

With some trepidation Lt. Whitmore hit the reset button on the Holographic Visoscope Projector. Success! The unit worked perfectly: Curt Phillips' image was clearly visible in the starry heavens! There was just one problem, though....

...Wrong planet.

Contents

<i>Introduction</i>	1	<i>A Night in Surgery</i>	20
<i>Who is this “Curt Phillips” person, anyway?</i>	2	<i>Who is the Killer?.</i>	22
<i>Completely True Stories from My Fanzines!</i>	7	<i>Where Fanzines Kiss the Sky</i>	24
<i>An Obituary for Lynn Hickman</i>	9	<i>The Hoarder’s Downfall</i>	30
<i>Wauseon, Ohio — “The Town You’ll Take To Heart”</i>	11	<i>One Life, Furnished in Early Fandom.</i> . .	32
<i>The Doorbell Rang</i>	14	<i>Watering Can Surprise</i>	36
<i>10-70 Structure</i>	16	<i>Nights of Thunder</i>	39
		<i>Spaceships in the Sky</i>	43
		<i>Afterword</i>	46

All questions, comments, egoboo, and complaints should be directed to
Curt Phillips, 19310 Pleasant View Dr., Abingdon, VA 24211, Absarka_prime@comcast.net.

Please do not send him any moussaka. For information about where to send your
TAFF ballot, please consult the instructions on the ballot.

Edited by Randy Byers and Claire Brialey, with support from Pat Charnock, Ulrika
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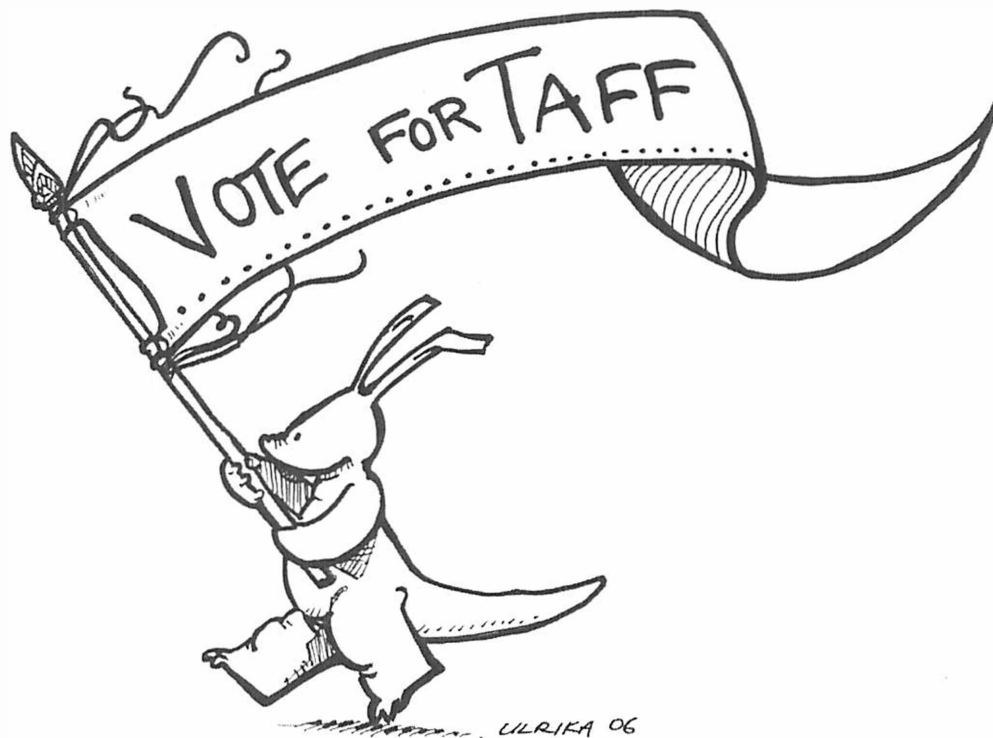
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Zoo Nation, ed. Pete Young (information at http://zinewiki.com/Zoo_Nation)



Introduction

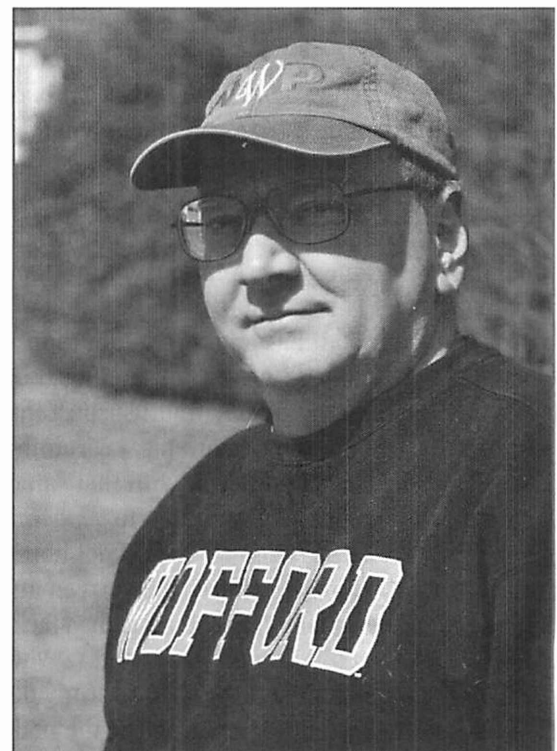
Curt Phillips for TAFF! is a collection of the fan writing of Curt Phillips published by his friends and nominators to promote his campaign for the Trans-Atlantic Fan Fund (TAFF) in 2014. As the ballot says, the Trans-Atlantic Fan Fund was created in 1953 for the purpose of providing funds to bring well-known and popular science fiction fans familiar to those on both sides of the ocean across the Atlantic. The idea is to promote connections within international fandom. See taff.org.uk for further information about the fund.

If you are an active science fiction fan eligible to vote this year, we encourage you to vote for Curt. As this collection of his writing will show you, he's smart, empathetic, and well-versed in fannish traditions, not to mention the owner of a vast and ever-growing collection of science fiction books, magazines, fanzines, and memorabilia. In short, he's just the sort of person who would make for a great TAFF delegate.

If, as we hope will eventually be the case, you're reading this in the far flung future, we salute your interest in fan history, fine fan writing, and the star of this particular show, Curt Phillips, and we hope that you'll seek out information about the TAFF race in the year that you're reading this, or, if TAFF has somehow fallen by the wayside in your time (apparently one of those dystopias we

keep reading about), please think about reviving it. It's still a good idea!

—Randy Byers



Who is this "Curt Phillips" person, anyway?

What a good question! Who *am* I? Well, I was born in Abingdon, Virginia on February 6, 1959. Spent several largely uneventful years growing up — much of which time was spent running around in the woods like Daniel Boone (who, I was once told by my grandfather, also ran around in those very same woods nearly 200 years earlier). Learned to read and very quickly thereafter learned to read science fiction. Read quite a lot of that. I recall a day in my 10 year old summer (you can tell that I once read a lot of Ray Bradbury, can't you?) that found me sitting on a hilltop near my home, watching the clouds and thinking about a TV news program I'd seen the night before about atomic bombs and other unpleasant things. *Gosh*, I thought. *The Russians could drop an H-bomb on Abingdon right now and I'd be vaporized before I could even run back to the house!* You'll understand that this was in 1969, long before I would realize that the Russians had far better things to do than to drop H-bombs on unimportant towns in Southwest Virginia, but at the time I was starting to realize that the world was a lot bigger than I'd previously thought. There was no going back to Ray Bradbury's world after that, I'm afraid ...

A year or so later my school librarian — a perceptive lady named Mrs. Dameron — handed me a pair of books to try. They were *The X-Factor* by Andre Norton, and *The Rolling Stones* by Robert A. Heinlein. The Norton book failed to catch my attention at the time, though later I'd find her far better *Star Man's Son, 2250 A.D.* and would learn to love her books. The Heinlein book caught me up by my sense of wonder and flung me to new heights and I'm still up there, dangling precariously from the higher branches. Most fans start off as SF fans and eventually discover that fandom has a lot more to it than just science fiction. I eventually discovered all that too, but I still collect and read SF to this day, and I suspect that the obsession will turn out to be incurable. I certainly hope so, anyway. The collection began with that same Mrs. Dameron, who bought a subscription to *The Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction* for the school library. Since I was almost the only student who ever read any of them, at the end of the school year she gave the stack of back issues to me to keep. Now *that* was neat! 12 whole magazines all lined up neatly on the shelf over my desk at home. I noticed that the little paragraph at the bottom

of the contents page implied that there had been a few hundred other issues before these were published. I considered the idea of somehow finding and obtaining all of them. *Impossible*, I thought. *Who could possibly collect over 200 magazines?* Well, I found out that a great many people could and did, and gradually I learned that old books and magazines turn up just about everywhere if you'll only keep your eyes open for them, and within 12 or 15 years I'd collected all those back issues, along with the subsequent issues, and a good many other SF magazines and books besides. And most of them just arrived 1 or 2 at a time. 30,000 books? That's not too many ...

I did the mundanely normal stuff too of course. My family lived on a farm and so I worked on it, as we all did. There was always hunting and fishing to do, as well as exploring new mountains and valleys around my mountain home. There were a few years in my teens when my father started a motorcycle dealership and for a while there I almost lived on a motorcycle. But on all those adventures, I always had a book in my backpack. I got into the 4-H club, which is a national club for young people age 9 to 19 based mostly on farm life and career exploration. I earned my share of little ribbons and awards and even became a national officer in the club in my last year. Unfortunately the mundane world I lived in was more impressed by membership on the local high school football team than by membership in the 4-H club, but I think I had more fun than the footballers did anyway. Somewhere in high school I found a reference to a "fanzine" in an old SF magazine. Nothing would do me but that I had to publish a fanzine of my own. It appeared in 1974 and was called *Excursions*. There were 12 copies made. If there's any mercy in the world, the only copy that still survives is the one that I have carefully stored away in a box in my closet downstairs. It's one fanzine that you'll never see listed in the Memoryhole Permacollection. And rightly so. Several years later, after I'd seen some real fanzines in a friend's collection, I published a one-shot zine called ... *Another Fan's Poison*, and I'd have published more but shortly after that I discovered Amateur Press Associations and joined one called "Myriad". That's the point at which fandom really started to become a Way of Life ...

Chapter Two —

Curt Discovers Fandom...

The story of how I discovered fanzines and SF conventions and other such fascinating pursuits goes back to a moment of abject terror that I still relive in my nightmares: I was 16 years old, sitting beside a pretty girl (whom I'd met only moments before) on an amusement park roller coaster and trying not to vomit. I'm sure you've all been in that exact same situation many times before. However, in my case, the pretty girl only had one thing on her mind; she'd discovered that I liked science fiction and she had decided to talk me onto that roller coaster and keep me there until I'd agreed to attend the new SF convention that her father was starting in Roanoke, Virginia. It was called "Rovacon".

"It'll be a lot of fun", she shrieked, waving her hands in the air as we plummeted several hundred feet down towards the ground. "Leigh Brackett's gonna be our guest of honor, and Kelly Freas will have an art show, and there'll be several *Star Trek* episodes shown. You're into *Star Trek*, aren't you?"

I had just noticed that the seat belt in our car was loose where the bolt went into the frame. Was that normal?

"And there'll be fans in costume — I'm making a costume like Jenny Agutter wore in *Logan's Run* — and the TV station will probably have us on the evening news..."

That was funny. I had just been thinking that if our roller coaster car came off around that next sharp curve — there where the rail looked wobbly — that we'd certainly make the evening news. I hoped my mother would see it. She could call all her friends and tell them about it...

"And there'll be a huckster room with books, of course. Say, why are your hands all white and pasty on the rail like that?"

I wondered how often these roller coasters had to be inspected. Was there an inspection sticker on the...

Books? Did she say books?

