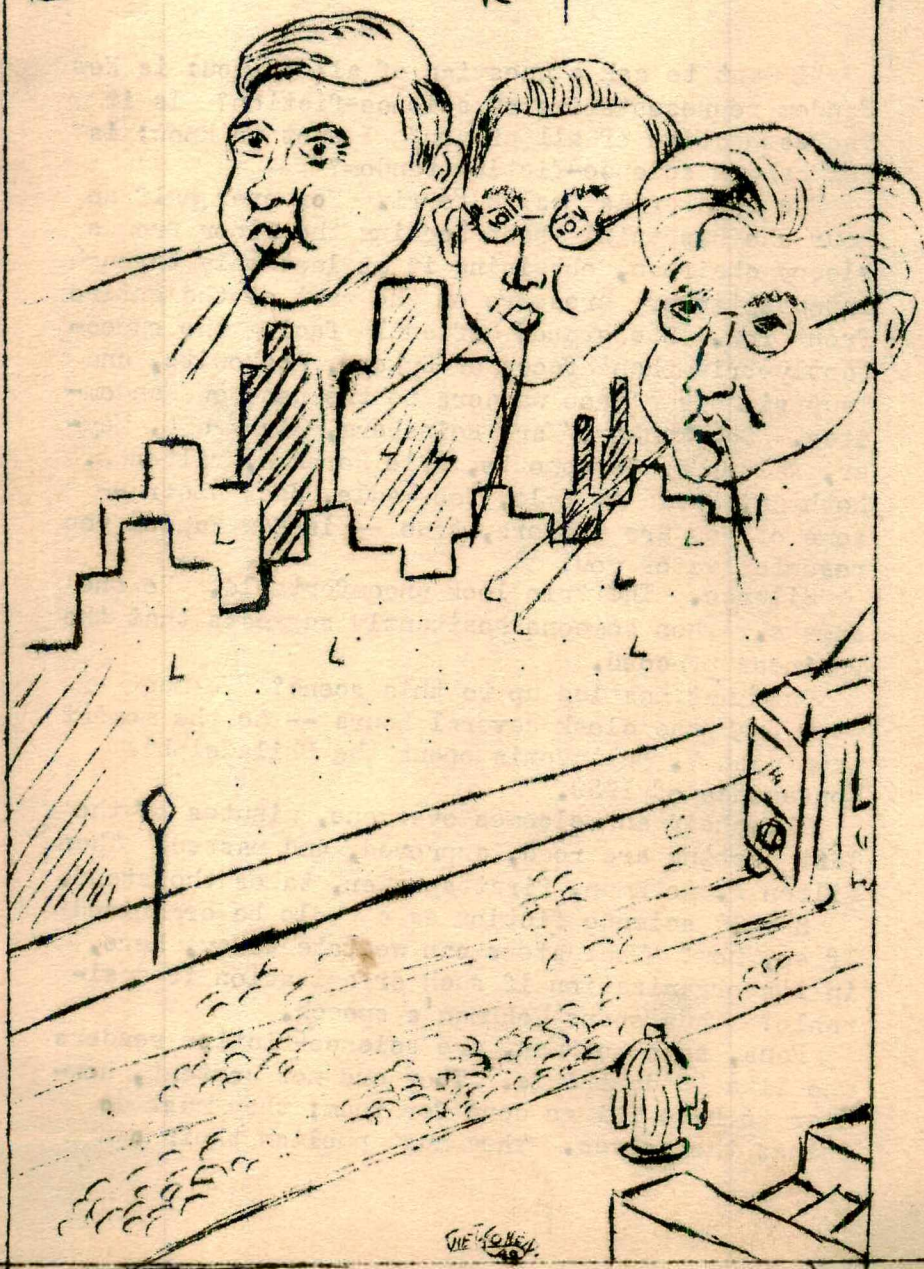


STORM OVER PHILADELPHIA



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STORM OVER
PHILADELPHIA

by Robert W. Lowndes

"I want to ask a question of all of you: is New Fandom representative of science-fiction? Is it representative of all of you? I want to know: is New Fandom science-fiction fandom?"

