

▲ FULL LENGTH ▲

ARTICLES

Number Two

UP TO NOW

. A history of fandom
as

Jack Speer
sees it.

EDITORIAL INTRODUCTION

Full Length Articles is ordinarily a purely FAPA magazine, but extra copies of this number will be made for distribution at the World Science Fiction Convention of 1939.

TABLE OF SUCCESSIVE TOPICS

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PREFACE

A careful analysis of prefaces to histories and other books as well shows them to be occupied, almost without exception, in bemoaning the inaccuracies, limitations, and general worthlessness of the work being introduced. This will not be an exception.

This is a kind of a cross between a set of memoirs and a history. I have tried to cover, at least thinly, all aspects of the purely fan field, but, as a glance at the table of topics will show, I am able to go much more into detail about those parts with which I am better acquainted. You might even become weary with the minuteness of detail in places. I extend my sympathies.

I have tried, so far as possible, to make this history as objective as a good history should be. I have been hard on my friends when they seemed on the shady side of the ledger, and have, I trust, never failed to give my enemies credit where due. Despite this, however, especially in the accounts centering around June, 1938, the reader will do well to beware, for at that point I find myself unable to see Wollheim's actions as excusable, when, of course, they most probably are. On the other hand, since the object of this history is truth, rather than to make me popular, I have not leaned over backward with regard to "personal enemies."

In trying to cover everything at least thinly, I have relied upon unreliable memory, upon inferences from unauthoritative accounts, and in some cases, as in the origins of Michelism, upon pure guesswork --fairly good guessing I believe, however.

If I haven't already made it clear, let me say now that this doesn't pretend to be the final history of fandom --far, far from it. I only hope to make a connected beginning, perhaps to slam such a mass of misinformation at you that those who know will be bound to give the true accounts. When those accounts are in, when we have run a course of "vignettes of fan history" in the fanmags-- then will be the time for the writing of a dependable history. The eventual historian or committee of historians will thus have a good groundwork for a better, fuller, and more accurate account than could possibly be supplied by any one fan, however experienced, working alone to write "the" history of fandom.

Since I have realized from the start that this couldn't be the history of fandom to stand for all time, I haven't made as great effort to check all points and fill in gaps as I might otherwise have-- indeed, a large part of it has been pat down from memory, in spare minutes at work.

If it succeeds in conveying to new fans a composite picture of fandom, not too irreparably distorted, as one fan sees it, that's about all I have a right to hope for.

But I think the old-timers will find interest here, too, aside from the certain sport of picking out mistakes and omissions. For one thing, the truth about several matters is here generally revealed for the first time, since I can't put into history anything I know to be false.

I turn now to a more direct discussion of the subject-matter of the history --or memoirs, as you will.

It will be found to deal almost entirely with American fandom. There is no disrespect to the Tommies, Aussies, et al, in the fact that I have nevertheless called it a history of fandom rather than of American fandom. The latter title seemed that it might force me to leave out entirely all references to English fandom except where it was directly connected with an event in America, a limitation I didn't want.

This is a story, not a handbook, and emphasis is placed on the flow of events rather than the elements thereof. Fans in most cases have been briefly identified personally if at all; fan magazines have not been mentioned as much as their importance would warrant. And professional s-f figures at the absolute minimum.

You will note the division of the history into periods. I acknowledge that the periods are much more strictly delineated than the actual conditions, but I have ample precedent in the writing of general history. And it seemed that it would be easier to recall the nature and context of the Schwartz-Wollheim feud if it were fitted neatly into a definite larger pattern, or of the Philadelphia Conference if emphasis were put on its place in a general trend of the times, and so on.

It might be well to here define my use of the terms "fandom" and "transition". A transition I conceive of as a period in which old structures are crumbling, new forces coming into being, and the entire nature of fandom in a state of flux. A "fandom" is a fairly stable stretch in which known elements work out to their conclusion thru interaction and development. I have that of no transition before the first fandom, because it seemed to come in pretty much in the shape that would have been expected, without much doubt as to what its interests and activities would be. I may be wrong; I know practically nothing of the early years.