Well, yes, she *did* say books, and at the Rovacon that October I saw my first convention dealers' room with what seemed like about 100,000 books; nearly all of them science fiction. I'd *known* that I wasn't the only SF reader in the world, but to discover a whole building full of books, and movies, and fans like me — and all of them interested in science fiction... well, you've all been there. You understand. I didn't actually see much more of the pretty girl after she'd gotten my \$3.00 for the conven-



tion membership, but moments after I arrived at the con I discovered a dealer's table piled high and creaking under the weight of old SF pulp magazines and I was well content with the weekend. I found and bought my first pulp magazine there: the December 1942 *Amazing Stories*! It was over a full inch thick and sporting a glorious St. John cover of what I'd thought was a Tarzan story. "Aw, shoot!" I said a little later that day as I sat in the convention lobby reading that first pulp. "This isn't Edgar Rice Burroughs! This is by some guy named Howard Brown!" Well, it was still a nice cover, and maybe the Brown story will be ok...

"Do you like Edgar Rice Burroughs?" a voice next to me asked. I looked up at a pleasant looking older woman who'd sat down nearby. I said that I did, and she asked if I'd read any of his Martian series. Well, *this* was interesting. This lady who looked a little like my grandmother knew about Burroughs, and as we talked it turned out that she knew a lot more about Burroughs than I did. And Ray Bradbury too. And also Heinlein and all the other writers that I liked. I don't know how long we talked, but I was sitting there explaining a famous Bradbury story — while she listened politely and nodded in the right places — when someone walked over to her and handed her a book. She took a pen from her purse and wrote something in it and handed it back. And then someone else came over with a whole shopping bag full of books. Intrigued by this, I edged over to see what she was writing and learned that my new friend, this grandmotherly lady who'd so politely listened to me explain Ray Bradbury, was Leigh Brackett.

Later that afternoon I got her to sign a book for me too. It's still one of my prized possessions.

At that same convention I met a fellow named Ron Rogers and he gave me the first fanzine I'd ever seen other than the one I'd invented a couple of years earlier. It was called *The Jinia Clan Journal* and was the club fanzine of the Nelson Bond Society. And then later that day I met Nelson Bond himself, the famous fantasy writer of the '40s and '50s, still living right there in Roanoke, Virginia. I went home after that convention already plotting how I might eventually move to Roanoke—which was evidently the SF capital of the world, or so it seemed that afternoon. I never did move there, but I eventually joined the NBS, attended several more Rovacons and joined the convention committee. A few years later I met a wonderful girl named Lizbeth who had been born in a small town called Wantage in Oxfordshire, and though she wasn't all that interested in SF, she was very tolerant of my interest in it. Still is, fortunately for me. We even spent our honeymoon at that year's Rovacon.

Over the next few years I attended and eventually started working for many more SF conventions; often with Liz, a few times with our baby daughters in tow, and sometimes with a variety of fannish friends that I met along the way. The odd thing about many of the local fan friends I've known is that most of them seemed to read and like SF for a couple of years and then just lose interest. I, on the other hand, have never felt any less interested in stories of possible tomorrows. I finished college, took a job in a local factory that built missiles for the US Air Force, and kept reading SF and attending conventions. I tried other hobbies and interests now and then. While I was still in college (the first time) I applied for a job as a movie projectionist on a whim and got it—and then had to teach myself how to run a 35mm movie projector on my first night at work. Happily it turned out to be not all that different from the smaller 16mm projectors that I used to run at school assemblies. That was a great job and actually got me a free ticket to the Atlanta Worldcon in 1986 when they needed a professional projectionist at the last moment. I also talked myself into a job at a radio station and while doing that I managed to get a license that would allow me to operate a radio transmitter from "a tethered balloon", just because I'd discovered that such a license was possible. I've spent the rest of my life looking for such a job, but haven't run across it yet. But I'm still looking.

Before the missile plant job, I cooked pizzas in a Pizza Hut (and lost a lot of interest in fast-food pizzas as a result) and worked part time in a few local book shops. Now *that's* a job I was born for. The arrangement I like to make with bookshops is to work for free and get "paid" in books. I've always come out way ahead on that sort of deal, and it's helped me build a pretty good

collection of SF books and magazines, plus it's gotten me involved in the world of book-scouting in a small way. Since I spend a great deal of my free time traveling around haunting thrift shops, flea markets, and yard sales looking for books for myself anyway, I long ago started picking up good books as I found them when the price was cheap. There are many bookshops willing to take good stock in on trade for books that I do want, or even to pay me something more than I have invested in them. That's book-scouting and it is, as Nelson Bond—himself an antiquarian book dealer of considerable standing—once told me, "a very pleasant way of making very little money". I went back to college at night and got a degree in electronics and that allowed me to move into some more advanced work at the missile factory. Eventually I got transferred into a variety of Quality Assurance jobs including one as a Technical Writer, which—considering that my spelling and punctuation are terrible—still makes me laugh to think about it. One of my proudest moments of working for that company came when I interviewed for that Technical Writer job. When I was asked about previous writing experience I mentioned fanzines and spent most of the interview explaining zines and the world of amateur journalism. It must have gone over well since I got the job. Later I moved into testing and fixing electronic systems of various military missile projects, but somehow I never really got over the idea that instead of building missiles to blow up tanks and airplanes, what I really wanted to do was to build missiles to send people into space. My bosses weren't impressed by that idea, and rarely asked me for suggestions, so we just kept on with what we'd been doing.

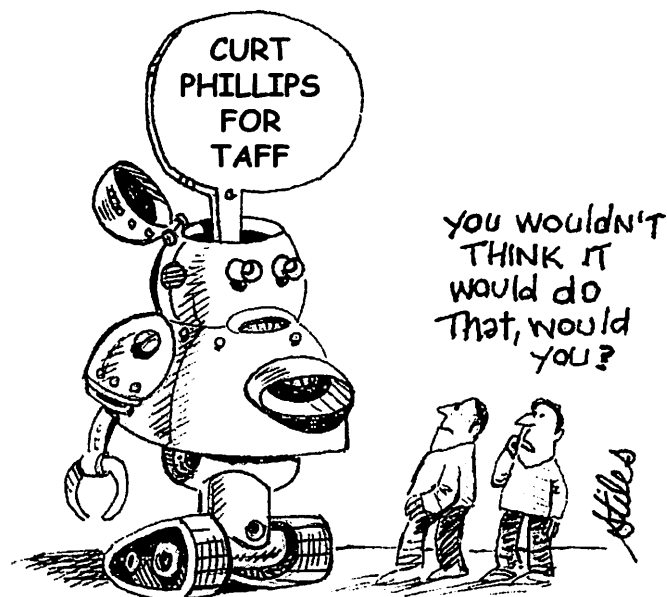
Just to finish off the story of how I earn my spending money, I'll mention that one day back in 1998, the missile company that I'd been with for 19 years decided to close the plant where I worked and this required me to make some decisions. I could move to Kansas and go to work in their airplane factory (the safe thing to do). I could move to Arizona and keep making missiles (the boring thing to do). Or I could start over. *That's* the one I chose. I went back to school yet again and looked for the career field least like building missiles and most likely to never close down and move out of town. I chose Nursing. You see, I'd joined the local volunteer fire department as a hobby a few years earlier and had become an Emergency Medical Technician. That work took me into hospital emergency rooms quite a lot, and seemed to have planted a seed in my mind about the sort of work that I could be doing instead of building machines designed to blow things up. I leapt at the chance to go to Nursing school. It wasn't easy, but I made it through—though at the cost of near total infatiation for two years—and today I work as a surgical

nurse in a large regional hospital in East Tennessee. With luck, this should be my last career.

That covers most of the mundane aspects of my life—except that I didn't mention World War II or American Civil War re-enacting, did I? And there are a *lot* of firefighting and rescue squad stories I could tell you... Oh well, maybe I'll write a fanzine article about all that. Now for the *real* substance of this bio: the story of the most contentious and dangerous part of my life. The story of how I joined not one, not two, but three apas—and lived to tell the tale...

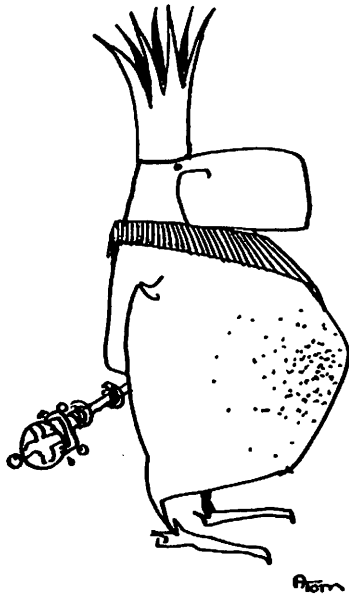
Chapter Three — Is Anyone Really Still Reading This?

Have you ever gone to a convention and wandered around feeling out of place, as though you didn't really belong and no one there really wanted to talk to you? Of course you haven't! That's because you're "in" fandom and you've already discovered that fandom has a million open doors and if you want to you can enter through any of them. Thing is, it took me a while to figure that out. I was one of those fans who started as just a "science fiction" fan. All I cared about at first were the books and magazines. I built up my *collection* and took insufferable pride in knowing the names of every Hugo winner and... eventually I realized that most of the folks who seemed to be having the most fun at conventions weren't terribly concerned with all that. The SF was interesting to them, yes, but there were other priorities. Talking with other people, for instance. And meeting new ones. It wasn't all that long before I began to realize that *I* was starting to look forward to the next convention not so much for the chance to find some more books in the dealers' room, but also for the chance to again see some of the people I'd met at previous conventions. These folks were just more interesting than those I'd known back home. They *read* more; not just SF but mysteries and science and history and so on. And they knew how to *talk* about what they'd read. And eventually, someone suggested that I ought to join an apa. And so I did. The first one was Myriad and it was as though I'd walked into a room with 25 interesting discussions: all of them involving me. Joining Myriad was the key to real fandom for me. I had learned to write in school, but it took that apa to teach me how to actually say something. And I met fascinating people there, most of whom became true friends. From there I joined SFPA, and a short time later Lynn Hickman started a new apa dealing with pulp magazines called PEAPS and I was a charter member. I OE'd first Myriad and then PEAPS for a while, worked on more conventions and ran a couple



of small ones back home. I attended the 1983 Worldcon with Liz and some friends and figured that a convention that large would *have* to be a once in a lifetime event. Then, as I mentioned, a friend who was working on the 1986 Worldcon in Atlanta suddenly found that he quickly needed someone who could run a 35mm movie projector—and remembered that fellow in his apa who had worked in a theater. That's how I got to attend Confederation that year. I joined a few clubs and attended meetings, worked on my share of *projects*, got involved in a couple of feuds, kept on collecting SF books and magazines, and started writing articles for other people's fanzines. Best of all, those fan editors kept asking for more of my writing. In the years to come I plan to spend much of my fannish effort on writing more articles, at least until I run out of things to say. You just can't beat that kind of Egoboo...