The speaker is Leslie Perri. For over half an hour she has vainly been seeking the floor from a sleepy chairman, obtaining it at last only through interventionary pressure on the part of the entire front row. She stands defiantly facing the expectantly-triumphant faces of Sykora, Loskowitz, and Taurasi; her glance wanders to the non-New Fandom-ites. Bob Tucker, Mark Reinsberg, Richard L. Meyer, Walter E. Marconette, Erle Korshak, Milton A. Rothman, David A. Kyle, Bob Madle, Jack Beer -- some of you are members, true -- is New Fandom representative of you?

Silence. The trio look uncomfortable. No one speaks. Then someone hesitantly suggests that the business proceed.

But what has led up to this scene? We must turn back the clock several hours -- to the moment when John V. Baltadonis opens the Philadelphia Conference of 1959.

The chairman welcomes everyone, minutes of the last meeting are read, approved, and passed. Then Milton A. Rothman, first speaker, takes the stand.

Should science fiction as a whole be organized? If so, how? What steps can we take today, here, in its organization if such organization is desirable? Thus opens Rothman's speech.

Fans, says Rothman, are science-fiction readers who like to do things. They are not content, however to have things done for them; they must do things themselves. They must publish their own

magazines, draw their own covers and illustrations, writes articles, stories, and poems themselves, make their own models of fantastic objects, write, produce, and enact their own science fiction dramas and movies, make up and take part in their own conventions.

They will not be content with any convention unless each fan attending feels that heesh has a direct part in it. That entertainment is not being handed him from above, but that this is an exhibition in which heesh is an important and interesting part. There can be no suppression, no exclusion, no "approved" or "disapproved" subjects. Thus speaks Milton A. Rothman.

Discussion starts. Chalres Burt rises to question if organization is needed or not. Then fans meet in any appreciable gathering only once or twice a year at the most, is organization needed?

Kyle suggests that discussion be postponed until the rest of the speakers have had their say. Discussion now, he claims, would very likely cut in to much of what the other speakers have in mind. We can save time and answer many questions by letting all the speakers proceed one after the other, then having a long discussion period afterward. The suggestion becomes a motion which is passed.

Jack Speer proceeds with a concrete suggestion for organization. A North American Fantasy Federation -- title optional -- which will operate loosely, yet which will cover the field well. Its purpose shall be to unite and harmonize fandom as far as possible without regimentation, strict discipline, and the suppression of dissenting viewpoint and opinions. There will be a council which shall act as mediator in inter-fan disputes (which have gone beyond mere personal issues), operate to assist projects in reference to fandom (ie - A service department which would do research on books, radio sketches, films, comics, fan-histories, and the like) and to prevent infringements upon the

democratic rights of any fan regardless of hiser opinions, viewpoints, or affiliations.

David A. Kyle suggests a Federation of all fan-groups. Each society, group, or club will elect a representative to the Federation Council. It shall exist only for the purpose of insuring democracy in fandom and facilitating projects (such as conventions) of mutual benefit and enjoyment to all fans.

Sam Moskowitz siezes time by the forelock to give a detailed account of New Fandom, sliiping a round the rough spots,, rationalising, glorifying, and boasting. He speech is teeming with absurd contentions; he states the speech has not been prepared, and it certainly sounds that way. Every other sentence starts with "Well, naturally ---"; he stumbles over words, contradicts himself, and generally follows the line to be expected of Moskowitz.

Chairman Baltadonis then announces that Mark Reinsberg (who is listed as the next speaker) has requested that Bob Tucker take the stand for him as Tucker knows more about the inner workings of the IFF than he (Reinsberg) does. However, since this speech entails a definite convention-plan rather than touching on the main problem up for discussion, Kyle moves that it be postponed until later. The former motion is invoked, but it is moved to set aside the ruling in this case. A vote defeats it, and Tucker takes the stand to thunderous applause.

Tucker states that a certain organization has offered to take over the IFF, but that offer was declined. He further adds that the IFF is running this convention, that it desires the co-operation of all fans and groups, but that it refuses to make definite connections with any one fan-group outside of itself. The IFF does not care to become a branch of New Fandom. Nor of any other organization. It remains neutral as to the battles between the progressives and reactionaries (as exemplified by the Futurians and

New Fandom, and insist only on a square deal to all fans in regard to the 1940 Chicon and full democratic rights to its own participating members.

