



"THE WORLD OF TOMORROW TODAY!"

Special
Convention Issue

VOL.2 - No 28 WHOLE No 59

THE PHILCON REPORT

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Fantasy-Times is published monthly at 101-02 Northern Blvd., Corona,
New York. 10¢ an issue, 3 for 25¢ or \$1.00 a year. This is a special
issue and is mailed free to our subscribers. The next, December, is-
sue will be out at the regular time, the first week in November.
Fantasy-Times is a Cosmic Publication

FANTASY-TIMES PRESENTS

THE PHILCON REPORT

The Event

THE FIFTH WORLD SCIENCE FICTION CONVENTION (Nicknamed the "PHILCON", held at the Hotel Penn-Sheraton, Philadelphia, Pa., Aug. 30, '31 and Sept. 1, 1947.

The Sponsors

THE PHILADELPHIA SCIENCE FICTION SOCIETY (PSFS), of Philadelphia Pa., one of the oldest science-fiction clubs in the world, whose history of more or less continuous action extends back to 1935. This society sponsored the FIRST and THIRD EASTERN SCIENCE FICTION CONVENTIONS in 1936 and 1937 respectively and went on to inaugurate a series of highly successful annual PHILADELPHIA SCIENCE FICTION CONFERENCES. Before the war the group was the center of the famous COMET PUBLICATIONS group which sponsored such memorable fan journals as "The Science Fiction Collector", "Fantascience Digest" and Science Adventure Stories". The war cut such serious inroads into the society that only the inspired action of Oswald Train kept the group intact for the post-war reorganization. At present, under its competent Director Oswald Train, the club is more successful than at any time in its history. It permanently maintains a three room club house, holds meetings every other week, and boasts such prominent names in its roster as George O. Smith, Alexander M. Phillips, Robert A. Madle, Benson Dooling, Oswald Train, Jack Agnew, Sol Levin, Charles Lucas, Al Pepper, Alfred Prime, Russell Swanson, Robert G. Thompson, James Williams and numerous others, last but far from least of whom is Milton A. Rothman, founder of the club and Chairman of the PHILCON.

The Attendance

It is estimated by a check of the registration, counting of heads, and consultation with attendees that probably 180 persons were present at the high-water mark of the program, though there is a possibility that this number may have been exceeded during the entertainment of the evening of Aug. 31, 1947 when the hall seemed unusually full. The record was set at the NYCON (FIRST WORLD SCIENCE FICTION CONVENTION '1939') when 200 were counted during the first day.

Among the famous authors present were Edward E. Smith, Ph.D., David H. Keller, M.D., Ralph Milne Farley, Theodore Sturgeon, L. Sprague de Camp, Willy Ley, Isaac Asimov, Lester Del Rey, Dr. Thos. S. Gardner, Alexander M. Phillips, George O. Smith, L. A. Eshbach,

William Tenn, Chan Davis, and many others.

Editors present were John W. Campbell, Jr., and L. Jerome Stanton of ASTOUNDING SCIENCE FICTION, and Sam Merwin, Jr. of THRILLING WONDER STORIES and STARTLING STORIES.

Most prominent artist present was Hubert Rogers, ASTOUNDING SCIENCE FICTION's cover and interior artist.

Famous fans in attendance were Forrest J. Ackerman, Bob Tucker, Sam Moskowitz, Jack Speer, Arthur L. Widner, Richard Frank, Stanley Mallen, Paul H. Spencer, Norman F. Stanley, Gerry de la Ree, Jr., Joe Kennedy, Thomas P. Hadley, Donald M. Grant, Paul Dennis O'Connor, Robert A. Madle, John V. Baltadonis, Oswald Train, Jack Agnew, Alex Osheroff, Ronald Maddox, Lloyd Alpaugh, A. Langley Soarles, Richard Witter, David Kishi, George Tullis, Erle Korshak, Thaddeus Dikty, Helen Cloukey, James Blish, Gertrude Kuslan, David A. Kyle, Fred Pohl, John Millard, Beak Taylor, Oliver E. Saari, and many others.

THE PROGRAM

FIRST DAY - AUG. 30, 1947

Chairman Milton A. Rothman hewed strictly to the program, and virtually everything began and ended on schedule. A feat in itself. Rothman delivered the address of welcome to the attendees, extended bouquets to men like Oswald Train, Forrest J. Ackerman, Robert A. Madle, Jack Agnew, John V. Baltadonis, THE PRIME PRESS, THE EASTERN SCIENCE FICTION ASSOCIATION and other groups that had contributed towards the success of the convention. Rothman's jokes and witticisms which punctured the welcome address came off very well. Rothman upon the completion of the Welcome Address introduced many of the more prominent present. Ralph Milne Farley, who had come east to attend the AMERICAN LEGION CONVENTION in New York, and then remembered that there was something even better, a science-fiction convention in Philadelphia, proudly announced that he had authored the wording of an act being brought before congress aimed at purging Communists from government positions. Someone challenged him as to the constitutionality of the proposed law, and Mr. Farley (whose real name is Roger Sherman Hoar, and who has occupied a seat in the U.S. Senate), insisted upon reading the measure. With some difficulty a political discussion was averted.

