

## THE LIFE OF THE FAN

by Milton Alpha Rothman

### What Science Fiction Fans Do in Their Spare Time

LET'S analyze the activities open to a science fiction fan and see how you can get started in them. First we must understand one thing. We're going to list a large number of activities here; you don't have to do them all at once. In fact, it is better that you don't try to do them all at once, for you'll find yourself burning away your interest in science fiction.

In brief, the activities are as follows:

1. Reading.
2. Collecting.
3. Writing letters.
4. Meeting fans.
5. Writing articles for fan magazines.
6. Club activities.
7. Publishing fan magazines.
8. Writing for the professional magazines.

That seems like a lot, but there are many fans who have done all of that at some time or other. Let's take them up in detail.

**1. READING:** You've already read some magazines; probably the current issues as they come off the newsstand. You've also discovered that there are many fantastic books to be had. Whether you are drawn more to science fiction or to pure fantasy, the fact is that this type of story is very interesting to you. The ideas of the strange things to come in the future, or on other planets, or in other spaces and times are more breathtaking to you than they are to other people.

THAT'S why you like to read these books and magazines. Keep on reading them. Don't stop reading them, as some fans do, and then claim that you are still a fantasy fan. Don't give up other types of literature either. Thomas Wolf, Ernest Hemingway and other people write good things too. My only point in these two paragraphs is that reading of science fiction and fantasy is the foundation of our fandom.

**2. COLLECTING:** You notice that the magazines have been going on for a long time. Amazing Stories was a fine magazine in 1926 when Hugo Gernsback started it, and Wonder Stories was magnificent under the title of Science Wonder Stories, in 1929.

It's nice to have on your shelves a complete set of all the science fiction magazines. It's a hard thing to obtain nowadays, but still it is fun to collect all that you can from whatever sources there are. In this way you read the fine science fiction that was written ten or more years ago, and you get an idea of the history of this sort of literature. I do not suggest collecting just for the sake of collecting, as some people do. Read what you buy, and keep it on your shelves so that somebody else can read it later on, or so that you yourself might look at it in the future.



WHERE can you get old magazines? In the big cities there are back-date magazine stores which formerly were a rich source of science fiction magazines. Nowadays they are not so good. A few certain make a business of selling old magazines through the mail, and often other people have advertisements in the fan magazines when they have something for sale. Unfortunately, for them you need money. No more 1928 Amazings for a nickle each.

THE Moral of this activity is that you are starting a hobby based on literature, you want to have a nice big stock of this literature on your shelves for purposes of pleasure and reference. And most of this pleasure comes in shopping around for the stuff. (appendix 1)

3. WRITING LETTERS: Before science fiction fan magazines and clubs became so highly organized, most activity centered around the writing of letters. A person with less then ten correspondents just didn't rate. At the present time, that is the kind of fan activity I have, and I see no reason why that should not still be a large part of any fan's activity.

The organ of the NFFF periodically runs a membership list with addresses. The obvious thing to do is to pick out some names and write to them. You may find people who live quite close to you. You will find people in all age groups. The next thing to do is to meet these people. In other words, we're setting out deliberately to make a lot of friends in this science fiction world. Most fans are quite delighted to receive letters, and they will answer them, even if they have never heard of you. If they are too busy to carry on a correspondence, most of them will politely tell you so.

What do you write about in these letters? You start out by discussing science fiction--the stories that came out recently, the books, the movies, the radio programs, the fan activities, collecting adventures and misadventures, magazine trading, and so on. Later you probably spread out to other things, like general literature, music, art, and perhaps the mundane things like the best liquor, but you still mention science fiction occasionally. That is correspondence: conversations in writing between people who have interesting things to tell each other.

4. INEVITABLY you get to meet some of the people you are writing letters to. And this is a good place to mention what I think is the most important thing about science fiction fandom.

WHERE EVER you might be in the country you can call up somebody and say, "Hello Bill, this is Joe". You've never met Bill. Maybe you have been writing to him, or maybe He's just seen your name in a fan magazine. And that's the same as already being friends. Now this is something where I know what I am talking about. I've been all over the United States in the past five years, and there were always people wherever I went with whom I was already friends, although many I had never seen before.

We have conventions once more. Fans will come from all over the nation to meet one another and to renew old friendships. It is a lot of fun to meet people that you have never seen before, but with whom you are already intimate in correspondence.

5. Up to now I haven't said much about fan magazines, but you can't be much of a science fiction fan without getting at least a few of them. Some fans try to get them all. That's pretty hard.



A good collection of fan magazines is another pleasure.

FAN magazines (called fanzines, or fanmags, or just fmz) are amateur publications published without profit by a fan as the creative part of his science fiction hobby. You see, when a person does enough reading, it's only a matter of time before he reaches the point where he has to write something. Not everyone can be a professional writer, but everyone can be an amateur, and so the amateur magazine was born.

USUALLY you start by writing for someone else's fanmag before you publish your own. It may be a letter, a fact article, a story a controversial article, poetry--anything goes, except filth and any self-respecting fan wouldn't bother with dirt. You find out what each magazine wants by reading them. There are innumerable fanmags. Some you get by subscription, some you get by being on the preferred mailing lists which are a result of general fan activity, some are free for the asking providing you write a letter of comment after reading it, and others come by belonging to an amateur press assn. such as the Fantasy Amateur Press Association. (see appendix 2.)

