. With few subsequent observations this document served as the sole authority for the conduct of Chapter matters until late in 1943. This novice attempt at providing constitutional guidance to a literary fan club was adequate for the old LASFL, but it was not adaptable to a group maintaining permanent quarters with a large, for its class, publishing activity. Thus when later in 1943 the problems of managing and policing a clubroom came to an impasse, the

entire legal structure fell down about an unsuspecting membership.

February 17 was the date of the first visit to the LASFL of the Pomona fan Thomas R. Daniels. Daniels is another one of those many proto-fans who never get up sufficient steam for a good launching. Off and on for a number of years Daniels was sometimes heard from in *Voice of the Imagi-nation*, in some other local fan magazine, through a flurry of letters, but never enough to become even moderately well-known. At present residing in Washington state, he is chiefly remembered for his attempt in 1940-41 to assemble a comprehensive photolibrary of scientifiction fans. I engaged in some correspondence with him regarding my own extensive photofile of local fans and visiting celebrities, but nothing ever came from any of this.

March 3, 1938, witnessed a discussion of the Supernatural, lead by Fred Shroyer. This date was a fine time for such a discussion, as the supernatural falling of unprecedented amounts of water from the sky at this time came the nearest yet to washing the entire city into the Pacific ocean. I was in a particularly unreceptive mood that night, as during the morning while walking on the curb (because the sidewalk was under water) up to the Sunset bus line to get to school, my saxophone case suddenly opened up and dropped a \$165.00 gold plated Alto Saxophone into a foot or so of rapidly running, muddy, silty gutter water. I managed to retrieve the instrument before it disappeared down the sewer, but the cost of cleaning and repadding it was a Depression era disaster.

The following meeting, March 17, popular author-member Arthur K. Barnes, recounted the havoc caused in his home district of Tujunga Canyon by this deluge, telling a never-to-be-forgotten yarn of his hilarious journey out of the flood area on an Earthworm tractor. While sitting, along with several other residents of the washed out area, on the hood of the engine, he was intrigued by the sight of several old copies of *Amazing Stories* of pre-1930 vintage floating down the swollen river. He never did learn who the collector in Tujunga Canyon was.

At the April 1 meeting, Paul Freehafer passed about tickets for an open house at CalTech, which a number of members attended, lured chiefly by the spectacular demonstrations in the electrical laboratories. A month later was had, as one of our few speakers of the year, Mr. John J. Parsons of CalTech, who discussed the rocket experiments there, where he was on the research staff.

One of the interesting personalities of the old LASFL was Charlie Henderson, who stood for the club as long as the club stood for him, roughly 1938-1939. Henderson was an irresponsible person of Shroyer's tastes but lacking the latter's intelligence and personal attraction. Charlie worked for Shep's Shop, and is alleged eventually to have run off with Lucille Shepard's huge Packard coupe and an unspecified amount of cash.

Henderson's contribution to the club consisted of ribald discussions and fantastic ideas for putting the club on a paying basis, a bad habit often dreamed about by Walt Daugherty. The meeting of May 19 ended in a verbal riot with Henderson proposing that the club purchase a professional story for \$100 and run it in *IMAGINATION!* for ten or twenty issues. The

flaw of this proposal as a circulation booster for a fan magazine is obvious. There are plenty of professional stories to begin with. Finally with the demonic assistance of Kuttner and Shroyer the meeting concluded with everyone going completely wild. It concluded with the proposal that newsboys be given copies of the club magazine so they could walk down the streets shouting "Examiner! Times! Imagination!"

Following a few meetings of peace and quiet, politics again reared its ugly head. Old Timers will recall the great furor raised by Wollheim and the CPASF over McCreary's story "After 3000 Years" in *Astounding* sometime in 1938. When copies of the Wollheim letter reached local fans, we were off again on the old merry-go-round. The contention of Bradbury, Brady and myself was that: what if "3000 years" was pro-capitalism, etc., it's only a story. The ensuing fracas succeeded only in getting the discussion of Michelism banned from *IMAGINATION!*, a solution which embittered feelings on both sides of the dispute for some time. The upshot of the McCreary controversy was to get me into a protracted correspondence with Tremaine and then Campbell, which I prized very highly, especially my letters from Campbell wherein we engaged for a brief while in an interesting psychological discussion.