The main speaker was John W. Campbell, Jr., editor of ASTOUNDING SCIENCE FICTION. It was his first appearance before a major science-fiction gathering in over seven years. Campbell is a big boy, standing over six feet and weighing an estimated 220 pounds. He has hawk-like features, and ports a tenor voice. The content of his talk followed the line of his recent editorials with the addition that one set up atomic piles for a specific purpose, and you either maintained your original aim or you sheated the pile with sufficient insulation and left it to eternity to extinguish, since there was simply no known way of changing the set-up of the pile or getting rid of it.

There ensued a very long question and answer period during which Harry Moore of New Orleans, long a fan of Campbell's old heavy-science stories, paradoxically gave him the toughest fight.

Under resolutions, Jack Speer introduced a fiery example in a strongly worded diatribe against Palmer and AMAZING STORIES which

elicited much enthusiasm at the time, but was doomed to fall before the axe of indecision and fear later on.

Alex Osheroff read the assemblage a letter from author Arthur Leo Zaget concerning a young fan, paralyzed from the waist down by a bullet in Europe, wasted away to skin and bones in a New York Veteran's Hospital, surrounded by piles of science-fiction magazines which were the only link of interest he still held in life.

After an intermission Sam Merwin, Jr. of THRILLING WONDER STORIES and STARTLING STORIES, spoke quite competently upon the present and future plans of his magazines, maintaining that his chief aim was to continue to buy material in a more mature slant, with emphasize on good writing. He said the improvement in recent issues of his magazines have been due to their finally running through a stock pile of old manuscripts, and the calibre of material will continue to rise. He quit the stand shortly after someone asked in very real seriousness: "What about UNKNOWN?"

The evening session was devoted to messages from the publishers of fantasy books. Bud Waldo spoke for PRIME PRESS whose latest book "Venus Equilatorial" has been distributed at this writing. Among PRIME PRESS' forthcoming highlights is a proposed collection by Lester Del Rey!

Donald M. Grant spoke for THE HADLEY PUBLISHING COMPANY. He announced that John W. Campbell, Jr.'s novel "The Mightiest Machine" was at the moment on the presses; to be followed by John Taine's "Seed of Life" and "White Lily", with new books by Montague Summers and David H. Keller, M.D. on the schedule.

L. A. Esbach took the rostrum for FANTASY PRESS, who had produced "Of Worlds Beyond" a symposium on the writing of science-fiction, with authors biographies and photos added, by seven of the field's most prominent authors, Robert A. Heinlein, L. Sprague de Camp, A.E. van Vogt, John Taine, Jack Williamson, Edward E. Smith, Ph.D. and John W. Campbell, Jr., as a convention surprise!

Forrest J. Ackerman presented the plans of the newly organized FANTASY PUBLISHING COMPANY, INC., one of the partners of whom is old time fan publisher, William Crawford. They plan publication of many excellent volumes by A. E. van Vogt, E. Mayne Hull, Stanton A. Colelantz, Ralph Milne Farley, as well as being exclusive distributors for several other book ventures.

Melvin C. Korshak plugged a 5,000 word CHECK LIST OF FANTASTIC LITERATURE shortly forthcoming from his firm, SHASTA PUBLISHERS.

Paul Dennis O'Connor, with Marty Greenberg told the plans of the NEW COLLECTORS GROUP, which includes forthcoming books by David H. Keller, M.D. and Neil R. Jones.

Paul Spencer gave details on the non-profit NFFF venture which is the publication of the first American edition of David H. Keller's story "The Sign of the Burning Hart" in book form.

Sam Moskowitz, in speaking for THE AVALON COMPANY, publishers of David H. Keller's collection "Life Everlasting and Other Tales of Science, Fantasy and Horror" stated that its production had been prompted to prove that science-fiction of literary quality could be produced. THE AVALON COMPANY had no plans beyond their first book.

THE AUCTION

The Auction held the late evening of the first day of the con-

vention was presided over by science-fiction's two most prominent auctioneers, Sam Moskowitz and Melvin Korshak. These two vieing politely for auctioneering supremacy grossed a total of \$450.00, the biggest take of any convention to-date, which must mean they are both pretty good. Highest bid of \$31.00 was garnered for Frank R. Paul's cover illustration "The Moon Devils" by John Beynon Harris in the old WONDER STORIES? SECOND HIGHEST was \$24.00 for Hubert Rogers forthcoming cover illustration for Smith's new epic, "Children of the Lens". Korshak knocked down an atrocious illustration for one chapter of Keller's excellent "Solitary Hunters" for \$6.00, which had little to commend it but a little frame and Keller's autograph. Moskowitz repeatedly sold currently "in print" books for a dollar or so more than their regular price. Alvin Brown finished up the auction when the Messrs. Korshak and Moskowitz began to tire.

THE SECOND DAY - AUG. 31, 1947

L. Sprague de Camp was feature of the second day's program. So much of the enjoyment of de Camp's speech lay in his remarkable diction and methods of enunciation punctuated with typical dry humor that we would fall flat trying to give the highlights. The subject was "Adventures in the Occult" taken from a soon-to-be issued book which we recommend you purchase and read.