Without further ado, I contact you to Page One;

THE BEGINNINGS

For this writer, mere guesses must suffice for the early contacts between fans. Many, probably, when editors no longer felt like carrying the discussion in the readers' columns, continued arguments over scientific matters in private correspondence, and some controversies on non-scientific points may very likely have also been continued privately after they had progressed too far for general interest. Or a particularly sparkling letter published might cause other readers to desire to write its author, aside from any particular points brot up. At any rate, many science-fiction fans did contact each other, but for a time didn't realize that others were doing the same thing.

Forrest J Ackerman and alias Jack Darrow popularized the letter-every-month habit with regard to the professional magazines, and built up extensive correspondences. Then, according to McPhail, one year in the early thirties Forrest Ackerman took a trip east from his home in Californrynia, and visited many correspondence friends on the way. This helped unify the field.

Some local groups took to publishing official organs, which became the first fan magazines. The West Coast publication, The Time Traveler, was the first to achieve general circulation. Science Fiction Digest, published at the other end of the country, must have gotten some mention in readers' columns, and built up a small circulation that was nevertheless nationwide, with some subscribers in England. This magazine eventually absorbed The Time Traveler, and shortly changed its name to Fantasy Magazine, to include facts pertaining to the weird fiction field.

The issue after its second anniversary, Fantasy Magazine began dedicating issues to the Big Three of scientifiction, and to other special fields, including Weird Tales. Its first dedication was to the field-leading Astounding Stories of Street & Smith, and it received mention in Brass Tacks. When Wonder's time came, they did even more, seeing to it that every member of the SFL got a copy of that issue.

A bit earlier, taking cognizance of the existence of the fan world, Charlie Hornig, who turned out a few issues of the unsuccessful Fantasy Fan, and then teen-age managing editor of Wonder Stories, recommended to editor Gernsback the formation of a Science Fiction League. This was undertaken with enthusiasm, and being well featured by a commercial magazine of large circulation, attracted many scientifictionists to the fan field. At the same time a Swap Column and other features of interest to veteran 'fans' were inaugurated. Later, the SFL Department began giving semi-annual Bachelor of Scientifiction tests which increased the interest of membership. It was the Golden Age of fandom.

In late 1934, Bob Tucker, a Brass Tacker of some standing, reported in Brass Tacks the formation of the spwstfm (the initials were in capitals when used by him, but one of the first principles of the War was that warriors should not capitalize the name of the enemy, and this writer was on The Other Side)--the society for the prevention of wire staples in science fiction magazines.

At the head of the society was one dictator, tucker. In later issues of Brass Tacks, the dictator reported new recruits of his society, and some months later duplicated his original announcement, in Wonder Stories' The Reader Speaks. One of the new recruits contributed two doughnuts to the society treasury, and was given a fool title, something like 'high nincompoop'. Another neophyte suggested rubber staples to replace the wire ones, and was also given an official title. One ironic side light in this war was that the next most prominent member of the spwstfm was 'ol' doc lowndes', royal pill roller for the dictator. Few knew that he actually was a medico of some sort, and none, certainly, suspected that one day he was to be the most liberal member of Wollheim's Michelist group.

And here Wollheim enters, in opposition to Tucker, Lowndes, and all the other anti-staplers. We, he declaimed, have listened to this infamous proposition long enough. He therefore proclaimed the organization of the International and Allied Organizations for the Purpose of Upholding and Maintaining the use of Metallic Fasteners in Science Fiction (which he, mocking Tucker, initialed STF) publications in the United States of America, Unlimited, and called for support from all red-blooded believers in the efficacy of metallic binders.

There followed a scramble for power and recruits. Espionage and counter-espionage were rife, and neither leader could know for certain that his most trusted lieutenant was not a spy. Membership in the IAOPUMUMSTFPUSA, Unltd, reached around twenty, and doubtless the spwstfm was about the same. Titles were given to all, usually meaningless. the dictator stood alone at the head of his battalions, but Wollheim, as Grand High Cocolorum, had Kenneth Sterling (whether author of The Brain-Stealers of Mars, or another coincidentally having the same name, was never quite clear) as Exalted Grand Booleywag. There were two exceptions to the rule about titles: A recruit whom Wollheim suspected to be a spy was deprived of his, and young Speer was named Lord High Bradder, referring to his suggestion that magazines be bound with hand brads--paper fasteners, such as bind this publication.

