

Dutch and Flemish fandom, fifties and sixties

Jaap Boekestein

Dutch and Belgium fandom, close and separated

The main language in the Netherlands is Dutch, with a small Frisian-speaking minority in the North. Belgium is a country with three languages: Flemish, which is very close to Dutch (to some extent comparable to the situation of 'American' and 'British' English), Walloon, which is very close to French, and a very small group of German speakers on the East border.

Because of the language Flemish fandom has always been very close to the Dutch fandom, while Walloon fandom was almost completely orientated towards French(-speaking) fandom. There was very little contact between Flemish and Walloon fandom, although some fantastic Belgium authors wrote in both languages. E.g. John Flanders/Jean Ray, aliases of flamboyant Flemish author Raymond De Kremer (1887-1964) who wrote lots of stories and a novel in both languages. He was the only European author to be published in *Weird Tales* more than once.

Dutch fans had (and have) the considerable advantage that, while the Netherlands is a bigger country than Belgium, the four mayor cities (Amsterdam, The Hague, Rotterdam, Utrecht) are concentrated in the west of the country and are well connected. The big Belgium cities (Antwerp, Brussels, Gent) are much more separated. This made it much harder for the smaller Flemish fandom to meet and organise. The 'Low Lands' is a name used for the Netherlands together with the Dutch-speaking part of Belgium.

Science fiction and fantasy have been for a major part English-orientated in the Low Lands. Over 90% of everything published is translated American or English science fiction/fantasy. Other languages have been very little translated, with the one exception of the German pulp series *Perry Rhodan*. There has been (and is) some original Dutch and Flemish science fiction and fantasy.

First fandom: born and died out again in the fifties

Science fiction was sporadically published in the Dutch language before the WW II (mostly authors like Jules Verne, H.G. Wells and Edgar Rice Burroughs), but the first fans can only be found in the late forties, early fifties.

Possible the first 'fanzine' in the Low Lands was *Fantasie en wetenschap* [Fantasy and Science] by Ben Abbas and Lo Hartog van Banda. There were four issues between December 1948 and March 1949. It seems the magazine was more directed to a general public than any existing fandom.

Between 1951 and 1957 the Dutchman Nico Oosterbaan had contacts with British fandom, among others with Ken Slater and the British science fiction club *Operation Fantast*, and some thirty other fans in the Netherlands. This group was mainly an import- and swap-club and had no real organised form. In January 1953 Nico Oosterbaan published through his advertising agency Propax in The Hague one issue of *Planeet* [Planet]. In this magazine Nico Oosterbaan asked for other fans to respond, but there seemed to have been little reply. No club was formed. Nico Oosterbaan had also contacts with the *Alpha*-club.

Another one off fanzine was *Space Fiction* by the Dutch fans Henk Luderichts and Tim Verheggen in 1952. Tim Verheggen was an editor and graphical designer, Henk Luderichts worked in advertising. The print run was an ambitious 10,000 of which 6000 to 7000 were sold. Because of lack of time of the two publishers there was never a second issue.

So far all the magazines started were short lived publications without a group of fans for support. The motives of the different publishers were probably to look if a professional science fiction magazine in the Netherlands was possibly. Alas, the time was not ready yet.

The real first recognisable fandom and fanzine was the Flemish *Alpha*. The Flemish fans Jan Jansen and Dave Vendelmans had in the early fifties contacts with British science fiction-fans. Also some fans were stationed with the British army in Belgium. The two fans started in 1953 the first fanclub in the Low Lands. The name was Antwerp Science Fiction Fan Club, which became *Alpha*. The club also published the fanzine *Alpha* with readers in Great Britain, the USA, the Netherlands, Belgium and France. There were about twenty three issues of *Alpha* (first in summer 1953, last in 1956). The fanzine started out in Dutch and English, but became completely English. *Alpha* was probably the first regular published fanzine in Europe, outside Great Britain. The club organised also a small convention at the home of an Antwerp fan (not Jan Jansen or Dave Vendelmans). There were about fifteen people with one or two British and an American. This could well be the first convention in Europe, again outside Great Britain. When Dave Vendelmans emigrated to Canada in 1956 and Jan Jansen married and became father, *Alpha* stopped.