Other interests: Old Time Radio. I collected old radio shows (*Lights Out!*, *Dimension X*, and so on) on tape for several years. Then about a year ago I discovered that the Internet has allowed OTR collectors from all across the planet to convert their collections to MP3 files and share them for free on the net. I now have several thousand shows—more than I'll ever listen to—and they all cost me less than what my first dozen OTR shows on tape cost. It's a nifty hobby for a collector. And when I have time I enjoy watching old movies on the various cable channels. Sometimes after a night shift at the hospital I'll come home after everyone else in the house is asleep, but I'll be too wound up to go right to bed and so either an old pulp magazine or an old movie will help me unwind. In my off hours I still pull duty as a volunteer firefighter and EMT, so when I'm not working at the hospital I'm usually bringing that same hospital more customers. I should get a commission. Firefighting is fascinating work. It's a whole world of its own and when you join a fire depart-



ment you become part of a fraternity closer than just about any family I've ever known. Kind of like fandom, except that you get to drive fire engines and ambulances. And every now and then I'll have a long weekend when I can attend a Civil War re-enactment. I've been doing that hobby since 1990 and still get a thrill at the time-binding aspect of it. As a re-enactor I get to explore history to a degree that no book or movie can ever provide. I've also done WWII and American Revolutionary War re-enacting, but Civil War is my first interest. I attended a SF con in Knoxville, Tennessee a few years ago and it just happened that my local CW group was doing a memorial service at an old cemetery there in the same town (the regiment we portray once fought there during the war) and so I took my uniform along and slipped out to participate in that ceremony. On my way back into the convention hotel the lady running the costume contest saw me, made a fuss, and insisted that I sign up for the contest right then. I don't think she had a lot of entries. So I showed up in that hot, smelly wool uniform and after the *Star Trek* and *Star Wars* people did their thing, I came out and realized — only then — that the audience was expecting me to "perform". Several ideas flashed through my mind in that moment. Running away was the one that kept coming back to me, but without knowing what I was going to say I just pointed to the far wall of the hotel, opened my mouth, and said: "If we could go back 135 years in time and stand here on this very spot, we would look towards the South there and see that mountain over across the river roaring with cannon fire and burning with musket fire as 4,000 Union soldiers attacked up the North slope and tried to take it from the 2,000 Confederates dug in on the top. They fought all night long, over 800 men were killed and it all happened exactly 135 years ago *tonight* (pulled out my pocket watch to check the time...) right to this very minute!" From then on it was easy and I pro-

ceeded to tell them about the battle, about the field hospital that was set up literally on the very ground where our hotel now stood, and basically I painted them a word picture of what that battle looked, sounded, and felt like. It was a success beyond anything I'd hoped for. And all I had to do was tell them the truth! That was how I won the first and last convention costume contest that I'll ever enter.

Someone asked me in a private e-mail what it was that I wanted to actually *do* in Europe if I win TAFF.* That question rather floored me. What I would like to "do" is go and be a fan. I'd consider myself pretty much at the disposal of fandom for the trip and would participate in the convention and any side activities that come along pretty much in any way that fandom asks me to. Isn't that how it's supposed to work? Sure, I could go for a trip to the usual tourist sites and all that (and there *is* a certain abandoned WWII air base that I wouldn't mind visiting), but the first priority is to meet the fans in Europe. I could make a big long list of all the folks on that side of the Atlantic whom I'd like to meet, but it's a lot easier to say, "I want to meet all of you." I do hope to spend some time either before or after the convention — if not both — traveling around a bit to meet some of the fans and fan group gatherings (I'm a fan *and* a nurse, so I really would have liked to have gone to the Florence Nightingale before they tore it down...) but fandom has a wonderful way of working things out to keep a visiting TAFF delegate occupied. I'm not worried about having to sit around with nothing to do. If fans over there really want me to suggest some things I'll be glad to do so but I'll wait to be asked — assuming I win, that is! My wife was born in Wantage, as I mentioned, and has spent years telling me about the people and places she knew there. (Pam Boal told me once that the building where my wife was born has since been converted into a museum. Liz was rather pleased with that idea. I'm toying with the idea of suggesting to her that if I get to go I should take the pair of baby booties that her mother still has and donate them to the Wantage Museum, but experience has taught me that every time I suggest things like that to Liz I wind up rather wishing I hadn't, so...

So now you know a lot more about Curt Phillips than you ever expected to. Except that I'd very much like to travel to other countries and meet other fans in my travels. I'll keep looking for ways to do that. And I still have that urge to write more fanzine articles so faneds, beware!

* This article was originally written as a part of my unsuccessful TAFF campaign in 2005, and I'm too lazy to re-write it. Fuller answers to the question this time around are on Facebook and in the fanzine *Banana Wings*.

Completely True Stories from My Fanzines! *(or reasonable sounding lies, anyway...)*

I've been a member of 3 apas—Myriad, SFPA, and PEAPS—and I've got thick files of the pages I've contributed to them over the years. Most of that material probably wouldn't be of interest to anyone now (and we'll just step quickly past the question of whether it was of any interest to anyone back then...) but I thought I'd rummage around in all those pages and see if I couldn't find a story or two to tell...

How Julie Schwartz and Forry Ackerman Nearly Got Me Kicked Out Of A Convention

...I attended a con in Roanoke, Virginia 5 or 6 years ago where Julie and Forry were the guests. Entering the main hall just after Forry's GOH speech had started I happened to wind up sitting next to Julie, whom I knew slightly. I had brought along a copy of an issue of *Fantasy Magazine*, the fanzine that he edited in the mid-1930s, for him to autograph and was holding it as we sat there listening to the speech. Forry's giving his standard talk—*blah, blah, blah... Bela Lugosi's ring... blah, blah, blah... the head of the Metropolis robot...*—and so on. Don't get me wrong, I like Forry and his speech was fun—the first few times I heard it. He just needs new material. Well, Julie's starting to snore and I'm nodding off myself, so I nudge him in the ribs and hand him the fanzine with the idea that he'll look it over and think, "My! What a bright and intelligent fellow this jerk must be for carrying my old fanzines around!" Instead Julie—refreshed from his nap—guffaws loudly and starts telling me about the zine. "SAY! THIS IS A GREAT ISSUE! WE GOT A LOT OF GOOD RESPONSE ON THIS ONE! DID YOU KNOW..." and so on. Does Julie Schwartz even know how to whisper? I doubt it.

Forry's reaction to all this was fascinating. *He tried to ignore Julie* and after a couple of loud "ahem, ahem"s he plunged gamely on about twice as loud as before. By this time Julie was well launched into the story he's telling me and he apparently interprets Forry's added volume as nothing more than increased background noise. I think you can see where this is going. Now, *here's* the unfair part: I'm sitting there not having said a single word, Forry's whooping it up on stage, Julie's whooping it up on my

right, I glance around to my left *and the entire audience is glaring at me!* For once in my life I'm the only entirely blameless person in the room, and the audience is ready to pounce on me like raptors on a wounded sloth. Just as I'm thinking, "How could this possibly get any worse?" I felt an angry tug on my sleeve. I turned to find myself facing a furious Forry Ackerman fan. "Young man", she snapped, quivering in fury. "You and your grandfather are being *very* rude!"

I can't remember what happened after that, but I never did get my fanzine signed....

— Absarka 7; PEAPS, April 1997

"I'll Be Superamalgamated!"

Scott Cranford of Nashville is one of the leading authorities on the pulp hero Doc Savage, and he and I are good friends and have traveled to Pulpcon together a few times. Those drives are never less than interesting...

Mailing comments to Scott Cranford about our drive up to the convention: "...I'm glad you wrote a Pulpcon report because our trip is all a blur to me now. It's accurate as far as it goes, but you left much out. For instance, you failed to mention that little roadhouse on the Kentucky/Tennessee border where you made me stop so that you could stock up on cheap whisky and Thunderbird wine. And then there was that lightning and hail storm just north of Cincinnati where you suddenly screamed "I'll be Superamalgamated!", kicked off your shoes and climbed nimbly out the window (and the seat in my truck was wet for a week from where you left the window open, thank you very much) and up onto the roof of the cab. I can't understand how you kept your grip with your bare toes on that rain-swept roof going up the Interstate at 70 mph. How many lightning strikes did you take, anyway? And I don't know what you did to the radio in my truck, but I'm still picking up coded messages for you and I can't seem to turn it off. When we drive up to Pulpcon next year, let's take your car ...

— Absarka 9, PEAPS, April 1998

Mailing comments to someone else about the return trip from that same convention:

... Scott mentioned the 'Zone of Hell' when he wrote his trip report. I think he was vague because it's quite difficult to describe what we experienced there. On the way home from Pulpcon we pulled off at an Interstate exit in Kentucky for gas and lunch. As soon as we got off the exit ramp, everything—and I mean *everything*—seemed horribly wrong. It was as though we had driven into a very nasty episode of *The Twilight Zone*, and Scott's description 'Zone of Hell' is hard to improve on. I immediately developed a sickening headache and blurred vision, and there was a horrible ringing in my ears. We pulled into a gas station and there didn't seem to be any place to park or even to stop and pump gas. Inside the station, all the food stank and the soft drinks were tepid. The aisles were narrow and crowded and seemed designed to make you trip and fall. The air conditioning had a bitter, metallic taste and the harriidan at the cash register had a sharp, penetrating voice that made you want to smash something. I realized that I'd broken into a cold sweat and I had the feeling that at any moment I was going to be violently sick. We left without buying anything. Outside the roar of traffic and the stench of truck fumes nearly overpowered us. The sun seemed to be flickering like a bad fluorescent light, and the asphalt seemed to be undulating as though it was about to open up beneath our feet and swallow us whole. Somehow we staggered to the truck and crawled in. Scott and I looked at each other and voiced a common thought: "Let's get the Hell out of here!" Slamming the truck into gear we shot forward, narrowly missing a puke green station wagon full of obese tourists that was about to trap us by parking in front of us. Their porcine noses pressed evilly against their windows as we screeched by. I still think they were *trying* to trap us. I glanced over at Scott. He had his face buried in a *Doc Savage* magazine, inhaling deeply of the reviving pulp fumes. I swerved into traffic and beat a yellow light to get onto the on-ramp just before a highway worker was about to close it with pylons. With our last ounce of energy we made it to the top of the ramp and out into traffic and... All at once, as if we had driven out of a dark tunnel, everything seemed OK again. My headache faded away, the sunlight seemed warm and comforting again, and Scott's hair stopped arcing at the ends. (I forgot to mention that earlier.) I have no idea at all of what it was that was so wrong there, nor can I recall exactly where that horrible place was. By the time I thought to note its location so as to never stop there again, quite a long time had passed and I couldn't remember anything about how to find it. Just thinking about it fanned the fading embers of my headache. This is a completely true story as Scott will

testify. Something at that truly God-forsaken Interstate exit in Kentucky spooked both of us to our very core, and made us start talking of Lovecraftian horrors that lurk in the shadows of broad daylight. We could find no answers. We could only drive on.

— Absarka 10, PEAPS, July 1998

It's All About the Kid Stuff

Comments to Graham Stone about Young Adult SF:

... If you give (kids) lousy SF they'll spit it out and never take another taste. Reading, after all, is work compared to watching television or doing the many other leisure time activities that kids have available to them. I remember the very first SF book I ever read at the age of 10. It was *The X Factor* by Andre Norton, and it was not at all a good book to pick for your first sample of SF. It was way over my head and I just happened to mention this in a conversation with my school librarian, Mrs. Dameron. She gave me a studied look for a moment and then took me over to the shelf where the Heinlein books were kept. "Give it one more try with this book", she said and she handed me a copy of *The Rolling Stones* by Heinlein. So I did, and the path of my life was changed forever. On the other hand, I've never been able to get any of my cousins, nieces, nephews, schoolmates, or, really, any other person at all to take up an interest in SF. Every SF friend I've ever had was already into SF when we met. So has entry level SF ever really been shown to work? I've no idea, but I suspect that one is either a natural born reader of SF or one isn't.