Both armies issued official organs, tucker's d'journal, and Wollheim & Sterling's Polynorphanuclated Leucocyte. The PL was a scream, as was the membership certificate; doubtless d'journal was, too.

The War entered its penultimate stage, finding several episodes (chapters) of the anti-staplers in existence, and three or four Fortresses of Wollheim's men. It is said that when two Americans get together, they form a club. Two were all that were required to form a Fortress.

It was a crushing blow to the spwstfm when the second issue of d'journal, upon being issued, was found stuck full of staples - sabotage, by spies? Tucker weakly quibbled about the difference between fan magazines; and science-fiction magazines, at which his program was aimed, but his prestige was ruined. The New York episode, in its entirety, went over to Wollheim.

An interesting commentary on the difference in the fan magazines of that day is that Fantasy Magazine scarcely mentioned the Staple War. Out in Oklahoma, McPhail wrote in his private magazine, Science Fiction News, that fans were growing tired of alphabetical societies. Several anti - alphabetical societies alphabetical societies were announced in Brass Tacks, and others expressed their weariness with it all in more dignified ways.

...the beginning of a press books department toward mid-1935, Tremaine broke precedent by commenting on a letter to follow--the commentary in italics--saying some enigmatic things about the reader reading the letter slowly, to get the same feeling from it that he did. The letter was a report by someone of Tucker's home town or nearby, stating that he was dead, and giving some of his last wishes. It shocked everyone. But professional publication moves slowly, and by the time that issue of Astounding was on the stands, Tremaine knew it was a fake, and, in private letters to interested fans, said he thought Tucker had known of the trick, and that he would publish nothing more with regard to the First Staple War. One of Wollheim's lieutenants talked with the dictator long distance. "The Staple War is definitely over," said Wollheim, "and we are working on something that will be lots more fun..."

THE ISA-SFL CLASH

Wollheim may have, to an extent, regretted his previous connections with foolishness when he launched into a serious and bitter indictment of Wonder Stories, in long letters to its *The Reader Speaks*, concerning the quality of its pulp paper, type face, word count, and such other matters as the translation of stories from the German; he was anti-Nazi even then. But deeper causes for hate of Gernsback lay just under this.

A story by Wollheim, *The Man from Ariel*, was published by Wonder and never paid for. In working to get his due, Wollheim ran across many other young or beginning authors who had been similarly cheated. He published his findings in the last Bulletin of the TFG (succeeded by the Phantagraph).

The TFG, which has not been mentioned hereinbefore, was a small organization of rather more weird fans, which, at the time of its change of name from International Science Fiction Guild (it originated as the Impossible Story Club), was headed by Wilson Shepherd of Oakman, Alabama. When Wollheim came in, and Shepherd and Wollheim publishers formed, the center of power began, unconsciously, to shift to the north. The first Terrestrial Fantascience Guild Bulletins were hektographed publications; the last was a large-size mimeo affair. In many respects, the TFG was before its time.

Publication of the facts against Wonder Stories resulted in the expulsion of Wollheim and a number of compatriots from the SFL. The last heard of this angle of the case, he had been offered six months' probationary reinstatement, and said he would probably come back in, with his tongue in his cheek.

The XSFL was a name the expelled ones took. Most or all of them were members of the International Cosmo-Science Club, which about this time changed its name to the International Scientific Association. And it was the New York Branch of this Association, supported by other ISA members, which thereupon took up the cudgel in support of its members, and became the rallying point for disaffected elements, rather than the TFG. The staff of Fantasy Magazine, also under attack by Wollheim, made common cause with Gernsback and Hornig against the ISA. The result was the climax of the Old Fandom.

This writer regrets that he is unable to give an account of the war that followed, having had nothing to do with it and having heard little of it until much later, when it was referred to rather than described. The NYB-ISA sang songs of their battle against Gernsback; songs that might be adapted for modern singing. In some way they must have gained publicity for their charges against Wonder Stories, for to their work is ascribed some of the credit or responsibility for the fall of Gernsback's Wonder not many months after.

The ~~NYB~~ published the International Observer, a photocopied magazine with a rather heavy sprinkling of science. The idea of the ISA in its later history was to harness science-fiction and science together, and the Observer straddled the fence between these two interests.