Chan Davis presided over the discussion "Is Science Catching Up with Science Fiction", which some claim was changed to "Is Science-Fiction Catching up to Science". Davis did not stay with his subject, though there was some interest when he attempted to explore little fathomed fields as science-fiction, such as the question of whether or not we would recognize alien life or intelligence if we saw it. The point was raised that humans, being human would primarily be interested in something similar in formation to themselves. This was taken under discussion.

after an intermission Erle Korshak spoke on "The Collecting and Enjoyment of Fantasy Literature." He devoted most of his talk to an itemizing of the rarest of fantasy books from his experience as a book dealer. Such famous titles as "Dawn of Flame and Others" by Stanley G. Winbaum, "The Shadow Out of Innsmouth", "The Outsider" and "The commonplace Book" by H. P. Lovecraft were covered.

THE EASTERN SCIENCE FICTION ASSOCIATION, with Sam Moskowitz acting as master of ceremonies filled the next hour. Their first speaker was member David H. Keller, M.D. who spoke very interesting on his association with past editors of fantasy. Joe Kennedy next delivered a fine address on the joys of editing fan journals, and the program was concluded by James Cullums well-coordinated talk on "Sequels in Science-Fiction".

The evening session was devoted to entertainment with L. Jerome Stanton as master of ceremonies. Milton A. Rothman and Chan Davis played selections on the piano. L. Jerome Stanton and Theodore Sturgeon played several duets with string instruments; a lovely young girl accompanying Sturgeon sang two songs, one of them of Sturgeon's own composition. George O. Smith gave his famous hair-trick, but probably Phil Klass, better known as William Tenn stole the show with a rendition of mock-letters-to-the-editor he had delivered.

THE THIRD DAY-SEPT. 1, 1947

The first speaker was George O. Smith, who spoke very briefly in

a simulated double-talk pattern, quickly making room for the feature of the day a symposium of interplanetary travel by Willy Ley and Dr. Thomas S. Gardner. Willy Ley was excellent as he delved into scientific-fictional references to the rocket made from centuries past to the present, and then in simple language illustrating (with the aid of chalk and blackboard), how interplanetary travel was possible with the materials we had developed exclusive of atomic energy.

Dr. Thomas S. Gardner was a bit more technical and discussed the possible application of atomic energy to the rocket, eliciting much discussion from Willy Ley, John W. Campbell, George O. Smith and Chan Davis.

The evening of the last day was devoted to fan business. A committee of three, composed of Sam Moskowitz, Jack Speer and Henry Spellman, had been chosen by the convention to split the profits. Their division of \$100.00 to the PSFS, \$50.00 to the next convention, \$15.00 to buy science-fiction books for paralyzed Joe Suriano, the fan in a New York Veteran's Hospital, with the remainder to be split equally between the NFFF and the FANTASY FOUNDATION, with the recommendation that the NFFF use the funds towards the publishing of the Keller book, was passed with no change except the addition of a clause permitting the Convention Committee to loan funds to fans who had overspent their finances and would need a loan to get home.

At the suggestion of Paul Dennis O'Connor of the NEW COLLECTORS GROUP, who donated a copy of his book "The Fox Woman" to Joe Suriano, L. A. Eshbach of FANTASY PRESS and James Williams speaking for PRIME PRESS also stated they would send a copy of each of their productions to-date to Joe Suriano.

Jack Speer's resolution that the convention go on record as approving all science-fiction magazines except Ziff-Davis' was the subject of heated debate, and was lost when the convention recessed upon the motion of Bob Tucker.

Toronto, Canada represented by Beak Taylor and John Millard won out over Milwaukee, Wisconsin; represented by Bob Stein, as the site for the next, 1948 Convention.

THE BANQUET

Despite high prices, the banquet was not very successful from any standpoint but attendance; at least 100 being present. The service was poor, the food inadequate. Edward E. Smith, Ph.D. and David H. Keller, M.D. made short talks while waiting for servings. There were introductions of many present and statements of pleasure on the success of the convention, but the three long days and nights of almost uninterrupted fun was taking its toll, and the fans were sated with their orgy of scientification. Last man to speak at the convention was Sam Moskowitz who appropriately recited Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's beautiful poem "The Day is Done" as a fitting finale to a great convention.

Lowlights

Thomas P. Hedley and L. A. Eshbach vied with one another in providing uninterrupted cases of liquor for free consumption of all and sundry. A half a dozen other rooms were all night open house, and the convention adjourned to many little conventions that went on a twenty-

four hour a day basis. The younger set indulged in carousing of their own. Joe Kennedy, Ron Maddox, Phil Froeder, Ron Christianson, and others purchased bushels of fruit of rare and exotic vintages, cake, ice cream and soda and carried on a non-alcoholic binge.

Jack Speer and Chan Davis gained immortality by being arrested and later released when no charges were pressed, for throwing fire crackers from the hotel balconies.

The End

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Corona, New York

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