After the first small wave of fandom in the Low Lands it became very quiet in the late fifties. Only notable is the 'Hobbit-maaltijd' [Hobbit-meal] on 28 March 1958, in Rotterdam, the Netherlands. This was the only time ever J.R.R. Tolkien accepted an invitation to be guest of honour. A dinner was organised by his Dutch publisher Het Spectrum and the bookstore Voorhoeve & Dietrich. Because of this visit Mrs. K.P. van de Mandele started for reading and discussing the work of Tolkien a very small reading-club that existed for some time. Maybe this was one of the first Tolkien-'fanclubs' in the world.

The only trace of fandom to be found in Belgium and the Netherlands and the end of the fifties, beginning of the sixties was *Contact*, the English-language fanzine of Jan Jansen, with an unknown number of issues, around 1959/1960.

The sixties: born again fandom

Like in the USA in the Netherlands the mass market paperback became very popular after WW II. Several publishers had long running series with some science fiction and horror titles (mostly by publishing houses Bruna and Het Spectrum). Still science fiction was not recognised as a separate publishing-genre.

The first try to get science fiction established as a commercial viable genre was not by the big Dutch publishing houses, but by De Schorpioen, a Flemish publishing house of pulp-series. Flemish folklorist and literary agent Albert van Hageland started with publishing house De Schorpioen in 1961 with *Utopia*. There were twenty four issues from June 1961 to March 1963. The stories were not of highest quality. Work of among others A.E. van Vogt and the German *Perry Rhodan* author K.H. Scheer, were 'edited' - some fans said 'butchered' - to fit the format. Like so many Flemish publishers, De Schorpioen had distribution problems (especially in the rather closed Dutch market). *Utopia* was sometimes hard to get and the pulp-series seemed not to bring the financial success that was hoped for. In the final issue the editor wrote that the series had been stopped because of the big demand for Wild West-, War- and Detective-novels. In the seventies De Schorpioen and Albert van Hageland would try a few more times with science fiction- and horror pulp-series.

The year 1965 saw the rebirth of fandom in the Low Lands. It all started with the 23th Worldcon: *Loncon II*. Because of this convention 'Mr. Sci-Fi' Forry Ackerman visited Europe.

Through mail-contacts with British and American fans several Dutch fans had found each other. This small and nameless group came together every now and then to talk, swap books and go to the few science fiction movies that made it to the Dutch cinemas. From this group came the invitation of Dutchman P. Hans Frankfurter to Forry J. Ackerman to visit the Netherlands after Loncon II. Forry accepted and when he arrived at Tuesday 10 August with the 22.28 train from Düsseldorf, he was welcomed at the station by P. Hans Frankfurter, a group of students in monster suits and some journalists. The next afternoon there was a meeting in the Stedelijk Museum of Amsterdam. [Forry's recollection of this visit can be found in the Souvenir book of *Confiction*, the 48th Worldcon in The Hague].

After the meeting some thirty visitors decided to start a science fiction club. Forry J. Ackerman travelled on to Belgium while with the support of P. Hans Frankfurter, Leo Kindt, Albert Taal and some other people, a new science fiction club was started: *het Nederlands Contactcentrum voor Science Fiction*, or *NCSF*.

On 28 March 1966 the first official meeting of the *NCSF* was organised in the showroom of Centrafilm N.V. in Scheveningen (The Hague). The members could see the Dutch pre-view of *Godzilla versus the Thing*. The first (and that year the only) issue of the clubzine *Holland SF* came out that summer. On 15-16 October a two-day science fiction congress was organised in Amsterdam: *NCSF-congres I*. Not familiar with British or American conventions, this first con was pretty serious with most fans wearing ties and suits. On the

con the art-duo 'Grovis' (Ruurd Groot and Eduard Visser) announced a new science fiction series with the publishing house Meulenhoff.

At the same time in Belgium fandom started again. In Brussels the fan Eddy Reiniers started the *Vlaamse Kring voor Science Fiction*. This club started officially on 18 April 1966, but only on 22 September Eddy Reiniers wrote to all the fans known to him. There was one issue of the clubzine: *Science Fiction Nieuws*, with Eddy Reiniers as publisher and with a publication date of November 1966 (actually the issue appeared in the summer of 1967). The club and the zine were no success and from neither was anything heard again.

