

No. 27s

August 1971

## August Derleth

For some 30 years, the names August Derleth and Arkham House have been synonymous. With the death on July 4 of the 62-year-old Derleth, the big question remaining is: will this also mean the end of Arkham House, the only remaining major publisher of weird and fantasy fiction?

Derleth died in Sauk City, Wis., where he was born on February 24, 1909, had gone through high school, and had made his home ever since. Death was attributed to a heart attack.

Despite the fact he had undergone serious surgery only two years ago, Derleth's death came as a surprise since he had seemingly regained his health and resumed his writing and publishing activities. But in September of 1969, Derleth was in a battle for his life so serious the blood banks in his area of Wisconsin couldn't keep him supplied. However he survived that siege, and on

November 11 wrote me:

"You can imagine what I came home to after 87 days in hospital, 4 operations, and a slough of diseases I had to lick ( a "tough old bastard" said one doctor) -- over 500 letters, an equal number of books in for review, galleys to proof, and an index for my "Emerson" to prepare! I'm still wobbly in the knees, will have to use a cane if I go any distance."

But by May of 1970, he seemed to have shaken off his illnesses and informed me, "Since this is Mushroom-hunting season -- and holiday for me (I've collected almost 7,000 delicious morels so far, and mean to go over 7,500 at least before I stop,



unless the heat ends the growing of morels -- and that may be, for it's to be in the 90s today, and that's deadly for morels!) I don't get much else done -- but evenings I can get at correspondence, poetry, book reviews, journal -- so I'm not too far behind, and I'll finish "The Chronicles of Solar Pons" in June for Fall 1971 publication with just a modicum of luck."

Derleth had an amazing capacity for work, as can be seen from his output. In addition to running Arkham House, Mycroft and Moran, and Stanton and Lee publishing houses, he personally produced well over 100 books during his writing career, was a regular contributor to newspapers and magazines, and carried on a staggering correspondence, both business and personal.

August is survived by his mother, Rose; two children, April Rose, 16; and Walden William, 14; and a sister, Mrs. C. P. Anderson. It was Mrs. Anderson, with some after-school help from young April, who kept Arkham House moving during Derleth's long spell in the hospital in 1969. But no true successor was ever groomed for this essentially one-man operation.

Arkham House was formed in 1939 by Derleth and Donald Wandrei and original plans were to publish the works of H. P. Lovecraft, who had died in 1937. Wandrei severed all ties with the publishing house, except for the Lovecraft works, after 1942 and since that time Derleth went it alone. More than 100 books were produced under the imprint of Arkham House, while he reserved the Mycroft and Moran name for his own Solar Pons books and used Stanton and Lee as the publisher of some of his Wisconsin-oriented books.

Derleth's early admiration for Lovecraft seemed to grow into an almost fanatical urge to gain for the virtually unknown writer of horror stories a place in American literature. And, to a large extent, he succeeded in this quest. Derleth had himself named executor of Lovecraft's estate and thus, for more than 30 years, had a virtual stranglehold on everything ever written by HPL. Included were the thousands upon thousands of letters the prolific Lovecraft had written to his friends in the 1920s and 1930s. A small portion of these have been published in two volumes of "Selected Letters" and a third volume was due out this summer. Derleth had hoped to complete the series in 1975.

Derleth was a burly, broad-chested, curly-haired man who liked to walk the lanes of his beloved Sac Prairie. He was extremely versatile, although his first love would seem to have been the horror story. He wrote his first story at age 13 and made his initial sale at 16 ("Bat's Belfry" to the May 1926 issue of *Weird Tales*). He also wrote mysteries, biographies, poetry; you name it, August Derleth probably tried his hand at it.

Although Arkham House books were generally produced in editions of 3000 or less copies, Derleth built up an almost fanatical cult of followers. Arkham House collectors have been responsible for forcing the prices on some of its out of print titles to staggering figures. Arkham's first book in 1939 was the now almost legendary "The Outsider and Others," by H. P. Lovecraft. Although it took four years to sell the 1,268 copies, this book quickly doubled and then tripled in value once it went o.p. Over the years "The Outsider" has steadily increased in value and now brings prices ranging from \$175 to \$250 a copy. And other Arkham books have similarly soared in price: "Out of Space and Time" and "Lost Worlds" by Clark Ashton Smith, "Skull Face" by Robert E. Howard, "Dark Carnival" by Ray Bradbury, "Beyond the Wall of Sleep" and "Marginalia" by HPL, and "Jumbee" by Henry S. Whitehead to name a few.

But Derleth, despite a far greater recognition during his lifetime than his mentor, HPL, had ever experienced, seemed to maintain his respect for Lovecraft to the very end. And, perhaps learning a lesson for the whole affair, when the subject of fame came up, he remarked only last August:

"I suppose if I have any 'coming into my own' to do, it will be after I've shuffled off this mortal coil, which is the American way.