One day the NYB went off on a picnic and ended up in Philadelphia; the First Eastern Science Fiction Convention had crept up on them unawares. A good time was had by all, we are told, and they agreed that it was a great idea.

THE HEYDAY OF FANTASY MAGAZINE

For yet a while Fantasy Magazine ruled the field. In the later stage of the old period, various vagrant fan magazines began to crop up again, but none attempted to enter into competition with FM. Jim Blish' Planeteer, based on an old suggestion of Wollheim's to Street & Smith, put fiction first and Esperanto, etc, second. The Phantagraph went thru a number of changes of format under Shepherd & Wollheim, at first mainly club news and ultra-°fan° discussions, and later purely literary. The International Observer apparently was not considered to be in direct competition with Fantasy Magazine, its contents being mostly science and fan doings rather than news on the pros. Numerous individual publications, single-issue and single-copy °pass arounds° were being done, but of course could not threaten FM's primacy. The boys were feeling around.

Even then, pseudonyms ran riot among the fans. The Greater New York Science Fiction League was said to be populated mainly with pseudonyms, half of which were Frederik Pohl. Willy the Wisp flitted around, always wherever Wollheim had been, reporting doings from a suspiciously Wollheimish point of view, as in the fight that resulted in George Gordon Clark's quitting the field.

The SFL continued, gaining new members every month, tho how interested most of the members were is problematical. Two or three P gif tests were conducted, in all, the returns on the last one never being published. Superficially, all was serene.

Then things began to happen.

THE DECLINE AND FALL OF THE ERA

Wonder has been sold? italicized FM's Science Fiction Eye.

In subscription, Wonder was doing rather badly, even compared to other pulps, and the depression had hit all of them pretty hard (What depression?) But that is in the history of science-fiction, and this is a history of fandom. Some of the life seemed to go out of the SFL toward the last, tho perhaps it is only my fancy. At any rate, with the disappearance of the parent magazine in early 1936, the SFL ceased to be, despite its imposing list of somebodies on the board of directors, which TWS at this writing still carries. The huge Chicago org of 50 or so authors, readers, and fans lost interest in itself. All over the country little three-man chapters gave up the ghost; in England the young SFA took them over.

The sale of Wonder was almost the last big story FM carried. Conrad H Ruppert's Printing Service could no longer print the magazine, and the bunch in Everett, Pa, had done one or two issues. But FM was skipping months, and a long interval elapsed before the last one. They didn't know at the time that it was the last, ~~but~~ they acknowledged the situation to be bad.

The rights to the name Fantasy Magazine were turned over to Willis Conover, and it was expected that it would be combined with the Science-Fantasy Correspondent of Corwin Stickney. But personal differences arose, and while the S-F C, later the Amateur Correspondent, filled out FM's subscriptions, Conover was out of the deal. Many people resented the transfer of their subscriptions to the AC, since it catered largely to weird, as had Charlie Hornig's Fantasy Fan, which was not considered competitive with FM during its brief life. Presently Stickney frankly stated that he did not aim at fans as such at all; that he intended his magazine primarily to aid young authors aiming at the pros, thinking that that was a larger group. There was a great deal of entirely unattractive advertising, and a stamp department for which dyed-in-the-wool fans cared not a whit. FM had had, toward the end, no more than 50 subscribers; the Correspondent probably had very few of its own. A printed magazine, it cost money to publish. At length, like FM, it appeared less frequently and finally ceased, but the title passed to no one else.

One reason for the decline in fan interest was the decline in the science-fiction field, on which fandom then depended closely. It was a long time after the last Wonder before Thrilling Wonder appeared. Astounding had reached its plateau under Tremaine, and Sloane's Amazing sank slowly into the depths. Naturally, interest in a fan field dependent upon these would decline.

Thus the First Fandom slipped away.

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The European Middle Ages were a period of transition, yet they had a distinctive civilization of their own, even tho it lasted in its full state only two or three centuries and carried in it the seeds of its early destruction. Similarly, the First Transition in fandom was a system that couldn't last, yet was quite distinctive while it did exist.

The old Fandom was gone, but being a fan had been too much fun to be given up just like that merely because the professional magazines hit the downgrade. Old friends and enemies - those that remained - sought, perhaps unconsciously, a new set of interests under which they could continue their contacts.