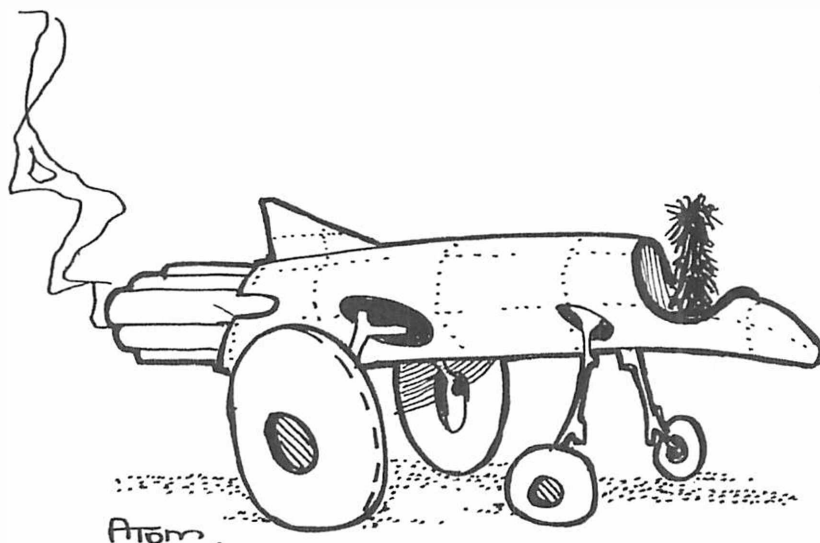
I think the biggest difference between "good" kid SF as represented by Heinlein's books and the bad ones as represented by *Apollo at Go* by Jeff Sutton (just to pick on the third SF book that I ever read and hated) is that the bad ones seem to be "written down" as if the poor little mites were assumed to be not terribly bright and couldn't ever understand ideas bigger than rockets and ray guns and monsters that like to eat bad children who don't do their homework. Such books only described some big world where adults did all the important thinking and kids just sort of bumbled around and found out things only by lucky accident. Grown-ups always had to save the day in the end. This concept is crap, of course. It's crap today and it was crap when I was 10 and I knew it.

The good stuff was different. In *The Rolling Stones*, for instance, the family was *doing* things together. The whole family—kids, parents and even grandparents. Sometimes the kids screwed up but then sometimes the adults did too. Even more radical, the ideas of the kids

were listened to and given fair consideration and the adults tried to take time to realistically explain things that the kids wanted to know about. In other words, the kids were treated like ignorant but intelligent people. Now this is the key point: all children are ignorant. And it is important to understand that ignorant does *not* equal stupid. Ignorance means nothing more than that there are facts or bodies of knowledge that one is unaware of. And

further, ignorance can be eroded by time, education, experience, and the inborn ability to *learn* from time, education and experience. This is as good a definition of intelligence as I'm aware of. Children are ignorant but they're not necessarily stupid and Robert A. Heinlein understood this and made use of it in his work. Go and read some Heinlein with this in mind and see if you don't agree...

— Absarka 8, PEAPS, April 1998



An Obituary for Lynn Hickman

The last time I saw Lynn Hickman was at the Asheville Pulpcon last February and at that time I didn't have the slightest idea that he was already deathly ill. I'm quite sure that was exactly the way he wanted it. I don't know if he'd already been told that his illness was terminal, but even if he had I don't think he'd have told us. He wouldn't have wanted to endure all the fuss that would have resulted, and he wouldn't have wanted us to treat him any differently. And so I'll never have to think of that Pulpcon as Lynn's last convention but as one of the many grand times that we shared with him.

It was at a science fiction convention that Lynn and I first met — a Chattacon, I think — sometime in the early '80s. We were introduced by a mutual friend who was recruiting us both into an apa called Myriad, and we soon discovered that we had a mutual fondness for pulps, old fanzines, and "traditional" SF fandom. A few years later when Lynn founded PEAPS he knew that I'd want to be

one of the charter members and invited me to join. I'm looking at the first mailing as I write this and there's my name along with the names of some of the finest people I've ever met: Brian Earl Brown, Al Tonik, Jerry Page, Fred Cook, George Evans, Glenn Lord, Howard DeVore, Don Thompson... a very fine company of friends.

Standing behind all of us, right from the beginning, was Lynn Hickman. He had to turn the active management of the apa over to other hands after the 3rd mailing and he was rarely as active in the apa as he wanted to be, but it will never be forgotten that it was his mind that gave PEAPS its design, his hand that gave PEAPS its substance, and his heart that gave PEAPS its style. All of us together create this apa and we recreate it with every

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mailing by both the effort we put into it and the joy we take from it. It hurts to realize that Lynn won't be part of that creation anymore. It hurts a lot. But in an important way his heart is still here with us. So is Don Thompson's. I can't sit down and write anything for PEAPS without thinking of who I'm writing it for — no; of who I'm writing it *to*. I'm writing to Lynn and Don and to all of you, and also to the ones who'll come after us. The PEAPS members who'll join us in the future; the pulp researchers who will someday dig through file cabinets full of moldering PEAPS mailings and wish that they could have been here with us. All of them. The friends we haven't met yet.

There's a lot more I'd like to write about Lynn. Dozens of little things come to mind. There was the time I gave him a copy of a *Double Detective* pulp at a SF convention and he later sent me a very browned and brittle copy of the Nov. 1930 *Wonder Stories*. It was nearly worthless as a collectable pulp, but it was priceless to me because it was the very first pulp magazine that Lynn ever owned and he wanted me to have it. I wouldn't trade it for anything.

Then there was the time Lynn was the Fan Guest of Honor at ConCave several years ago. It was decided to "roast" Lynn at the banquet and I got the job of putting that together. I worked like a fiend getting letters and photos from all over the place. I had material from Bloch, Tucker, Dean Grennell, and lots of other big-name fans who knew Lynn way back when. Naturally I thought I had him backed into a corner since everyone knows that at a roast the roastee is supposed to try to mount a rebuttal and I figured that I'd made things pretty hot for Lynn. The moment came when some response from the man of the hour was required. I sat down and looked at Lynn with an expression that said, "OK, get out of *this* one if you can." Lynn cleared his throat. The audience leaned forward to catch the opening salvo. Then Lynn's face broke into a huge grin as he said, "Well, that was fun. I'm kinda thirsty now and there's cold beer in the consuite so... follow me!" Then — pausing only long enough to throw a wink at me — he marched the entire audience out of the room leaving me to marvel at just how easily he *had* wiggled out of it. Lynn was one of those guys who always had a little something up his sleeve when he needed it.

He visited us here in Abingdon once while on his way between North Carolina and Ohio. I couldn't get him to spend the night but he had dinner with us and sat for a while talking pulps and fandom with me. Then after a last cup of coffee he jumped back into his car and drove straight home. After that he invited me to come and visit him sometime. I always seemed to be too busy to plan

that trip but he'd mention it again every now and then. After he finished his "Slam Shack" he invited me again and I promised that I would..."someday."

Sometime last September I heard from Brian Earl Brown that Lynn was sick. I didn't want to bother Lynn's family directly so I called Pat and Roger Sims since I knew they'd be able to tell me the whole story. That's when I found out just how bad the situation was. Roger told me that the doctors had given Lynn the opinion that he had about two months left. I don't really recall what I said to Roger after that, but I think he could tell that I was pretty shaken up. When we talked again a few days later I mentioned that if Lynn could see me I was going to try to go up there right away. I had planned to stay in a motel in Wauseon but Pat & Roger immediately suggested that I stay with them in Cincinnati, a very generous offer that meant a great deal to me. I called Lynn's home and talked to Carolyn a bit, then she told me that though Lynn was weak he could talk for a moment on the phone. She put him on and it was obvious that it was very difficult for him to talk at all. He sounded awfully tired and his breathing was labored. I tried to keep the conversation light but I wasn't fooling either of us. I asked if he thought it would be possible for me to come and visit him that weekend. He said, "No, I don't have the strength just now. Maybe next week." So I told him I'd call back in a few days and wished him the best. Four days later I came home from work and discovered Roger Sim's message on my phone. "Curt, I have news about Lynn and it's pretty grim..."

The news hit me harder than I was prepared for. The deaths of my own grandfathers hadn't had as much impact, but then my grandfathers weren't as close to my day to day life as some of my friends in fandom are. I had wanted to go to the funeral in Ohio but wound up just sending flowers. Roger tells me that Lynn's collection has all been arranged for. The art is to be sold to a certain buyer at a fair price, the books and magazines go to one or more of his kids, and the fanzines are to be divided between DUFF (the Down Under Fan Fund) and...me. Roger's the DUFF administrator so he and I will take care of all that by ourselves as soon as I can get up to Ohio to claim that inheritance. To tell you the truth, I'm not ready to deal with all that.

Wauseon, Ohio — “The Town You’ll Take To Heart”

Northern Ohio is as flat as a landing strip and in places it seems to roll on and on forever. Cornfields stretch in every direction as far as you can see. On the drive from where you get off I-75 at Bowling Green to the outskirts of Wauseon itself, corn seems to fill the entire world. As I drove I passed dozens of farmers on huge tractors patiently tilling their fields for mile after mile after mile. Eventually a town loomed up in the midst of all that corn. A bright little sign on the side of the road read: *Welcome to Wauseon, Ohio — The Town You’ll Take to Heart*. And to tell you the truth, driving into Wauseon did feel something like driving into my own home town because this was where Lynn Hickman had lived, and he had told me about his little oasis in the Corn Belt for years.

I had put off this trip for a long time. Just after Lynn’s death in October, 1996 Roger Sims had told me that Lynn’s fanzine collection had been left to me and that I should contact Carolyn — Lynn’s widow — about it soon. I wouldn’t admit this to myself for a long time, but the fact is that I was deliberately putting off that phone call because I was putting off dealing with the fact that my friend had died. I had last seen Lynn the previous February at Pulpcon in Ashville, NC and we had talked and joked and carried on just like always and when we parted at the end of the convention we said, “See you at the next one,” just like we always did.

We didn’t say good-bye then, and I didn’t want to say it now.

But of course, you can only put the truth off for just so long, and now here I was driving into Wauseon on a beautiful spring day to pick up my inheritance and to say goodbye.

If you’ve never been there, you wouldn’t really believe how pretty a town Wauseon Ohio is. Small, rambling, old, and graceful, it’s the kind of rural Midwestern place that every one of us sees in our imaginations when we think of “small town America.” It has wide, tree-lined streets and the cleanest downtown courthouse you’ve ever seen. On my way in I had to stop at that courthouse and be a tourist for a moment. Down home in Virginia most of our older courthouses have monuments to the county’s *Confederate* dead from the Civil War and we all grow up taking that pretty much for granted. Wauseon has a court-

house with a huge monument to the Civil War *Union* veterans of that locality. It was the first time I’d ever seen such a thing and I had to stop and go over and read the names inscribed on the base. An awful lot of Ohio boys from that county had gone off to war in 1861 and many had never come home again. I recognized some of the regiments as having been in the battle at Ft. Donaldson in west Tennessee; a place I know well. A couple of years ago I marched in a reenactment of the Ft. Henry to Ft. Donaldson march and walked the same backwoods trails that many of these Ohio boys had walked. Other regiments on that monument were at the terrible battle at Stone’s River (near Franklin, Tennessee) where the Union dead covered the battlefield so thickly that in places you couldn’t walk without stepping on them. Some of those dead at Stone’s River may have grown up in those same cornfields around Wauseon. Had I made it to town a year earlier, Lynn and I probably would have walked by the courthouse and he could have told me all about it.

413 Ottokee St. looks like a nice, average home. I don’t know what I was expecting but it didn’t look any different from the houses around it. In fact I went to the wrong house at first and the neighbors had to point me in the right direction. Then I knocked on the door and Lynn’s son Mark invited me inside — and as soon as I stepped through the door, something unusual happened. Bear with me. I’ll try to write this as simply as I can. In spite of having read a lot of science fiction and supernatural fiction, I do not have the slightest belief in ghosts or the supernatural. And although I do have my private beliefs about matters of religion I am not what you would describe as a religious man. However, I have long been able to “sense” people around me, by which I mean that if I walk into a room and someone else is in the next room I can tell it somehow. I don’t know why this is so. It just is, and I’ve never really thought about it. I used to think that everybody could do that sort of thing and am still confused about why other people don’t seem to be able to. Different people have different knacks and among mine are that whenever I shoot a rifle I pretty much always hit

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what I aim at; that no matter where I am I can always tell which way is due North; and that I always seem to be able to tell when other people are around me. When I walked into the front room at Lynn's house that evening, my knack told me, "Hey! Lynn's here!" In fact, he seemed to be standing up between the couch and a chair directly in front of a large plant that I later learned was the same plant that I'd had sent to his funeral. I didn't see anything unusual; it just felt like he was there and that he wanted me to know that he was glad that I'd finally come up to visit.