Danny De Laet, another Flemish fan, started in Antwerp in July 1966 another science fiction club: *Vereniging ter bestudering der Nederlandse wetenschappelijke verbeeldingsliteratuur* [Club for researching the Dutch scientific fiction]. This club was mostly Danny De Laet himself, although it is quoted as the publisher of the fanzine *Kosmos*. After start of the club *Sfan* in 1969, Danny De Laet gave up the *Vereniging ter bestudering der Nederlandse wetenschappelijke verbeeldingsliteratuur*.

Kosmos was one of the few fanzines that was in Dutch and French. Issues 0, 1 and 2 appeared in July, August and October of 1966. Editors were Serge Betran (an alias of Danny De Laet) and Jozef Peeters. Part of issue 1 was *Cahier Jean Ray 0*, which was about the work of the recently died Flemish writer Jean Ray (a.k.a John Flanders, both aliases of Raymond De Kremer).

The year 1967 was very important for science fiction in the Netherlands and Belgium. Publishing house Meulenhoff realised its plans to start the special science fiction mass market series in the Netherlands. Six titles of Heinlein, Asimov, Anderson, Kornbluth & Pohl, Harrison and Ballard were published. The new series were an enormous success and Meulenhoff published the same year four more titles by Brunner, Farmer, Disch and Davidson. Other publishers followed suit with separate science fiction series. Suddenly plenty of science fiction was available, a situation that stimulated without question the growth of fandom.

Publishing house Vector tried to start in February the Dutch version of *Galaxy Magazine*. Five anthologies with the name *Galaxis* with artwork and stories of *Galaxy Magazine* were published, edited by Theo Kemp. The first four anthologies looked exactly like a magazine, but a subscription was not possible. The fifth was nothing more than a mass market paperback. Sales did not meet expectations and the five titles were remaindered.

In Germany the pulp-series *Perry Rhodan*, written by a team of authors, was very successful. The Dutch publishing house Born decided to publish the pulp-series in the Netherlands. The first six titles were published as mass market paperbacks (three in 1967, three in 1968). After the first six issues Born stopped with the *Perry Rhodan* mass market paperbacks. But the publishing house printed its own books and only to fill free space on the printing press Born started to print *Perry Rhodan* in pulp-magazine format. *Perry Rhodan* became the most

successful pulp-series in the Netherlands and only with a slight stop in 1970-1971 the series is still running today.

In the meantime the young science fiction club *NCSF* was in trouble. There were no conventions in 1967, and not a single issue of *Holland SF*. More successful was Danny De Laet with four issues of *Kosmos*: issue 3 in January, 4 and 4b in March, and the double number 5/6 in December. In *Kosmos 3* Jozef Peeters' *Cahier Jean Ray* reappeared, as *Cahier Jean Ray 1*. In 1971 *Cahier Jean Ray* would become a separate clubzine of the club *Werkgroep Jean Ray*.

The *NCSF* came back in 1968 with a second convention: *NCSF-congres 2* on 20 April in Amsterdam. About seventy five people came together to hear different speakers. On the convention was decided to organise a short story competition. The winner F.J. Bunning with 'Donor gezocht' [Donor wanted] got his prize on the *SF Dag* [SF Day] on the 17 October in Amsterdam. Other activities of the *NCSF* were organising pre-views of Stanley Kubrick's movie *2001* on 3 September in The Hague and 12 September in Rotterdam. Also there was the *Eerste Haagse Minicon* on 14 November in the house of a fan in the Hague. This minicon was in fact a meeting of seven people: Alfred Brouwer and his wife, Annemarie van Ewyck, Johan Hogedoorn, Leo Kindt, Albert Taal and Jan Veldhoen. For the first time a group was formed to visit foreign conventions, especially the Eastercon in Oxford next year. At the meeting also was decided to organise several days in 1969. *Holland SF*, the clubzine of the *NCSF* knew six issues in 1968, including its first short story and its first book review.

At the same time the American fan Billy H. Pettit was living in the Hague. He published the English language fanzine *A Newsletter from the Hague/Den Haag Nieuwsblaadje* in January 1968. Billy H. Pettit had many contacts with international fandom. There seems not to be that much contact between Billy H. Pettit and the local Dutch fans. Only one issue of *A Newsletter from the Hague/Den Haag Nieuwsblaadje* is known.