Bob Olson was an author-member whom I particularly liked. He was a small, jovial Swede, a sort of everybody's grandfather. His contribution to the earliest history of magazine scientifiction was established and well-earned in Gernsback's *Amazing Stories*. His first story appeared in the June, 1927, issue: "Four Dimensional Roller Press", and this was followed by a host of dimensional stories, "Four Dimensional Surgery". "Four Dimensional Robberies", etc. During the three years from 1937 to 1939 when Bob Olson was an irregular observer of Chapter doings, his genial, rotund figure was welcomed at all times. He was always willing to talk to any of us, especially wee youngsters like me. Shortly after the beach party of 1939 he became afflicted with an obscure bone ailment which incapacitated him for several years. In 1941, just after the Denvention, Ackerman, Morojo, Erle Korshak and I visited him at the County Farm, and then in 1942 I saw him on the campus of Los Angeles City College, quite well again. Unfortunately his almost perfectly globular bald pate now had some unsightly lunar undulations. Alas! His enviable cranium never recovered from his affliction.

The meeting night of June 7, 1938, witnessed an interesting lecture by Olson on hydroponics, the art of growing plants in chemical solutions. At the time Bob was an agent for a local company promoting this agrotechnology. The club in a great burst of enthusiasm planned for an attendance of fifty persons but succeeded by a very late hour in attracting only twenty five. One of the guests at this meeting was A. Ross Kuntz, who made irregular appearances along with his friend Melvin Dolmatz until just last year.

At the meeting of August 17, 1938, we experienced a blow that seemed to presage the beginning of the end, but which eventually turned out to be merely the darkest hour before the dawn. The minutes for this meeting open as follows:

One of the most discouraging, down-hearted, disgusting, dreary, discouraging, disabling meetings in the history of the local Chapter. Only 12 persons were present at this sad as-

semblage; the meeting at which one of our most popular members died. Beloved by all, the enlightener of many dreary hours, of service and assistance to the cause of scientifiction many times, missed and mourned by all members of the local Chapter, yea, of all the scientifictional field, we take this moment to bow our heads in silent memory of our former beloved member: *IMAGINATION!* Sniffle, sniffle).

The object here, one might guess, was to communicate the feeling of disaster to all. What did happen? Apparently after the death of grandfather Ackerman earlier in the year, the Ackerman fortune had not fared so well, so that in August 1938, at the age of twenty two, Forrest J Ackerman had to give up scientifiction as his full-time occupation and go to work on the swing shift as a typist for either the government or Standard Oil. This was, to the best of my knowledge, Forrie's first real job, and it hit him as hard as it hit the rest of us. Since he was the mainstay of the editing and stencilling of *IMAGINATION!*, a fact that was begrudgingly admitted only as necessary, it became suddenly obvious that the magazine would have to undergo some severe telescoping.

After rapid, though sometimes vapid, discussions, the club showed more good sense than on any similar occasion since, and decided to suspend the magazine, rather than suffer a slow and agonizing descent from being one of fandom's top periodicals to an becoming ignominious hanger-on. However, plans had been in the offing for some months to make the forthcoming anniversary issue a giant of its kind, replete with top-notch articles by some of the shining lights of the time, both amateur and professional. There were to be full page lithographed pictures of Chapter members. There was a large accumulation of manuscripts scheduled for future issues, including submissions for a contest with the topic: the future of scientifiction. (These make interesting reading, especially Jack Speer's "After 1939, what?")

When the news of Ackerman's having to work hit the club, everything had to be frozen until we knew just how much spare time Forrie was going to have available. The situation came as a very hard blow, and many a near-tear was seen in the eyes of those present at the August 17th meeting. I noted it all down in the Minutes with a sense of foreboding, and for a while it looked as though I were right. Letters of protest and condolence began to flood Box 6475<sup>o</sup> from all over the fan world. On the home front, no one seemed to be getting over the shock.