Reinsberg then tells of the progress of the Chicon, expresses pleasure and appreciation at the universal fan support, explains briefly the setup of the IFF, and refers all to their first issue of the official organ for full details. Briefly, the IFF is divided into two groups: the participating members and the non-participating members. The participating members are those members living in the near vicinity; the non-participating members are those members who live too far away to permit them to attend regular meetings. Suffrage extends to participating members only -- the rest, who are voluntary associates, or honorable members -- have the right, nay, are cordially requested, to suggest measures and plans for the convention, but have not a voice in the final decisions of the IFF.

The floor is thrown open to discussion.

Rothman explains further his scheme of organization. L. A. Eschbach, speaking as a fan, deplores the fact that everyone seems to have an axe to grind -- every group wants to be "it". He pleads for co-operation, for less self-seeking service in fandom.

Sykora brings up the first diversion away from the subject by rebuking Rothman for his attacks on New Fandom in reference to the Nyecon of 1939. Sykora claims that the expenses of the Nyecon were not met through the members' dues (as Rothman stated) and beats around the bush as to how they were met. Kornbluth asks why a list of New Fandom's members has never been published. Why the names of these 100-200 (the trio cannot seem to make up their minds as to whether they have 100

or 200 members) are kept in deep dark secret. Sykora explains that, were this list published, certain people who have it in for New Fandom, would use the knowledge of who the members were for their own purposes.

If New Fandom has nothing to hide, if there is no skeleton in their closet, why should there be any objection to members' names being made public?

Mr. Sykora refuses to answer. He quibbles and evades and reiterates his objections, at the same time repeating his claim of a huge membership list for New Fandom.

And where, Mr. Sykora, is this constitution that New Fandom is supposed to be getting? Sykora replies that he has it with him. But he prefers not to bring it up here because it would tear the lid open. Everything has been kept down up to now; he knows there are people here who hate him; he does not wish to start things popping.

The opposition doubts the existence of a constitution and says so. "Here's the skeleton in the closet", cries Will. He waves a large roll of paper. "Here's our deep dark secret!" The chair does not consider this a side issue and calls for point of order are quietly ignored.

Sykora marches down the aisle, his hair falling loosely over his forehead, a boyishly exuberant expression on his face. He is a cross between a statesman and St. Cecilia at the organ. Under one arm he carried a large chart.

The chart is unrolled, stuck up against the wall. An outline of New Fandom's new organization. Taken, says Will, from the suggestions of a number of members, as well as from Speer's proposed organization.

It is the paper model of a corporate state altered to suit science-fiction fandom. Inner

circle members elect a ponderous governing body which is divided into bureaus and departments; outer circle members look on and try to become inner circle members. And how does one become an inner circle member? By doing something in sf fandom "approved" by the governing body. This governing body "approves" fan mags, activities, everything. But what shall be the test of approval? Why, says Sylora beamingly, that which is approved by the governing body. We have and are to grind, says Will, his face glowing with holy zeal; we have a mission to perform. We're out to make science-fiction the greatest thing yet. The general public must be made into readers, and, once, readers, into fans. Into outer circle members of New Fandom. Outer circle members may become inner circle members if they work for that honor. (And if their work is "approved" by the governing body.) Inner circle members may run for offices, serve on committees, hold office, and vote in elections. Only inner circle members, those whose activities are "approved" by the governing body, may vote in elections.

And the end of all this furious activity? None is given. No reason is given for this mad dash to make the world science-fiction conscious. The fans must work their heads off to make the general public science-fiction conscious so that they (general public) can join New Fandom and work their heads off doing "approved" things to make more General Public science fiction conscious so these can join New Fandom and work their heads off doing "approved" things to make more General Public science fiction conscious so they can join New Fandom and work their heads off doing "approved" things calculated to make still more General Public science fiction conscious so they can join New Fandom and work their heads off doing "approved" things to make yet more General Public -- and so on to the end of time. A new generation of General Public to be made science fiction con-

scious can be expected every 20 years or so, thus there should be no danger of let-up.