I know what you're thinking. You're thinking that I'm making this up just to have a story to tell. You're thinking that I'm spinning this wild ghost story and maybe you're thinking that it's in rather poor taste to use the occasion of Lynn Hickman's death to invent a ghost story, and you're certainly not going to believe a word of this. I don't blame you. When I think about it rationally, I don't believe it either. I honestly don't believe in anything that I can't feel or see, but I'm stating to you as fact that when I walked into Lynn's living room that evening the *certainly* that he was right there with me hit me like a brick and if I'd closed my eyes I would have sworn that he really was there. I'm not asking you to believe anything except that his presence in that house was as real to me as was Mark's or Carolyn's. I don't intend to try to explain it. I'm just going to report what I experienced there and you can make of it what you will. I hesitated for a long time to write about this, but since I believe (as we say where I come from) with my hand to God that all this is true then for the purpose of reading this report you might as well accept it on that basis.

And if you want to know the rest of it, he seemed to be very happy — delighted, in fact, and he stayed put there in the living room for some reason that I can't imagine. Mark took me all over the house a bit later and we even went out back to Lynn's Slan Shack (a small tool shed that he'd converted to a sort of den and fanzine room not long before he died) and that's where I would have expected to notice something if there was anything to notice. No matter where I was, my senses told me that Lynn was there in that chair in the living room and that he was very happy. During my entire visit he only moved once and I'll get to that in a bit.

Carolyn was at work when I arrived but Mark welcomed me in and we sat and talked a while. We had previously talked on the phone about SF books and pulps and Mark wanted to pick my brains a little for advice about selling some of the books he'd inherited. He's not into SF himself and so we talked about the SF book market and Pulpcon and auctions and I told him about the

way that I sell SF books at conventions. A lot of the books had been stored down in a damp basement and damaged by moisture. Mark nearly made me choke on my Pepsi by telling me that they'd already bagged up about 60 large trash bags full of books from downstairs and hauled them off to the county dump. Lynn's pulp magazine collection was in much better shape. Most of it was upstairs in a hallway that had been turned into a library and as we looked them over I saw a lot of hero pulps, lots of SF, large stacks of air-war pulps and a few westerns. An excellent comprehensive pulp collection. I've often said that you can tell a lot about a fellow by looking at his collection. Lynn's told me many things that I hadn't known before. It seems that he reviewed SF for a while in the early '60s or at least was able to get on several publisher's lists for review copies; most likely because he published a well regarded fanzine — *The Pulp Era* — at the time. Although he read mostly SF he also read some mysteries and particularly liked Frank Gruber's books. He was something of a technophile and loved to work with his computer. Out in the Slan Shack he had an up-to-date Apple computer and a really nice desktop publishing outfit. Most of his mimeograph stuff had been removed before I got there but there were still large stacks of over-run sheets from his last few fanzines stacked neatly on shelves.

As I mentioned, out back in the garden Lynn had converted an old garden shed into a comfortable little retreat that he called his Slan Shack. I was interested to note that Carolyn and Mark — who aren't SF fans themselves and didn't know where the name had come from — still called the building by that name in their casual conversation. Carolyn had found Lynn's paperback of *Slan* by A. E. Van Vogt and asked me if I thought that there was a connection, so I explained about the novel's impact on fandom in the 1940s and about Al Ashley's original Slan Shack. Lynn had moved some of the best parts of his collection out there, and much of it was still in place during my visit. Lynn had often invited me to come up and see his collection of Pulp Magazine artwork and I'm glad that I got to see much of it there where Lynn had placed it. His Frank R. Paul paintings had been sold before Lynn's death, but I did get to see most of the ones that he'd talked about for years in PEAPS. There were famous cover paintings by Walter Baumhoffer, Robert Gibson Jones, Edd Cartier, Hubert Rogers, Virgil Finlay, Hannes Bok, and several others. There was a Lawrence Stevens painting that had been found covered up by a pile of rags when Mark had started cleaning up. There was a faded pencil drawing on heavily browned paper that Mark thought might be some old fanzine artwork. I recognized it as a Jerome Rozen sketch — but only because I saw Lynn buy it at my first Pulpcon several years earlier. For me the best of the lot

was the Bok painting that appeared on the first issue of *Imagination*. It was far better than the printed cover and I was very impressed to see it there in Wauseon, Ohio. No one will ever see them there again. In the months after my visit they've all been either sold or moved to very secure locations. There was also a large file of old fanzine art that Carolyn turned over to me. A lot of that turned out to be by Terry Jeeves who'd been a favorite friend of Lynn's. There was also some original Plato Jones artwork. That was one of the names that Lynn had used for his fanzine artwork in the '50s.

Prior to my visit Carolyn and Mark had sorted out most of Lynn's papers and boxed up most of the fanzines. These awaited me in the living room and I moved them out to the truck that night. I was also given his fannish correspondence files which contain a great many letters from pro writers and big name fans of the past. There too I found all the correspondence he ever got about the apa he started, PEAPS (The Pulp Era Amateur Press Society) and I'll put all that into a large file box along with all the correspondence that I received when I took over as OE of PEAPS after Lynn. If anyone ever wants to write a history of that apa, that box will make the job easier. There's also a lot of material dealing with the founding of First Fandom, which is to be expected since Lynn was a founding member of that organization.

Carolyn put me up in the guest room, and I slept fine that night. No ghosts, no dreams, and I awoke feeling refreshed. I took Carolyn out to lunch at a little place in town that has great cherry pie and I got to hear about how she and Lynn had met and some other great stories. She may not have been a fan, but Carolyn did go to a lot of conventions with Lynn and she kept her ears and eyes open. Later that morning at my request we drove over to nearby Napoleon, Ohio. That's where Lynn grew up and is now buried in a family plot next to his mother and right across from his brother who was a fighter pilot in the 8th

Air Force and who was shot down over Holland in 1944. Lynn had told me about his brother a few times in the years that I knew him. His death during the war probably explains some of Lynn's fascination with aviation and the air pulps. The Hickman gravesite is one of the prettiest I've ever seen. The stonecutter happened to be there when we visited and was just putting Lynn's birth and death dates on the stone. Carolyn mentioned that she'd been thinking of putting some sort of symbol on the marker too. "Maybe a First Fandom insignia", I blurted without thinking. "Yes", she said. "That's what I was thinking too." After spending some time there we went back to Wauseon where I said my goodbyes and left. Well, not quite that simply. I've mentioned how when I first arrived the night before that I'd "felt" Lynn's presence in the house all during my visit and he'd not moved from that corner of the living room except for once. I was standing there in the doorway about to leave when I turned around to take a last look over at that corner. Suddenly that "presence" or whatever it was came over to the doorway. I mean that I actually sensed it move across the room to the doorway where I stood. I didn't see anything and I didn't hear anything, but in that moment I was absolutely filled with an odd feeling that was something like déjà vu. For just that moment I couldn't think of anything except for that last moment I'd seen Lynn in Ashville over a year earlier when he'd raised his hand in farewell and called, "So long Curt. See you next time!"

Yeah, I know. There's that unbelievable stuff again. What I know is that when I walked out of that doorway, my grief for my friend's death was finally over. I still miss Lynn just as all the people in fandom who ever knew him still do. But somehow I had said the goodbye that I'd needed to say. I stopped back by the cemetery on my way home. The stonecutter had finished his work and gone away. I didn't "sense" anything there, nor did I expect to. But just in case I said, very quietly, "So long Lynn. See you next time." Then I went home.



The Doorbell Rang

Our front door bell gave up the ghost years ago, and its replacement is two pieces: one is the doorbell itself, which sticks to the wood by the door with thick double sticky tape and has a battery to power it. It's attached over the hole left by the original bell. The other part is a cube that plugs into a wall outlet and sounds the chime. It's not the greatest set-up and doesn't like being pushed quickly... won't ring. I have a tiny label on top of the outside unit that reads, "Press for 3 seconds." Most do.

— Robert Lichtman

Our door bell doesn't work, either. I don't know why. I have a nice little hand-lettered sign below it that says "Please knock, door bell is kaput!" I'm amazed at how often people don't read it or, perhaps, don't comprehend the word "kaput."

I usually sit in one of the two living room chairs near the front door and can often see or hear any visitors coming onto the porch before they reach the front door. Sometimes I actually get to see them raising their arm and pointing their door bell finger as they come up the steps in anticipation of pushing the button. Sometimes they continue to keep the finger raised as they read the sign.

Once they reach the button and the sign, there is always a short pause before they begin to knock. It usually takes them a few seconds to read the sign and decide what to do. Some decide to push the button anyway and wait to see what happens before they start knocking. Others read it and go right to knocking. And there have been a few who don't read the sign at all. They ignore it. They just push the button and wait for a response — cooling their heels is the phrase, I think. When they get none they will push the button again and continue to wait. Eventually some of them get around to knocking on the door — maybe they've finally noticed the sign — but others have been known to simply give up and walk off the porch without ever knocking.

I sit there and watch them waste a few moments of their life standing on my front porch. They accomplish

nothing. About half of them will leave a piece of paper behind for me to pick up and throw away at my convenience. For those who are brave enough or smart enough to knock on my door, I will always answer it and listen politely for about 2 minutes before I tell them I can't give them any money, or can't fix the gutters because I don't own the house, or that I don't want any fresh tamales today, or that I have all the magazine subscriptions I need.

It's a full life here on my porch. The world comes to my door and most of the time I don't even have to get out of my chair. Yes, it's a full life.

— Dan Steffan

I love it when people come to my door to sell me magazine subscriptions because I get to play my little game with them. Here's what happened with the most recent magazine salesman who came a-knocking on my door:

"Hi! My name is Todd and I'm trying to earn money for rodeo clown college by selling magazine subscriptions, and..."

"That's great!" I interrupted. "I happen to need several magazines at present, so I'm glad you've come along."

"Well, then sir, let me show you this list of the titles..."

"Oh, no need for that. I already know which ones I need. Got your pen ready?"

"Yes sir! What would you like first?"

"OK, I need a subscription to *Astounding Stories of Super Science*."

"Astoun... Mmmmm... No, I don't think we carry that title. We do have *Scientific American*..."

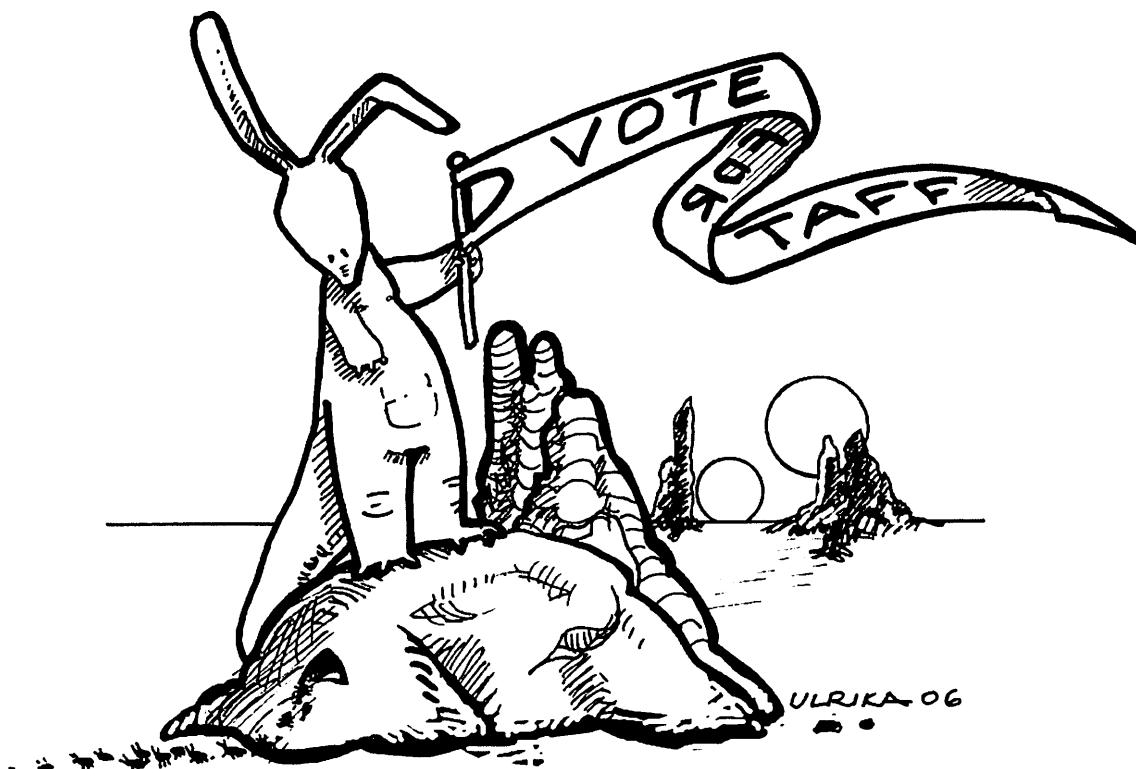
"No I have a lifetime subscription to that one. Never mind; give me a subscription to *Planet Stories*, then."