In Belgium the Flemish fan Danny De Laet was pretty active with fanzines. He published the issues 7 and 7bis of his Dutch-French fanzine *Kosmos* (in 1971 the last two issues - 8 and 9 - would be published). He also started a complete French-language fanzine: *Futur*. This fanzine had three issues: no. 1 in June 1968, no. 2 in September 1968 and no. 3 in August 1969. Danny De Laet contributed also - probably under alias D. Golbekijk - to the Flemish fanzine *Toekomst Een* [Future One] of Paul Torfs. The aim of this fanzine was to publish as much original Flemish and Dutch material. Stories of Flemish writers like Eddy C. Bertin and Julien C. Raasveld (under alias Paul Pandira) were published in *Toekomst Een*. In April 1968 issue 1 was published and in October that same year issue 2.

The fan and writer Julien C. Raasveld started in 1968 two fanzines: *Galax* and *Science fiction/fantasy fan*. They would be the first in a long line of fanzines by Julien C. Raasveld. There were five issues of *Galax*: no. 1 and 2 in 1968, no. 3 in 1968 or 1969, no. 4bis in October 1969 and no. 5 in November 1969. *Science fiction/fantasy fan* was published under the name and mail address of fan Daniël De Raeve. First issue was on 20 January 1968,

second (and last) issue in March. Because of problems with the mail Julien C. Raasveld decided to publish the zine under his own name. He also changed the name into *Sfan* and restarted the numbering.

In 1969 the *NCSF* did not organise a convention, but in The Hague there were several science fiction days: *Eerste Nederlandse SF-Ruildag* on 27 February and *Tweede Nederlandse SF-Ruildag* on 29 April. During a general member meeting of the *NCSF* on 12 April in Hilversum was decided to make the *NCSF* an official club with Leo Kindt as chair. Four issues of the clubzine *Holland SF* were published.

In Belgium on 29 November there was the meeting *Pa-Sci-Fic* in the Comic Art Gallery of Antwerp with Flemish and Dutch fans. Flemish fan Julien C. Raasveld proposed to start a Flemish science fiction club. On a meeting which became known as *De Vergadering der Vier* [The Meeting of the Four] on 14 December at home with Julien C. Raasveld in Antwerp four fans (Danny De Laet, Paul Torfs, Daniël De Raeve and Julien C. Raasveld himself) started the Flemish science fiction club *Sfan* with Julien C. Raasveld as chair. Earlier Julien C. Raasveld had renamed his fanzine *Science fiction/fantasy fan* into *Sfan* and published issue 1 in September 1969, and issue 2 in October 1969. In December he would publish issues 3, 4 and 5. After the start of the club *Sfan*, Raasveld's fanzine became the official clubzine and the numbering started again with issue 1 in March 1970 as the clubzine *Sfan*.

Another new club in Belgium was *Werkgroep Jean Ray* which was started by Jozef Peeters. This was not an science fiction club in the normal sense. The aim of the club was to study the work of the Flemish fantastic writer Jean Ray/John Flanders (Raymond De Kremer). In the seventies *Werkgroep Jean Ray* had several club- and newszines. In 1985 Jozef Peeters stopped with this club.

Paul Torfs also published in 1969 issue 3 of *Toekomst Een*.

In 1970 there were some very important developments. The *NCSF* organised two science fiction meetings in 1970: on 28 February the *Derde Nederlandse SF-Ruildag* in The Hague, in pub Paviljoen, organised by Leo Kindt and Alfred Brouwer. On 16 May there was a meeting which was also the first member meet as an official club in the Amsterdam. Also three issues of *Holland SF* were published. The *NCSF* still exists today and *Holland SF* still gets published.

More important was *Sfancon 1* in the library of Antwerp on 19 April, organised by Danny De Laet and Paul Torfs. This was the first of the fifteen Sfancons that would be organised up to the eighties. The first Sfancon almost was cancelled because the library demanded at the last moment payment for use of the space. Danny De Laet wanted to stop, but Paul Torfs and Georges Adé convinced him to continue the con. Guest of Honour was Flemish big name fame, the folklorist, publisher and literary agent Albert van Hageland. Forry Ackerman was also announced, but he could not make it. There were panels and a dealer room. The novel *De Ring* by Flemish author Gust van Brussel got the Sfan Award for 'best science

fiction novel in recent years in the Dutch language' (which was not very difficult because original Dutch or Flemish science fiction was very rare). Also the Walloon fanzine publisher Michel Féron and the Dutch fan Leo Kindt got a Sfan Award. The new, young author Eddy C. Bertin won the Sfan story competition with the short story 'Tijdstorm' [Timestorm]. The Czech movie *Ikarie XB-1* and the *Brick Bradford*-serial were shown. There were some eighty attendees.