However, Moskowitz has given a hint to this in one of his articles. Fans, he says, must be saved from themselves. (They've already been saved from Wollheim and Communism -- ah, the purity and angelicism of the fan-field now that Wollheim and the terrible terrible red meance is gone!) Thus they must be led by their little noses into "approved" pastures so that the glorious name of stf be not sullied by reality, meaning, constructive visionarism, -- or anything else along that line which is so repugnant to the tric. Fandom must retain the glorious honor it received from the TIME reporters.

Discussion on "approved". Now, now, says Will auntily, you must trust your leaders. What's the sense of having leaders or officers if you can't trust them? You must trust someone ... this flow of hot air continues indefinitely.

Will the activities of all fans be "approved" demand Kyle. Would every person here be able to join New Fandom under the now setup? Would they be able to get into the inner circle?

I wouldn't know, says Sykora. That is not for me to say; it is up to the governing body. Anything approved by them ... Kyle repeats his question: could anyone here get in to New Fandom?

If I had anything to say about it, admits Will there are some who would not get in.

But Mr. Well-- Kyle: (to Sykora persecution-complected mind, everyone who questions him has become Wollheim) you're implying that I might do something unfair, something dirty. I resent that hint. I think you owe me an apology, you owe all New Fandom an apology.

You've got to get it out of your heads, says Will, that anyone is trying to put anything over on you. We have never hurt anyone. No member of

New Fandom has ever defamed anyone --

CHALLENGE!

Voices from all over the hall ring out. "That's a lie!" says Wollheim plainly.

Sykora marches down the aisle again, an image of self-righteous indignation. Jack Gillespie (height 4' 10") siezes Will's arm; Sykora turns pale, but pushes on -- on to Wollheim. He goes over to where the W is sitting, glares and threatens immediate violence. "No heckler can call me a liar -- particularly a Communist heckler!" He does not deny that he has lied nor protest heckling in principle. Michel smiles; lights a cigarette, and quietly places one foot between Sykora's outspread two. Pohl, Bethman, Burt and others rise quickly and come forward. Taurasi rolls up his sleeves and makes a dash for the front of the room. Speer looks particularly unhappy. Baltadonis stares blankly. Lowndes watches carefully, shifting position for a quick rise if necessary. The two are arguing in mutters. Wollheim can be heard replying that Sam Moskowitz' article in the recent Science Fiction Collector alone is proof of defamation. Sykora has no answer to make to that; babble for a moment while Burt makes insulting remarks, then someone pulls Sykora back. He stalks back to his seat like the retreat from Moscow, apologies and retractions unreceived.

Wollheim arises, addresses the chair. Since Mr. Sykora has thrown democratic procedure to the winds and threatened personal violence the moment he was challenged, I demand that he either apologise to this assembly for his resort to strongarm methods or leave the hall. Kyle speaks calling Sykora a liar again without using those specific words. No response.

Speer coughs, stammers, hastily suggests that the affair be ignored and the business proceed. The chair apparently has no desire to express disapproval of stringarm tactics on the part of Sykora and

his followers. Let's forget it and go on.

Moslowitz moves that the plan of New Fandom, subject to necessary revision, be approved by the Conference. Revisions suggested. Then the chair recognizes Vollheim, who immediately relinquishes to Leslie Perri. Perri has been trying to obtain the floor for the last half hour, but has been consistently ignored by the chair who has done his best to keep his eyes away from that general direction.

This plan of yours, says Perri, is excellent -- for a political organization. But we fans have something else to live for than science-fiction. Granted that science-fiction is a fine thing, that it offers a great many opportunities for self-expression and creative work, it is still no end in itself.

I want to ask a question of you: is New Fandom representative of science-fiction? Is it representative of all of you? I want to know: in your minds, is science-fiction fandom the same as New Fandom?

New Fandom with its regimentation, stamp of approval, mockery of democratic rights to members, bullying, hot air, strongarm methods whenever intimidation through rhetoric fails, nazi-like defamation of character against all who oppose it or question its leaders, diversion of all aims and motives in fandom to the meaningless aim of making inner circle members -- New Fandom, the Corporate State in Science Fiction --

Is this representative of all fans?