"Plant, Plant... How about *Southern Home Gardens*?"

"No, no, *P-L-A-N-E-T Stories*. Like Mars, Venus, Vulcan?"

"Uh..."

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"Ok, never mind. Here's an easier one: I'll take a three year subscription to *Galaxy Science Fiction*."

"*Galaxy, Galaxy*... Ah! We do have *The Magazine Of Fantasy & Science Fiction*. How about that?"

"No, I already have a lifetime subscription to that one. OK then, give me *Two Complete Science-Adventure Novels*."

"I'm sorry, we don't sell any novels. Just magazines."

"Well never mind; I'll take *Argosy*. You do have *Argosy*, don't you? It's the best selling and most popular magazine of all time."

"Uh... well, I guess we *should* have it, but..."

"OK then, how about *The Shadow*? *Operator 5*? *Ace G-Men*?"

"Uh... Ace what?"

"Or *Texas Rangers*, *Star Western*, *Wild West Weekly*?"

Blank look.

"I can use *Thrilling Mystery*, or *Dime Detective*, or even *Mammoth Mystery Stories*."

"Sir..."

"I know, give me *Sheena of the Jungle*. Or *Oriental Stories*. Or *Red Star Adventures*."

"I don't think we carry any of those, sir."

"Well then, how about *Michael Shayne's Mystery Magazine*, or *Tales of the Frightened*, or *Manhunt*? Or *Suspense*, or *Rocket Stories*, or *Top-Notch*? Or *Eerie Stories*, or *The Avenger*, or *Unknown Worlds*?"

"Sir, please; we just sell regular magazines!"

"Regular magazines? Like what?"

"Like *Reader's Digest*."

I gave Todd a long hard Look.

"*Reader's Digest*?"

"Yes!"

I stared at him for a long moment, then slowly shook my head.

"Never heard of it."

Then I turned, went back inside and firmly shut the door. I ran to the window and peeked around the side to see Todd standing there, blinking. Then he walked slowly to the sidewalk, turned back to look at the house for a moment, then slowly walked away down the street. Chuckling to myself, I went back to my chair, sat down, picked up my magazine and resumed reading my copy of the August 1942 *Super Science Stories* where I'd left off when the doorbell rang.

— Curt Phillips

10-70 Structure

It was only my third night on duty at the Washington County, Virginia, Fire/Rescue Dept. and I and the five other firefighters present were sitting in the TV room watching a Jackie Chan movie that one of them had rented. I, as the most junior firefighter present that night, had spent the first few hours of my shift washing the oldest and dirtiest of our three fire trucks, a 1975 International that I suspected had not previously been washed since disco was popular — the *first* time. There's a lot to wash on a fire truck and I was ready to goof off for a little while. As I flopped down on a couch, the old hands were enjoying one of their favorite indoor sports: predicting the future.

"Well Marty," drawled our Assistant Chief, Kyle, "we gonna burn one down tonight or not?" I was starting to get used to the guys referring to answering a fire alarm as 'burning one down'.

"I think we will," answered Marty. I'd been told that he was the best in the department at predicting fires. "I'd say we'll get it about 12:30 this morning." Marty likes to make his predictions fairly specific. From reading the stack of old fire reports in the office I knew that we'd not had anything bigger than a dumpster fire in six or seven weeks and I figured the odds were that I'd be spending another quiet evening watching TV there at the station. Jackie Chan was smacking some generic bad guy around and I was starting to think about ordering out for pizza when the distinctive electronic tones of our alarm began whooping in the garage bay.

"Attention Washington County Fire/Rescue, 10-70 Structure; repeat, 10-70 Structure fire at 11857 Industrial Park Road."

The TV had been clicked off at the first tone and we all sat still while the announcement repeated. No one leaps to action when the alarm sounds like they do in the movies. We all listened carefully to the full announcement and memorized the address. Then we all quickly got up and went out to the garage bay to get ready. We each had a specific job to do. First, everyone gets into

their turnout gear. That's the boots, heavy coat, pants and helmet that firefighters wear at a fire scene. Kyle then went to the office to call Central Dispatch to ask for a second alert. On any structure fire we roll out a maximum response, and with only six firefighters present our first need was for more manpower. My job was to raise the doors. Later we'd get garage door openers that we operated from the trucks, but that night we still had to do it by hand. I'd just gotten the third one up when the alarm sounded again for our second alert.

"Attention all members Washington County Fire Rescue, your department is requesting additional manpower at the station."

Marty and Kyle climbed into the cab of Engine 101, our newest and biggest pumper. Laura, Jason, and I jumped into Medic 107, one of our two ambulances. Laura is an EMT-I, a Shock Trauma technician (the next step above EMT-Basic), Jason is a Paramedic, while I was still in the first few weeks of my EMT class. As far as medical help on this trip was concerned, I was just an extra pair of hands, but sometimes that's what you need.

"Fire/Rescue 101 to dispatch. Engine 101 and Medic 107 are 10-8."

The radio '10-code' was still very new to me, but I knew that '10-8' meant 'in service', or that we were leaving the station in route to the location of the fire. My first big fire.

When you're the newest member of an ambulance crew you don't get to drive, or talk on the radio, or even run the siren. You *particularly* don't get to run the siren. You get to sit in back in what's called the "Captain's chair" (although I can't imagine why — we have a Captain on our department and he never sits there) and hang on for dear life. On our ambulance this does give you a pretty good view forward and you get to see that most of the other drivers on the road in front of you haven't got the slightest idea of what to do when an ambulance comes up behind them with lights and sirens going. What the law of Virginia says they *should* do is pull over to the right side of the road and stop until we pass by, and in fact about one driver in twenty actually does exactly that, bless their hearts. Most simply slow down — possibly

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to give themselves more time to think about their next move. Some then speed up again and some actually try to outrun us. Some pull over, let us pass, then whip out right behind us, tailgating us for miles as though they were going to go help out at the fire too. Cops love it when they catch some idiot doing that. You want to make a Virginia State Trooper happy? Just tailgate a fire truck or an ambulance on its way to a fire when he's around. They can charge you with enough violations to make you do time.

Smoke from the fire was visible about six miles away, and as we pulled into the drive we could see flames starting to break through the roof. That's bad. Usually when we see that on arrival, we can't save much of anything. Even worse was that we saw immediately that this wasn't just a structure fire, it was a double wide trailer fire. *Much* worse. The difference between a wooden frame house (a structure) fire and a trailer fire is about like the difference between burning a piece of heavy cardboard and a piece of notebook paper. The paper will be cold ashes long before the cardboard is halfway burned.

"Fire/Rescue 101 to central; we're on-scene. This is a double wide trailer fire, well involved, with multiple exposures. Flames are through the roof. Request a third alarm for backup, and please alert Goodson-Kinderhook to stand by with their tanker."

Notifying Central Dispatch of what we saw on arrival does a couple of things for us. Dispatch records all radio traffic and notes the time of every transmission, and so regular reports to dispatch gives us a legal record of the progress of the fire incident. That comes in handy when it's time to write the reports. Also, every other firefighter in the county listens in to these radio calls, so now they all knew what we were seeing and that we had a serious fire on our hands. There are ten volunteer fire departments in Washington County, Virginia, and each one of us sometimes find ourselves called to a fire that's too big or too complicated to handle by ourselves. Thus, we have a formal mutual aid agreement with those closest to us. Goodson-Kinderhook VFD is the one next to us, and they have a tanker. That's a fire truck whose only mission is to load, transport, and discharge water. That job is absolutely vital when the fire is out in areas of the county where there are no fire hydrants. In our case, that's a bit less than half of the county. Our fire was out in a remote area so the Assistant Chief called for the tanker that he knew he'd need right away. Our pumper only carries one thousand gallons of water on board. Without another water source we could use that up in less than ten minutes.

The first priority on arrival at a fire scene is rescue. Was there anyone in that trailer? If there was, from the looks of the fire, they were already dead, but we'd have to

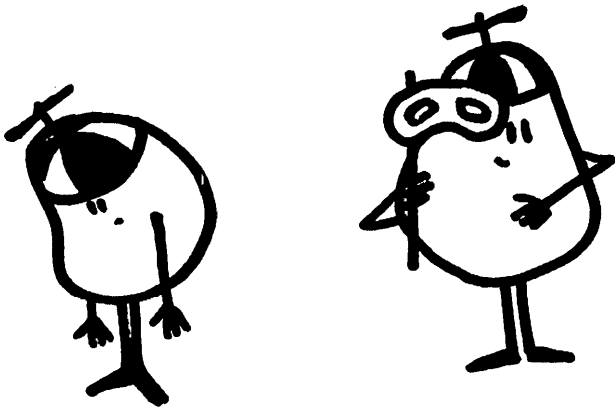
try. The owner was waiting in the yard when we pulled up and told us the story. It was an older woman who lived there with her husband, and small dog. (And yes, we'll try to rescue pets when we can do so without risking human life. Imagine if it was your pet in a fire. You'd certainly want us to try to save it.) Only she and the dog were at home. She had been canning beans in the kitchen and had gone to the garage to get some supplies. Apparently she'd been delayed because when she returned to the house she saw smoke coming out the open door. She had the presence of mind to shut the door and run for help. (Shutting the door seems like a good idea, but because it was a trailer and the fire had already gotten a good start by that point, it didn't help. In fact, it caused a lot of trouble for us, as will be seen.) Running to a neighbor's house to call for help had used up valuable time; by the time we arrived the fire was about twenty minutes old. Since no one was inside, we put the ambulance on standby and I went to join the fire crew. Three other firefighters had arrived; Kyle and one of them put on air packs, pulled a trash line (that's a 18-inch line carried on each side of Engine 101 for fast assaults; it's often used on trash dumpster fires, hence the name), took it to the back porch where the kitchen door was and started in.

That was a mistake.

The way to mount an interior attack on a house fire is to enter where the fire isn't and push the fire back on itself. This prevents forcing the fire into unburned areas of the house and deprives it of fuel. Kyle said later that he thought the fire might be contained to the porch area — which seemed to be like a small utility building added on to the trailer. If that had been the case he might have been able to knock the fire down quickly and save more of the property.

The thing is, the fire had been burning in a closed building for some time now and Kyle was about to open the door directly into it. The textbook says *never, ever* to try this, but sometimes firefighters do anyway. Here's why you shouldn't: ever see the movie *Backdraft*? Kurt Russell plays a firefighter who never seems to use an airpack or to even fasten up his turnout coat, but never mind that ... the film *does* realistically show the effects of a backdraft.