The club *Sfan* had some troubles in 1970. The first worldcon in a non-English speaking country was *Heicon '70* in Heidelberg, West Germany. This worldcon was visited by several Dutch and Flemish fans. Danny De Laet wanted to send an official Sfan-delegation. Most members could not go, so Danny De Laet went alone and left the club soon thereafter. Still the peace was not restored. Around October or November 1970 several members of Sfan (Simon Joukes, Paul Torfs, Willy Magiels, Jan Jan sen, Martin Box and George Gorremans) took action. The chair Julien C. Raasveld was voted out, and the club was reorganised. *Sfan* would merge in 1981 with the other Flemish science fiction club *Progressef* (started in 1973) and would stop in 1986.

There had been five issues of Julien C. Raasveld's fanzine *Sfan* (1, 2, 3, 4, 5) and five issues as the clubzine *Sfan* (no. 1 March 1970, no. 2 April 1970, no. 3 July 1970, no. 4 August 1970, no. 5 October 1970). After Julien C. Raasveld was voted out, it was decided to have a new clubzine: *Info-Sfan*. The fan Paul Torfs had published issue 4 and 5 of his fanzine *Toekomst Een* in 1970. He stopped with *Toekomst Een* to publish, with the help of Simon Joukes, the new clubzine *Info-Sfan*. The first two issues of *Info-Sfan* were published in November and December 1970. After thirty one issues *Info-Sfan* would be renamed *SF Magazine* in 1973. Also were sixteen issues of the very small newszine *Sfantoom* published from July 1970 to November 1971.

The Dutch publishing house Born decided in 1970 to stop with the pulp-series *Perry Rhodan* after issue 35. A group of five Amsterdam fans (Karel Rave, Han Slotema, Jan Wiggermans, Joop van Kerkwijk and his brother) wrote letters and talked with the publisher to get him to continue the series. Also several other fans like Kees van Toorn and Robert A.J. Zielschot wrote to the publisher. The action was a success and 1971 *Perry Rhodan* was continued. The group of five fans formed the club *Perry Rhodan Science Fiction Vereniging Terra* on 3 July 1971. This club with its clubzine *SF Terra* still exists today.

At the end of the sixties science fiction and fandom were established firmly in the Low Lands. The seventies would show a large growth in book titles, pulp-series, fanzines, conventions, clubs and fandom. But that is a story for another time.

Sources

-Boekestein, Jaap, *De kroniek van de drie zusters der dromen*, Bravado Books, 's-Gravenzande (The Netherlands), 1993

-Boekestein, Jaap, *Strategische adviezen voor uitgeverij Babel Publications aan de hand van een analyse van de Nederlandse markt voor science fiction en fantasy 1967-1997*, Final Thesis, Opleiding Boekhandel en Uitgeverij, Hogeschool van Amsterdam, Amsterdam (The Netherlands), 1999

-ConFiction, 48th Worldcon Souvenir Book, Den Haag (The Netherlands), 1990

-Warner jr., Harry, *A Wealth of Fable, an informal history of science fiction fandom in the 1950s*, SCIFI Press, Van Nuys (California, USA), 1992

some vanity: a short biography of Jaap Boekestein

Jaap Boekestein (1968) is a Dutch fan who wrote the history of fandom in the Netherlands and Flemish part of Belgium: *De kroniek van de drie zusters der dromen*. He also is also the author of over the hundred SF-, fantasy-, horror- and thriller stories. Two of his fantasy novels *Schaduwstrijd* and *Meesterproeve* were published by Dutch publishing house Babel Publications. He organised for four year the yearly Dutch story competition *King Kong Award* (renamed *Millennium Prijs*). He was the fan guest of honour at *Beneluxcon 2000-ConTreaty* in Maastricht. He is editor at the Dutch publishing house Het Spectrum where he gets paid to read science fiction and fantasy.