Finally, on November 3, 1938, *Madge's Prize Mss.* was issued, the first bit of fan literature to come out of the LASFL since the crash. But at the same time, attendance at the meetings was dropping. Present day members who imagine the club to be much more active now (late 1943) than formerly will be interested to note that in the minutes of November 17, 1938, it was seriously observed that the club was facing the startling prospect of *disbanding* because the attendance was down to only fifteen per meeting and showed no signs of getting better! Today an attendance of fifteen is considered better than average. A long discussion took place that night between the "faithful", which consisted of Hodgkins, Ackerman, Morojó,

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<sup>o</sup> Box 6375 Metro Sta in downtown Los Angeles was the club's mail address until 1941. Ackerman or Morojó picked up the mail every day and distributed it to club officers and other intended recipients.

Bradbury, Freehafer, and myself. It was pointed out that many of our active members, such as Mike and Corinne Ellsworth, Pogo, Wilbur Stimpson, Freehafer, Grady McMurtry, the Glendale group, etc., were not attending because of work and the distance involved. A representative of the Glendale group flatly told us that the club had degenerated into a boring, uninteresting tedium, and at the moment I feared he was right. (This was a long, long time before some of the more loyal members admitted the same thing themselves.)

The absence of *IMAGINATION!*, the lack of new interests or new active members, saw the Chapter approaching the end of 1938 at a very low ebb. At the meeting of December 2, only eight persons were present in the Little Brown Room. Clifton's floor manager kept peeking into the room and was visibly annoyed at the small attendance and concomitant decline in the purchase of food or refreshments<sup>7</sup>. We decided to postpone disbandment until after the Christmas party two weeks hence.

Faith in scientifiction and Los Angeles fandom was again restored on December 15. Despite a rainstorm that did some \$25,000 (pre-war prices) worth of damage to the city and environs, twenty four old timers turned out for the annual Christmas party. Gifts for the grab box were in great profusion and the sudden reappearance of our authors and their friends, plus the Glendale SFL, made everyone jubilant. Charlie Henderson conducted an auction that was hilariously funny. There was much discussion and feasting, from the middle of which Russ Hodgkins was called by his father to help push the family car out of a downtown mud-sink. This left me in charge of the whole affair.

When *IMAGINATION!* became the club organ, dues were raised from ten to fifteen cents per meeting, but with the demise of publishing Pogo called for a motion that the levy be reduced to its former level. Settling this haggle was my first experience at the helm of the LASFL, a function which I have assumed on numerous subsequent occasions, much to the dissatisfaction of many members who are annoyed that I insist on carrying on the business at had without a sideshow. Finally, dues were kept at fifteen cents on condition that the club design a coat of arms and produce some stationary for members' use. Stationary came two years later and the coat of arms after three years. Russ returned from his rescue mission, and everyone proceeded to reach into the grab bag, and to gab far into the night.

Nineteen **thirty seven** and 1938 go hand in hand in my interpretation of the club's chronology. Though the latter year differed from the previous because of the emphasis on publishing activity, the stage was peopled with essentially the same characters and the same spontaneity among the membership. I like those days and weeks, partly, I suppose, because there was a certain element of newness for me in associating with a group of this nature. We actually did live in comparative harmony then; there were few if any frictions, and very little gossip. The old LASFL was perhaps the ideal fan organization because each and every member had an earnest, sincere interest in science fiction and its hobby aspects. The activity was therefore undiluted with cynicism, vicarious motivation, and petty jealousy which later wrecked the LASFS. And there were no members whose presence was resented by any of

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<sup>7</sup> The Little Brown Room could easily accommodate thirty or more persons.

the rest, another feature of the late LASFS which caused much unpleasantness.

In this first column of these memoirs I may have waxed pedantic and dull at times. I was a very young adolescent then and I can only record my recollections and feelings as they seemed at the time. In the next volume things pick up, with remembrances and anecdotes about the many professional authors and visiting fans that flocked to Los Angeles in 1939-1941. But if the reader has come this far with me, he will appreciate in the following volumes why it was necessary for me to go into such minute detail about the years 1937 and 1938, for it is on this framework that the history of the next four years rests.

The coming year 1939 saw many sudden, abrupt changes, the beginning of the two year transition period from the LASFL to the LASFS. In the following December, the face of Rome would be greatly changed.

T. Bruce Yerke,  
December 14, 1943