A fire in a closed building will quickly use up all available oxygen and die down, but not die out. It'll smolder, filling the room with superhot smoke until it gets a fresh supply of oxygen — like when an unwary firefighter opens a door on it. That's what Kyle did. That superhot air in the room suddenly saw a huge supply of nice fresh oxygen outside and immediately tried to set it all on fire. Kyle and the other guy happened to be standing right in the way. "Well," says the fire, "let's see how well



they'll burn." A cloud of fire shot out of the open door and slammed into the two firefighters, knocking them off the porch and twelve feet out into the yard. Kyle later claimed that he was already jumping when the flames hit him and that helped, but the end result was that they suddenly had to swim through fire. They did have full turnout gear on with Nomex hoods and airpacks, and this saved them. But they both had heat burns on the face and neck from where the heat cut through the hoods. They weren't seriously hurt, but they both climbed into the ambulance and were taken to the hospital. I was needed at the fire scene and stayed there.

Now the fire was more serious and was fully involved in the rear of the trailer. Our chief arrived and set the eight of us who were present to setting up two attack lines in the front with another to start wetting down the exposures. An exposure is any other house or structure near the fire that might catch fire from the original fire. At that time—only about eight minutes into the fire attack—he called for additional backup.

"Fire/Rescue 101 to Central—this structure is fully involved. We request additional manpower from our backup departments and also the cascade unit from Glade Springs VFD."

By this time all the members of our fire department who could respond were either at the fire scene or on their way. Additionally, four members of Goodson-Kinderhook VFD who happened to be in the area arrived in their own cars. They'd wind up running our pump controls, keeping track of airpack use, and other jobs that free up our members to go into the fire. Our second fire truck—normally used on car wrecks—arrived, followed by our second ambulance. County deputies also arrived and took over traffic control on the road in front of the fire, freeing another two firefighters to join the fire attack. The tanker from Goodson-Kinderhook arrived, laying a relay hose-line to our truck and began pumping water to us from a creek about 200 yards away. Later the Glade

Springs Volunteer Fire Department arrived with their cascade truck. This is a special vehicle that has the equipment needed to refill the air bottles on our airpacks. The bottles only last twenty minutes on a charge. We had four attack teams of two firefighters each committed inside the building. We worked in about twelve-minute shifts, with fresh fire-fighters going in to take over the hoses and the tired firefighters immediately coming out for rest, drinking water, and fresh air bottles.

After the backdraft I was assigned to help hold a hose on the safety line—that is, I was the second man on a two man crew that held a pressurized hose as backup for the team that made the initial fire attack on the front door. Had there been further trouble when that crew went in, we'd go in after them and cover their retreat. The second man helps hold the fire hose and makes sure that the nozzle man has enough slack at all times to go where ever he has to. A charged line is heavy and cumbersome, and each man has his hands full. If the nozzle man has to shoot a stream of water up, I have to hold the line down below my knees. If he wants to shoot down, I have to hold the line up over my head. It's not nearly as easy as it looks in the movies. Plus, the second man has to watch out for dangers in every direction but forward. Ceilings falling, floors collapsing, fire breaking out behind us—you tend to stay kinda busy. I didn't go in on that first attack, and when backup crews arrived, my partner and I were relieved and began carrying empty air bottles uphill to the cascade truck to be filled. It had parked about fifty feet up a hill above the fire because it was completely dark by then and they had large floodlights on boom poles that lit up the entire fire scene from up there.

By then we'd been on scene about 45 minutes and the attack crews had knocked down the worst of the fire and had ventilated the unburned areas of the trailer where smoke and heat had accumulated. Normally we would have had to ventilate the roof by cutting holes in it with a K-12 saw, but the fire had done that for us. The entire roof over the center of the trailer was gone, part of it burned away and the rest pulled down during the fire attack to keep it from dropping burning insulation on our heads. Fire was still burning in the rear of the house and in the ceiling, but we were getting control of it. The trailer was going to be a total loss but we'd be able to save a lot of their belongings.

Their belongings had, in fact, become a major problem. These folks were evidently pack rats; the house was full of stuff. Piles of clothing were stacked everywhere and the rear rooms were full to the ceiling with bulk quantities of food and other stuff, with narrow walkways to get around in. This was adequate for normal use, but

for a firefighter in full turnout gear dragging a charged line it was impossible. In places, we actually couldn't move to get to the fire, so we had to start dumping stuff outside. In the living room where the fire had first been knocked down, smoldering clothes and furniture plus the remains of the roof hampered our movements, so the chief ordered the front windows removed and we started throwing out chairs, bookcases, insulation, and thousands of articles of smoldering clothing, all of it thoroughly soaked and now trampled into the mud and ashes by dozens of firefighter boots. I imagine that they were able to salvage some of the clothing. Their washer and dryer, I noticed, were in the separate garage which was undamaged.

With the fire now under control and the fire attack now consisting of knocking out hot spots, I was relieved from muling air bottles up and down that hill and told to put on an air pack for a *rescue* job! Turned out that the family dog was nowhere to be found, and was thought to be in the house. Since every room had been filled with smoke and killing heat, it was almost certain that if the dog was in there it was dead. I was given the task of searching for it. So while crews still sprayed water in various places, I and a partner went in. We first looked in the relatively unburned areas where all the bulk food was stored. We dug in closets and turned over beds, figuring that a small dog might have crawled under something to hide and then been suffocated. No dog. Finding a locked door, I forced it open. It was a bathroom. Immediately I pushed open the shower curtain and looked in the tub. Nothing.

"Curt!" I looked up to see the Chief standing at the door and looking at me curiously. "Did you *really* think that a small dog would lock itself in the bathroom and hide in the bathtub?" While I was thinking of an answer to that, he was called away. Lucky for him.

Now the fire crew was into the longest and messiest part of the job: salvage and overhaul. This means checking all the hidden areas of the structure for hidden fire or hot spots and extinguishing them, plus protecting whatever you reasonably can of the family's possessions. These folks were seriously into recorded music. There must have been 20,000 records in that trailer, 45s, LPs and 78s, and lots of cassette tapes too. And also some serious stereo equipment, all probably junk now. Some tall bookcases of records had been spared the direct flames but the heat had warped and melted the LPs into black goo. The albums near the floor seemed OK, and may possibly have been playable, but they were all soaked from our hoses now. I noticed some stacks of 78s that seemed totally undamaged, which surprised me. I saw others on the floor

which had survived the fire but had fallen victim to our fire boots.

Our search for that dog had brought us to the last part of the house, the bedroom on the end. Fire hadn't touched this room, but smoke and heat had. This room had a wall covered with those wall mounted cassette tape racks, filled with maybe 2,000 cassette tapes. Down near the floor the tapes seemed undamaged. I pulled one out and it looked perfectly OK. As I looked up the wall, the tape cases started showing more and more heat damage and at the top of the wall, the cases were almost entirely melted away and the tape shriveled and blackened — dramatic evidence of how the heat from a fire builds up in a room. Had we not knocked out the fire as early as we did, the heat build up alone would eventually have caused that room to burst into flames. I've seen that happen on training films.

We tossed that room thoroughly and found no small furry body hiding anywhere. That left us with two possibilities: either the dog had gotten out somehow and was hiding in the darkness, or it was part of the thoroughly burned piles of smoldering junk in the burned-out living room. We spent the next hour sifting through the room with pike poles and searchlights, stopping only when the floor suddenly gave way and my partner fell through it up to his waist. I helped him out and we retreated. I notified the Chief that the floor was now unsafe and met the lady of the house who was being helped to the front door to get a look at what was left.

"Ma'am," I said, "we've searched all over the house for your dog and haven't found him, so I think he might have gotten out somehow. We'll keep looking, but he might be scared of all the noise and lights and might not turn up till morning."

She listened to me patiently and then said, "Oh that dog's down at my neighbor's house. She caught him a while back, and I forgot to tell you all."

We spent about four hours on scene with a total of 32 firefighters present, gradually releasing the extra units as we no longer needed them. In the months since that fire I've gotten to know a lot of those folks better. Good people, all of them. They made a tough job a lot easier for us; we'll return the favor someday.

Eventually, the Chief declared the scene secure. We all assembled for a head count, packed up all our gear, and headed back to the station.

"Fire/Rescue 101 to Central dispatch. This fire is secured. We are clear at the 10-70 and in route back to station 100."

At that point we were back on duty for another call, so as soon as we got back to the station we all jumped in to clean the truck and tools. The fire hose—all 700 yards of it—had to be unrolled, scrubbed thoroughly, and rolled back and stowed on the truck. Supplies had to be restored, soot and grime had to be cleaned off the tools, fuel for the generators and saws had to be topped off, paperwork had to be completed, turnout gear had to be roughly cleaned off and hung up to dry, and several families had to be called to be told that we were on our way home.

But first, we all crowded into the TV room—dirty, smelling of smoke and sweat as we were—to catch the eleven o'clock news. The TV crews had been all over the place, not that we were able to pay any attention to them at the time, but now we were ready to see ourselves on the news fighting our first major fire in two months. Since I was the new kid on the block and this was my first fire, I was allowed the seat of honor right in front of the TV. The station news logo flashed on and the local news anchor started his spiel. "Good evening. Firefighters battled a major blaze this evening in Washington County that sent two people to the hospital..." He looks

off screen, obviously at his floor director. "But first we join the network for a breaking story." Cut to the network logo...

"This is an NBC News Special Report! A short time ago, Princess Diana was seriously injured in an automobile crash in Paris! ..."

You know, they never did show our fire on TV that night.

Eventually, everyone went home except for me and the others who had the station duty that night. We cleaned ourselves up, found some snacks, and settled back down in the TV room. After a while, I looked at my partner. "Well, Marty, when's the next alarm gonna come in?"

Marty looked thoughtful. "Well," he mused, "I'd say it'll be about 3:30 in the morning. But it'll be a rescue call. It'll be a really good-looking redhead with her toe caught in a bathtub drain."

"Well," I said, "I checked the last bathtub, so you can have this one."

"Fair enough," he said.

A Night in Surgery

It's a little after midnight and I just got home from work. In case anyone doesn't know, work—for me—is in the Surgery Dept. of a major hospital in East Tennessee. I'm a Registered Nurse and tonight I worked as the Charge Nurse. That means that I'm responsible for managing the department on 2nd shift and for dealing with all the trauma cases that come into the ER that need surgery. Tonight we had a very bad one.

About the time that I and my co-workers were sitting down to eat dinner tonight, 65 miles away there was a car wreck. I believe it was two cars that hit more or less head-on at a moderate speed. The driver of one car was pronounced dead at the scene. The other car carried a man and his wife and their 12 year old daughter. I'll call her Kelly. Kelly's mother was seriously injured and was flown by helicopter to a trauma facility in Roanoke, Vir-

ginia, about 60 miles away (about 125 miles from where my hospital is). Last report on her condition was "critical, but stable". Her father suffered moderate injuries and was taken by ground to a general hospital in Wytheville, Virginia. Kelly was far more seriously injured. At the moment of impact, Kelly—who was sitting in the rear of the car and not wearing a seat belt—was catapulted forward and hit the dash (or so it is thought) with her head. The first paramedic on scene found Kelly crumpled in the right front floorboard of the mangled car, still alive, but just barely. He carefully slipped a cervical collar around her neck and held her head and neck immobile with his hands while Kelly's parents were removed from the wreck and transported away. Then with the help of other EMT's, Kelly was very carefully lifted up out of the floor of the car and—while her back and neck were expertly held immobile—she was placed on a backboard and tied down with straps. Then the backboard was carried to a waiting ambulance, but not for transport. A Virginia State Police Medflight helicopter had already arrived to take Kelly to

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her destination. The stop at the ambulance was to provide a warm and well-lit place where a quick primary physical assessment could be done. Kelly was bleeding from the mouth, nose, and both ears. She had obvious deformity to the entire left side of her face. It was too soon yet to see bruising, but her abdomen was slightly swollen. An inter-tracheal tube was installed to assure an airway that would remain open and to assure that if Kelly vomited, none of the stomach contents could be inhaled into her lungs. An IV was established and fluids given to support her blood pressure. At the time her BP read in the normal range but children compensate the effects of massive bleeding very well and when you *do* see a lowered BP in a traumatically injured child it's often too late to do anything about it. The bleeding was such that nothing needed to be done until arrival at the hospital except to suction it every so often. The flight nurse taking care of Kelly began calling the regional trauma centers to see which hospital would be able to take Kelly immediately while the flight paramedic and firefighters on scene began loading Kelly into the back of the Medflight Helicopter. Several closer trauma centers were already full or didn't have the on-staff neurosurgeon available that Kelly would obviously need, and so within about 20 minutes of the time that the wreck occurred, the helicopter with Kelly aboard lifted off en route to Bristol Regional Medical Center about 65 miles away. I was about halfway finished with my dinner. I'd not finish the rest of it. As soon as Medflight lifted off, the flight paramedic declared a "trauma code" and alerted our hospital to stand by to receive this patient. Our ER radio room received the message and set off the trauma beeper that would alert Surgery, Anesthesia, Radiology, and several other departments. In the Surgery Staff lounge, the beeper in my pocket began its annoying little chirping.