--Gerry de la Ree

## THE FATHER OF SCIENCE FICTION

There are many people whom one might cite as being the 'father of science fiction.'

Johann Kepler wrote the first story that sounded like science fiction and that paid attention to actual scientific fact. Edgar Allan Poe first caught the idea of inevitable social change through advances in science and technology. Jules Verne was the first to specialize in science fiction writing. Herbert George Wells was the first to make it a recognized branch of literature. Hugo Gernsback was the first to publish a magazine devoted exclusively to science fiction and to create the beginnings of the first mass market.

But all of these, put together, only laid the foundation. The man who took that foundation and built the structure of modern science fiction upon it and shaped it to what we now accept as such, was a tall, broad, light-haired, crew-cut, bespectacled, overbearing, overpowering, cigarette-holder-waving, opinionated, talkative, quicksilver-minded individual named John Wood Campbell, Jr.

He was born on June 8, 1910 in Newark, New Jersey, and remained a Jerseyite almost all his life. He had a difficult childhood for he was born into a world that had not been designed to his scale.

He began reading science fiction not long after he began reading. He bought the first issue of Gernsback's *Amazing Stories*, read it regularly, and was profoundly impressed by the trailblazing serial "The Skylark of Space" by E. E. Smith, which began in the August, 1928 issue. Inevitably, he began to write science fiction himself in the style of Smith.

He made his first sale when he was seventeen, but his first published story appeared in the January 1930 issue of *Amazing*. It was entitled "When the Atoms Failed." In the month that it appeared, a new science fiction magazine was launched entitled *Astounding Stories of Super-science*. That this was an astonishing coincidence could only be understood in hindsight.

Before 1930 was over, Campbell had launched the Wade, Arcott & Morey series of stories which clinched his fame in the science fiction world. This series joined him with E. E. Smith as the great exponents of the super-science epic in which men of more-than-heroic mold fought each other with suns and leaped over galaxies in single strides.

But there was this difference between Smith and Campbell. Smith, having found his metier, never left it. To the end, he wrote the super-science epic, changing it only to make it ever larger, ever more colossal.

Campbell had no metier he wished to call his own; or, rather, having found one, he could not help but look about for a better one.

Perhaps a change in his personal life helped him do so. He attended M. I. T. where he had no trouble with science but was laid low by the German language. He passed on to Duke University in North Carolina, where he completed his work for his degree. (However, it was always M. I. T. which remained his spiritual home in later years and he visited it regularly.)

As though to mark the change from M. I. T., the super-school of science, to Duke University, where psychology was important and where Joseph Banks Rhine (who later put parapsychology on the map) was already an instructor at the time, Campbell began to switch from tales in which super-science blasted the readers' minds to those in which human emotion wrung their hearts.

He wrote "Twilight," a low-key poignant tale worth all his super-science adventures put together. "Twilight" appeared in the November 1934 issue of *Astounding*, which was then edited by F. Orlin Tremaine. For various reasons it appeared under a pseudonym. The best reason was that had it appeared as a Campbellesque production the readers would have been set for super-science and would have missed the wonder the story really was. So it appeared as having been written by Don A. Stuart, a name which was almost identical to that of the maiden name of Campbell's first wife (Dona Stuart.)

For the next four years, Campbell, under that pseudonym, pioneered in what came to be the 'new wave' of that era. He wrote stories in which science and scientists were what they really were and combined that with human emotion and human foibles.

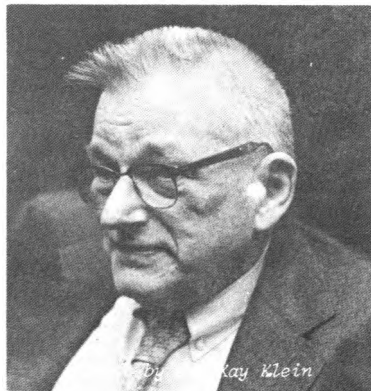
The climax came in the August 1938 issue of *Astounding*, which carried Campbell/Stuart's "Who Goes There?", surely one of the greatest science fiction stories ever written, and which was made into "The Thing from Outer Space" surely one of the worst movies ever made.

But by that time, Campbell had made his second metier sufficiently his own to abandon it. He had written all, or almost all, he intended to write. He was going to be an editor.

In September, 1937, he had joined Street & Smith which then published *Astounding* and in May, 1938, he succeeded Tremaine as editor of the magazine. He remained editor thirty three years and two months -- to the day of his death (at home, quietly, quickly, painlessly, as he sat before his television set) on July 11, 1971.

I once asked him, years ago (with all the puzzlement of a compulsive writer who can imagine no other way of life) how he could possibly have borne to leave his writing career and become an editor. I had almost said merely an editor. He smiled (he knew me) and said, "Isaac, when I write, I write only my own stories. As editor, I write the stories that a hundred people write."

It was so. By his own example and by his instructions and by his undeviating and persisting insistence, he forced first *Astounding*, and then all of science fiction, into his mold.