There was yet one center of the fan world that seemed as strong as ever. The MIB-ISA was now acknowledged the leader of the fifty or so who remained with the hobby, and the ISA's International Observer rose to new heights, putting out one issue specially designed to appeal to science-fiction fans rather than scientists.

But the hegemony of the ISA did not discourage other attempts to take the place of Fantasy Magazine. Olon Wiggins' Science Fiction Fan ran three printed issues, all at a great financial loss to the editor and associate, and Wiggins was forced to conclude that there weren't enough interested fans left to support a printed magazine's high cost. Others discovered the same bitter truth. Hayward S Kirby's Science Fiction World flared and died. Daniel McPhail expanded his Science Fiction News, first published only for his own amusement, into a carbon-copied magazine for circulation in the Oklahoma Scientifiction Association and exchanges outside the state. He was later able to print it, and made a mighty effort for high circulation. Then he moved away from the printing shop. The Philadelphians put forth their effort, Fantasy Fiction Telegram. The Atom and the early Helios, both printed, belong to a slightly later time.

Shepherd and Tollheim's Phantagraph continued to nutate with every issue, passing thru a bewildering succession of formats. They also issued the hektoid Astonishing Stories and made a bid for commercial publishing with Fanciful Tales, from which Weird Tales has reprinted Lovecraft's The Nameless City (it is not infrequent for professional magazines to take stories that appeared first in the amateur publications). Then Tollheim broke with Shepherd, and took in another ISA New Yorker to form Michel-Tollheim publications. From their printing press came the Phantagraph, mainly, by this time, for the amateur press associations Tollheim belonged to, and their mimeograph produced the Mijimags, the book of ghughu, and other gosh-awfuls. Wgo-Pohl gave the world two issues of Mind of Man. Jim Blish of The Planeteer retired with the passing of the old days, and the title The Planeteer passed to new fan Taurasi. All attempts at printed magazines were failures.

Well. If you couldn't print them profitably, what was to be done? With the supreme Fantasy Magazine gone, every fan could aspire to be an editor, and most of them were. The mimeograph came into wide use, but the cost of the machine and stencils was too much for most fans.

Gradually hektographed publications began to point the way.

Which came first after the TFF Bulletin the writer does not know.

°A Taurasi Publication° appeared on many little hektoid efforts. The Science Fiction Fan, after a time, resumed via hektograph. But to the Science Fiction Collector should go the credit for elevating hektoid work to a presentable level. One day fans thruout the country got post cards announcing a new fan magazine to be published by a guy named Morris S Dollens, Jr. They didn't even know how to pronounce °Dollens°, but some bought. The first issues were mostly fiction, by the editor. But material began to come in from other sources, and the Collector

times Dollens wavered between monthly and every-three-weekly issuance, conflicting statements even appearing in the same issue, pages of which were done at different times. The contents never did get very good, but somehow fans liked them.

In conjunction with Hayward Kirby, Dollens tried to organize the Fantasy Fiction League; its organ, Fantasy Fiction Digest, was a twin of the S-F Collector, and was mailed with it, sometimes combined with it. The organization was a failure, as were many others that "juveniles with Napoleonic complexes" attempted: The Phantasy Legion, the Science Fiction Advancement Association (last to go, tho it died in spirit early), the Fantasy Fans' Fraternity, the Jules Verne prize club - many of these began in the old days, but reached their "peaks" in these years of flux. Most of them were never anything more than a name, a membership card (perhaps), and an official organ. Some excitement was added, where there were dues, in charges and countercharges of financial sloppiness.

Dollens also did illustrating for the hektored Science Fiction Fan and other fan magazines. And then he had to drop out, apparently due to parental pressure because of the time his hobby occupied. Philadelphia's Baltadonis took over his Collector after a lapse of some months.

THE SECOND CONVENTION AND THE SHIFT OF POWER

The Second Eastern States Science Fiction Convention was held in New York, under the auspices of the ISA. Philadelphia attended, and fans from New Jersey and elsewhere in the east brot the attendance up to around 40. It was here, legend says, that there was first suggested a World Science Fiction Convention, by Donald Wollheim.