WHAT I wish to emphasize here is that fanzine publishers are always delighted to print good selections by new fans. They will crawl to you on hands and knees if you have something worth publishing. Do not be deceived into believing that by breaking into amateur print is a high and mighty and difficult thing to do. It is not, as long as you have something worth saying--and there is always somebody who is looking for an item for his next issue. In addition, the NFFF maintains a manuscript bureau which helps in getting good writing to the fan publishers who need such. There is little that gives more pleasure than seeing something of your own in a fanmag, and there is no better way to become better known, for with correspondence you may become acquainted with only a few people. By being published in a fanzine you become better known to all fandom.

6. YOU can join the largest club of all: the National Fantasy Fan Federation. The many activities open in this club can be found in the various issues of the official organ. There you will find announcements asking for volunteers for some job, to serve on a committee, to help on some project. If you have the time and the means, respond to any of these calls.

THAT'S the way we keep the club running, and that's how you feel that you're doing something in the organization besides paying dues. Furthermore, when you eventually run for office (as every member is entitled to do) you will have this record of club activity to back up your platform.

If you find friend nearby who also like science fiction, you can form a local club with them. In the past there has been many such, some of which lasted longer than others. In 1934 I helped form the Philadelphia Science Fiction Society, which has had many ups and downs.

WHAT you do usually in a club like that is hold meetings, talk, publish a club magazine, and help out on the bigger, nation-wide projects such as the annual conventions. Incidentally, a local club is customarily the basis for holding a national convention. That is, it does the job of finding a convention hall and making all of the physical arrangements.



AT the present time, the Los Angeles Science Fantasy Society is the most active local organization, with a club room, much publishing equipment, a library, and extensive cross-index to science fiction, and the organization staging the 1946 convention.

7. EVENTUALLY you may feel the urge to put out your own fanzine. To do that you need good hektographing, mimeographing or printing equipment, a bit of money, and a lot of ambition. A lot of fans publish, and many keep their magazines going for a long time. Years. At first we thought the war would put an end to fan publishing activity, but the mags kept coming out. I will find it pretty near impossible to keep up with them when all the fans return to civilian life.

8. WRITING professional fiction is the horrid end to which many fans have sunk. Included on the NFFF roster are nearly twenty fans who "have sold". Some few fans have even become editors of professional magazines, not only science fiction magazines but other types. It's pretty hard to make a living at it, so I won't go into this subject, but will simply leave it as a distant pinnacle of success at which you might aim if you feel so inclined.

IN conclusion I want to repeat that it is not necessary to do all of these things to become a science fiction fan. You need do nothing more than read the magazines and write a few letters. Your success in fandom should be measured by the number of friends you make. Your skill as a writer, the beauty of your fanmag, the size of your club, That's all gravy.

FANDOM is known as a collection of individuals--of characters. Each fan is known by the distinctive mark of his activities and his personality. If you keep on in fandom, you'll become known to the others in the way you carry on. You'll find what you like to do, and you won't worry about copying what anyone else has done, and there won't be anyone telling you what to do. I hope you have a good time.

APPENDIX 1: A good collection of science fiction would consist of the following items--Complete sets of "The Big Three" Amazing Stories and Amazing Stories quarterly and Annuals from 1926.

Science Wonder Stories, Air Wonder Stories, Wonder Stories and Wonder Stories quarterly from 1929.

Astounding Stories and Astounding Science Fiction from 1930.

And then: Weird Tales from 1923, Unknown Worlds from 1939 and Fantastic Novels and Famous Fantastic Mysteries from 1939. Afterwards: Strange Stories, Marvel Stories, Dynamic Stories, Comet, Startling Stories, Astonishing Stories, Super Science Stories, Stirring Science Stories, Planet, Future Fiction, Science Fiction, Fantastic Adventures, Captain Future, and Thrilling Wonder Stories.

If you are lucky you find the two issues of Miracle, Science and Fantasy Stories. If you want to delve deeply into the past, you hunt for the Thrill Book, Tales of Magic and Mystery, Witches Tales, Black Cat, Gernsback's Science and Invention, The Electrical Experimenter, or even his old radio magazines containing some items.

Munsey Magazines--All-Story, Argosy, Argosy-All-Story weekly, Cavalier and other ephemera.

APPENDIX: 2.

A complete list of all of the fanzines published last year is obtainable from the NFFF upon request. However, below is a list of some of the outstanding fan publications that to the best of my knowledge, are still being issued.

SHANGRI-L'AFFAIRS. Published by the L.A. Science Fantasy Society.

SUN SPOTS. Published by Gerry de la Ree.

FANTASY COMMENTATOR: Published by Langley Searles.

THE ALCHEMIST: Published by Charles Ford Hansen.

CHANTICLEER: Published by Walt Liebscher.

THE GORGON: Published by Stanley Mullen.

FANEWS: Published by Walter Dunkleberger.

KAR-MAR TRADER: Published by K. Martin Carlson.

LE ZOMBIE: Published by Bob Tucker.

THE VORTEX: Published by Gordon M. Kull & George R. Cowie.

FANTASY ADVERTISER: Published by Gus Wilmorth.

DIABLERIE: Published by Bill Watson.

TYMPANY: Published by Redd Boggs.

CENTAURI: Published by Andy Anderson.

The Officers and Members of the National Fantasy Fan Federation, would appreciate it very much, in case you are not interested in joining our organization, if you would pass "THE LIFE OF THE FAN" on to someone who is interested in science fiction and fantasy.

Thank You.

The Officers and Members of the National Fantasy Fan Federation, sincerely hope that you will see fit to unite with us in fandom, and that you will receive the same joys and pleasures that we have had together in common membership.

PUBLISHED BY THE NATIONAL FANTASY FAN FEDERATION.

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Stenciled by: R. Vernon Cook.

Mimeographed and assembled by: K. Martin Carlson.