# John W. Campbell

He abandoned the earlier orientation of the field. He demolished the stock characters who had filled it; eradicated the penny-dreadful plots; extirpated the Sunday-supplement science. In a phrase, he blotted out the purple of pulp.

Instead, he demanded that science-fiction writers understand science and understand people, a hard requirement that many of the established writers of the 1930s could not meet. Campbell did not compromise because of that; those who could not meet his requirements could not sell to him and the carnage was as great as had been that in Hollywood a decade before, when silent movies had given way to the talkies.

Campbell went to work to fill the gap left by the forced retirement of some of the best-known names in the field. He began to develop new talents in a new generation of writers; those plastic enough to learn a set of newer and much harder skills; and he succeeded. Those who flourished under Campbell's tutelage and learned to write in his uncompromising school lifted the field from minor-pulp to high-art.

Not all writers before Campbell were poor; not all writers after Campbell were great -- yet the change was large enough and dramatic enough to make it clear that science fiction as adult literature had a name and that name was John Wood Campbell, Jr.

I met him in June, 1938, just a month after he became editor. I was eighteen and had arrived with my first story-submission, my very first. He had never met me before but he took me in; talked to me for two hours; read the story that night; mailed the rejection the following day along with a kind, two-page letter telling me where I had gone wrong.

Over the next four years, I saw him just about every month, always with a new story. He always talked to me, always fed me ideas, always discussed my stories to tell me what was right and what was wrong with them.

It was he who gave me the skeleton of "Nightfall," including the opening quotation, and sent me home to write the story.

It was he who considered my third or fourth robot story, shook his head and said, "No, Isaac, you're neglecting the Three Laws of Robotics which are---" and that was the first I heard of them.

It was he who took the idea for a short story which I brought to him and put it through a rich sea-change that transmuted it into the "Foundation" series.

I never denied, or even tried to diminish, the debt I owed him, and told him flatly that everything in my writing career I owed to him, but it was characteristic of him that he never accepted that.

He admitted he fed me ideas but he said he kept on doing so only because I brought them back changed and improved. He denied he had made up the Three Laws of Robotics and insisted he found them in my stories and merely put them into words.

He watched many of his writers take their instructions from him and use them to go on to fame outside Astounding and outside science fiction. He rejoiced in that and stayed behind to teach a newer generation.

Only once did I manage to get him to recognize his value openly. I asked him to what he attributed his editorial ability and he answered, "To an unteachable talent."

I asked him what talent that was and he said, "The talent which made it possible for me to see writing ability in a hungry teenager named Isaac Asimov who had brought me in a completely hopeless first story."

Yes, indeed!

It has always been my pride that of the writers developed by Campbell, I was one of the very first (in time, at least, if not in ability.)

Nor did he ever settle down. To the end of his life, he was always experimenting, always changing, always trying to find the new and exciting. Others grew stodgy and rut-ridden with age; not Campbell. Many science fiction readers did; not Campbell. Many science fiction writers did; not Campbell.

He tried Astounding in different sizes; he tried it with rotogravure sections; he changed the letter-columns this way and that; he introduced new departments and dropped them; let word-rates depend on readers' votes. Changes didn't always meet with approval, but he wasn't looking for surface approval, but for something he felt and knew to be right -- and to the end of his life, he kept Astounding first in sales and prestige.

He even changed the revered name to Analog Science Fact - Science Fiction, over the loud outcries of many readers (including myself) but saw it through unwaveringly because he felt the new name no longer smacked of the juvenility of science-fiction's magazine beginnings.

Campbell championed far-out ideas: dianetics, the Hieronymus machine, dowsing, psionics. He pained many of the very men he had trained (including myself) in doing so, but he felt it was his duty to stir up the minds of his readers and force curiosity right out to the border-lines.

He began a series of editorials in his magazine in which he championed a social point of view that could sometimes be described as far-right. (He expressed sympathy for George Wallace in the 1968 national elections, for instance.) There was bitter opposition to this from many (including myself -- I could hardly ever read a Campbell editorial and keep my temper.) Yet criticism never angered Campbell, nor strained his friendship, and, however idiosyncratic his views on science and society, he remained, in person, a sane and gentle man.

I saw him last at the Lunacon in April 1971 and spent an evening in his hotel room. While Peg Campbell (his second wife, with whom the last two decades of his life passed in happy serenity) was finishing a complex and beautiful rug, Campbell lectured us all on medicine and psychiatry.

It never occurred to me when I shook hands in farewell that night, that I would never see him again; never even hear his voice again. How could that occur to me when I had never once thought (never) that death and he had anything in common, could ever intersect. He was the fixed pole star about which all science fiction revolved, unchangeable, eternal.

And now that he is dead, where can we find ten people who by united effort might serve as a pale replacement for the man who, in the world of science fiction, lived a super-story more thrilling than any even he ever wrote.

--Isaac Asimov