Says Chief Lotschatter Mophail, "Then in walk Julius Schwartz and shake hand and smoke peace pipe with Donald and his warriors who have been on war path for many moon." The handshake ended the last lingering vestige of the old days. But at the same time, the Schwartz group gave way to Wollheim and Sykora as leaders of fandom.

But the days of the ISA were numbered. Sykora was interested in science as well as sci, and had a home laboratory of his own. The name of the group certainly sounded like a scientific club, but here it was, being run largely by and for science-fiction fans. Controversies as to what it was originally intended to be are too vague to go into here. At any rate, not long after, Sykora, getting ready to enter college, there to pursue a scientific course, felt that continuing as president of the ISA, the position he then held, would be an unjustifiable waste of time. In his letter of resignation he worked himself up to a highly emotional mood, and, indicting fans for their useless activities, branded them as egotists chiefly desiring to see their names in print, and too lazy to pursue scientific careers. Copies were sent to all ISA members.

Sykora had quite a following, and such a resignation exploded a bombshell in the club. Of the four offices, one was vacant, Sykora resigned another, a third was occupied by a gentlemen who was in the hospital at just this time, and the fourth was held by Wollheim. From the other officer and from the NYB he got carte blanche support. Some discussion was carried on with ISA members outside New York. The exact proceedings are obscure, but no formal vote was taken, and Wollheim declared the club dissolved. This legal omission Sykora seized

upon in an attempt to reorganize the club two years later.

Financial settlements were made, there were shoddy incidents, and the end of the ISA was anything but glorious. A final issue of the International Observer was devoted almost entirely to news of the dissolution, and arguments against Sykora. Down toward the end of Wollheim's general news column, he suggested that fans who were really interested join the rising Science Fiction Association, which had headquarters in England. A surprising number did so. Wollheim's prestige was on the rise.

Fantasy Magazine was gone and the ISA was gone. There was no longer any single organization or group which could claim the headship. There was a general concession of prestige to Wollheim personally, but aside from this, all central tendencies were gone.

THE SECOND FANDOM FINDS ITSELF

The field had been leveled to the ground; it was time for the emergence of a new order. If no new order did emerge, then fandom was finished.

As there had been a scramble to take Fantasy Magazine's place, so there was a scramble to take the ISA's place as leading fan organization. Several New York clubs made only partially successful attempts. Philadelphia always rides thru storms with the least change, and the Philadelphia Science Fiction Society was still functioning as stoutly as ever. They called the Third Convention. As the time for that gathering, October 30, 1937, drew near, there was talk of using it to form a federation of fantasy clubs, since many local groups, such as the Los Angeles SFA-SFL and the Oklahoma Scientifiction Association, as well as specialized horizontal guilds, were doing or had shown capability of doing well in spite of the collapse of the headship.

Thrilling Wonder's place in the professional field had been found, and things there had steadied down. The SFL was continued, and there was somewhat more incentive to form local groups when they could be part of the larger SFL and their meetings reported in TWS.

The new Science Fiction fan was beginning to be recognized as the leading fan magazine. A multitude of minor publications continued to appear, and more were being projected all the time. The cheap hektograph was definitely the medium.

So much for the means. What was to be the ends? What were fans to talk about? Most of them were tired of discussing stories; some very active fans no longer bought and read the science-fiction magazines regularly. The fan magazines at this time were filled mainly with news of --themselves. A typical column of gossip would report that A had given B the rights to his magazine's name, that C would illustrate the allegedly October issue of D's magazine, that E and F were going to New York to see G before the Convention, that H had broken his association with I, and would publish their magazine alone, on the hekto instead of mimeo.

The nearest thing to a contemporary recognition of the change that had occurred was San Moskowitz' "This Changing Tendency Among Fan Magazines", in which he called attention to their growing independence and asserted that all professional magazines might go out of existence and fandom would continue on its way.

Fans had found a new center of interest: themselves and their own activities.

THEN WHAT HAPPENED?

Will the Third Convention meet and form a fantasy federation? Reminath approaches Tethus the nearest any celestial body has been, the very night for which the meet is scheduled. Will Earth be destroyed before DAW can save fandom?

This gripping story will be continued and, I hope, concluded in the next mailing, but if you simply must finish it before then I hope to have complete copies ready for distribution at the World SF Convention.

Jeff "S"