Milton A. Rothman, Jack Speer, Bob Tucker, Mark Reinsberg, Walter E. Marconetto, David A. Kyle, Bob Radle and you others --

Is New Fandom representative of you?

Silence. The trio look uncomfortable. No one speaks. Then someone hesitantly suggests that business proceed. After a little half-hearted hed-

ging, meeting is adjourned for refreshments.

Little gatherings into small personal groups follows. Much individual discussion. We meet and talk with Bob Tucker and Walt Marconette -- this alone is worth the trouble is listening to the trio. Mark Reinsberg tells us of his experiences in unifying the Chicago group. We hear of how it came about that he and W. Lawrence Hamling agreed to shelve personal differences for the nonce and co-operate for the sake of the Chicon. We congratulate Mark heartily and bid him extend our greetings and congratulations likewise to Hamling. If only similar wisdom on both sides could have occurred in New York prior to the Nycon of '39. ... Wollheim converses amiably with Marie Macic and other QSEF members outside the trio. We meet Dick Meyer and greet Erle Korshak again, congratulate Rothman and Kyle on their work, slip in a few words of greeting to Jack Speer who, like ourself, is trying to be everywhere at once.

Sandwiches and soda is passed out. The storm is over and what promised to be a worthy and constructive conference has been flooded away, drowned in the masses of blah and irrelevant boasting, bullying and orating of the trio. All those subjects which might have been tackled here have been swept aside.

Was this done by connivance with the PSFS? That we do not know. Was this done through tacit agreement on the part of the chair and secretary? Again we do not know. We can say only that the PSFS could not have done much better by the trio had their been a carefully pre-arranged strategy. The opposition to the trio could not have been much better ignored had there been a direct combination to keep them from the floor as much as possible.

The meeting is recalled to order. Moskowitz moves that a vote be taken on the approval of the New Fander constitution read by Sykora (a reading which followed the explanation of the chart and which killed about twenty minutes), with provisions for changes if necessary. Pohl makes several

concrete proposals. Chairman calls for a vote --
OBJECTION!

The motion must be restated and presented including the suggestions. No one speaks up. Were the suggestions taken down?

Taurasi re-states the motion. What Sam meant was -- But Taurasi's re-statement entirely ignores the provision for possible changes. Finally Sykora arises and makes the direct motion that the Conference approve the setup of New Fandom's constitution as read. (A minority of those in attendance at the Conference are members of New Fandom.)

I want to point out, says Pohl, an evidence of bad faith on the part of New Fandom's leaders. The original motion called for suggestions for possible revisions. But the moment that these suggestions were actually made, the leaders of New Fandom try to force a vote through without their being stated. And, failing in that, they alter the motion altogether so as to relieve themselves entirely of the bother of possible revisions. It is but one symptom of their deceitful and crooked attitude toward the entire fan field.

Throughout this discussion on the motion, which took all three members of the trio, one after the other to state comprehensibly, the voices of Moskowitz and Taurasi can be heard calling for an end to discussion, for immediate voting.

You're trying to force this thing through without full consideration, aren't you, flaunts Perri. You've suppressed us; you've excluded us in the past; you've seen to it that we were not called upon to speak, today, as much as you dared.

Again the trio looks uncomfortable and says nothing. Baltadonis looks about him helplessly for a moment, then calls for a vote. The motion to approve the proposed New Fandom constitution as read, is passed by the votes of the QSFPL and PSFS alone. The others either vote no or abstain in disgust.

Meeting is then adjourned.

In closing, I should like to add that, with the exception of direct quotations (statements in quotation marks) I have not tried to reproduce exact wordings of either speeches or statements. Thus, the reader is warned that some details will be inaccurate. The general tone of this report is, as those who were there can testify, accurate.

If anyone feels that this report had wronged any person, I am ready to consider evidence which would show mistake on my part, and to retract (with apologies) for such. I should like to point out, however, that it is a time-honored trick of the trio to quibble over details (which admittedly may be incorrect) and, on the strength of these try to worm an admission of error on the entire reportage out of those who have made the slip. Vide Moskowitz' letter to Tucker in Le Zombie, New Year's issue.

This is another symptom of the hypocritical and crooked attitude of the three inquestion.

cordially yours,

Doc Lowmides

"Storm Over Philadelphia" --

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