I called the radio room and got a report: 12 year old female, MVA (motor vehicle accident) blunt trauma to head and chest, intubated and unresponsive, 20 min. out. I immediately assigned a nurse and a surgical tech to start setting up an OR room for some sort of case and ordered case carts (which contain surgical supplies and instruments for various types of cases). I called in our "on-call" surgical team and they arrived about the time that Medflight landed and I sent a nurse to the ER to get a first look at the patient so that we could get a "heads up" on what sort of case we were likely to do.

"Unresponsive" in this case meant that the patient was not only unconscious, but that her eyes were non-reactive to light. With her blunt head trauma, this indicated that she probably had swelling or bleeding in the brain and would need neurosurgery pretty quickly to relieve the pressure. That meant that as soon as she arrived in

the ER she'd get a quick MRI (Magnetic Resonance Imaging) scan to determine the nature of the damage followed either by a very quick decision to come to Surgery for a craniotomy or if the patient's ICP (Inter-Cranial Pressure) was too high already, possibly a ventriculostomy to install a drain to relieve the fluid that presumably was causing the increased ICP. However the first X-rays showed a fantastic amount of damage to the skull with massive fractures on the upper left side of the face. There was severe and unrepairable damage to some important things in that area. I could detail that damage for you but you wouldn't enjoy reading it. While the neuro docs were studying all this it was decided to send the patient to Surgery to do an exploratory laparotomy to determine and fix the cause of the swelling in her abdomen. Given the nature of the injury and the location of the swelling that usually means abdominal bleeding. We quickly set up the OR and the Call team brought the patient directly from the ER and Surgery began. It had then been about 65 minutes since the accident.

I'd have gone into the room myself but at that point we got an emergency Open Heart Case (a coronary artery bypass graft of 4 arteries which is a pretty serious heart case) and I had to go and deal with that. I got back to Kelly's case shortly before the doctor finished. The news about her abdomen was good. No major bleeding and no other life threatening complications. However during surgery her ICP had continued to rise. A ventriculostomy had been installed, but within a short while it had clogged off and the damage to her skull was such that there was no other place where another such drain could be installed. Kelly was moved to the Surgical Intensive Care Unit on full life support. I helped push her bed there and stayed a while to help with some tests that the neurosurgeon needed to do. While Kelly had been in surgery the neuro team had come to the reluctant conclusion that there wasn't anything else effective that they could do. They did some tests and considered various options, but the real problem was the greatly increased ICP and the massive area of bleeding deep within her brain. The damage was too great. A brain function test was performed. The results were negative. Other such tests would be done to confirm these results, but the results will likely be no different. Kelly was stable on full life support but there was no signal coming from her brain that would make her breath on her own. Her grandfather had arrived. I didn't have to be in the room when the doctors talked to Kelly's grandfather. We learned that her father had been released from his hospital and would be brought here later in the morning. The regional organ donor services people had been called. They would offer — as is required by state law — the family the opportunity to have Kelly

become a donor. Some families can't even consider this, and that's all right. Some find it a way of keeping some part of their loved one alive and it can be a comfort to them. At this point I found that I was working very hard to keep my thoughts of Kelly separate from thoughts of my own daughters—both of whom were home asleep in their beds. It was now shortly after 11:00 p.m. and my shift was over. As I left the ICU I looked in on Kelly one more time. The ICU nurses had cleaned the blood from her face and hair and had given her a small brown Teddy bear. I walked back to Surgery, reported to the on-coming Charge Nurse that he might have an organ retrieval case in Surgery later today, changed out of my scrubs and left the hospital. It was very cold as I walked to my truck.

I apologize for writing this tonight. Nothing enjoyable can come out of this bit of writing. No one is going to

want this for their fanzine. But you see I won't talk to my wife or children about Kelly. Not anytime soon, at least. Maybe someday, but not now. They'd understand and be sympathetic I think, but even though they know me far better than any fan who'll read this, somehow I feel that you are the ones I needed to tell this to. It's one of the things about fandom, you know. One of the better and stronger things.

It's 2:06 A.M. or about three hours after I left Kelly in the ICU. Maybe I can sleep now. I have to be in Surgery again tomorrow night.

These events took place on the night of 25 November 2003. Kelly's situation did not improve and her life support was switched off the following day with her injured father by her bedside.

Who is the Killer?

(with introductory comments by Rob Jackson, Graham Charnock & Jim Linwood)

Some recent horrible world events in December 2012 sparked a conversation on the InTheBar mailing list which prompted a contribution from Curt Phillips of such heartfelt brilliance that at the time I said in reply: *Wow, Curt. I just wonder at all the millions of people (especially soldiers, politicians and arms dealers) who ought to read that.* Though ITB is a private discussion forum, there are times when what is said in there just cries out to be read more widely. With permission from the authors, I am doing my bit by giving pride of place in *Inca's* editorial slot to them, and chiefly to Curt.

— Rob Jackson

A man kills his two children and himself because his wife has left him. A man walks into a school in Connecticut and kills a lot of children. A woman straps a bomb to herself and walks into a market in Iraq and kills 50 people. A man hijacks a plane and flies it into an office building killing thousands. I think there must be some deep solipsist horror at the heart of the human psyche which is

the only thing that can account for this, not religion, education, indoctrination, or drugs.

— Graham Charnock

A major western country kills nearly 200 children in drone attacks...

— Jim Linwood

When I was a younger man I worked for a company that made guided missiles that were designed to kill other people. I didn't think much about that at first; it was for "National defense", and we weren't at war with anyone. Eventually I became aware that the products of my work *were* being used now and then to kill people. I usually didn't understand the reasons for this, and sometimes didn't even understand why or how our missiles had come to be where they were, yet people still died. And no one could make me understand why they'd had to die.

The tipping point, for me, came when I saw an engineering report on one of the missiles I'd worked on that had been launched at a target in Nigeria—some anti-drug action, I believe—but the guidance control section had malfunctioned and the missile wound up hitting "an

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isolated farm in the Nigerian jungle" and killing a family. The report was very detailed in the analysis of how the missile had malfunctioned, but no further word about that family was mentioned. I don't know if anyone anywhere ever even said the words "I'm sorry" to anyone else over the incident.

Sometime later my company closed its local plant and moved the work out west. They offered to move me out there too so that I could keep on doing what I'd been doing. Instead I looked around for some work that I could do that was as far from building death machines as I could find, and I returned to school and became a Registered Nurse. It wasn't easy. Being out of work for two years nearly impoverished me and my family, and we had two young daughters to raise. But I took a job doing manual labour in a lumberyard, sold our farm — our wonderful, beautiful farm that I still miss every day of my life — and managed to get through that time. The daughters were raised, the family prospered again and I'm much prouder of the work I do now. And only I can see the blood of those unknown Nigerian people that will forever stain my hands.

But at least I know that those stains are there. No one would ever blame *me* for those deaths, and I doubt that anyone else in the long chain of people who were involved in those deaths have ever given them a thought. It was "a regrettable accident", after all. And I'd rather keep on thinking about those imaginary bloodstains than to think that those people who were killed by that missile would ever be completely forgotten by *everyone*. If those people aren't worth even remembering, then what, really, are any of us really worth? I can't answer that question,

so I'll go on remembering.

Facebook is abuzz today with talk of gun control. Nearly all the talk is so polarized right from the start that I can't see any point in responding to any of it. The point of our lives — or so it seems to me — is not to develop ideas and then cling to them with a death-grip or to shout those ideas at anyone we see. I think the point of being alive is actually to *think* and to learn and to grow; and to try to find better ways and better ideas. For everything. Forever. I can't see how we can grow or learn as a people while so many of us are fixed on whatever ideas we happen to hold on to. Nothing wrong with ideas, mind you, as long as they're good ones that work and that result in helping things without hurting others. But I've never found any one idea that was so good that it was beyond improvement. I don't know that I can ever improve anything for anyone else, but I think that as long as I hold myself open to the possibility that I *might* then I'll already have improved *me*. So that's a start.

Nothing anyone says or does or thinks is going to un-kill those children in Connecticut, or that farm family in Nigeria, or the thousands of soldiers killed in a single day at the Somme in WWI, or any of the millions of other senseless killings that human history reeks of. We can only go forward, and try not to harm anyone else. That doesn't seem to me like too much to ask of ourselves, yet thus far we as a people have always refused to live that way. I wish I could understand why we do that.

In any event, we go forward anyway. Bloodstains and all. I wonder where we're going?

—Curt Phillips



Where Fanzines Kiss the Sky

A convention confession

by Curt Phillips

*Catfish got whiskers and a sweet little grin,
But you never can tell where a catfish has been.*

For the most part, attending Corflu Zed (Seattle, March 2009) had very little to do with any decision of mine. People—more specifically, a small group of fannish warlords known as the Corflu 50 gathered together to conspire to do me good. The Corflu 50 is a group of Corflu regulars who donate to a fan fund designed to bring to that year's Corflu some particular fan who would otherwise be unlikely to attend the annual fanzine fan's convention on their own. The first selectee was Steve Stiles, the well known and well liked fan artist and all-around great fellow; an excellent and logical choice, and Steve attended Corflu Silver in Las Vegas. The following June I hosted a summer backyard cookout for the few actual fans in my region of the country and also invited a number of well-known fans from elsewhere whom I'd gotten to know over the years. Somewhat to my surprise, a few of them accepted the invitation, Ted White among them. I was delighted that Ted was coming to visit but surprised that he'd be willing to drive well over 300 miles to eat grilled hamburgers in my backyard, but I chalked it up to my good luck. Gary Grady and Warren Buff came up from North Carolina, Scott Cranford and his brother Patrick drove over from Nashville, and Arnie Katz called us from Far-off Las Vegas to interview a few of us for his internet TV show *The Wasted Hour*. All in all, a very good party and a delightful weekend.

At one point while we were sitting out in the Bob Tucker Memorial Gazebo in my backyard watching the smoke from the grill waft up to the summer sky, Ted brought up the Corflu 50 fund, said that my name had come up as a possible choice and asked if I'd be interested in going if I were offered the trip. I was completely surprised by this and the only response I could come up with in that moment was "I dunno" and that I'd have to think it over. The conversation moved on and I forgot all about

it as I would have forgotten a suggestion that I might win a Special Hugo that year for Best Fannish Backyard Cookout, although I do believe that I grill a pretty good hamburger when the charcoal's hot enough. Months later I got an e-mail from Rich Coad. The Corflu 50 had selected me and would I accept? I hemmed and I hawed, and eventually said, er... "No." I think I surprised everyone just a little with that answer, but it wasn't very hard for me to think of many other fans who were far more deserving than I was and I figured that pretty quickly everyone else would think of that too so I declined with thanks. I thought that'd be the end of it but as is so often the case fandom had its own plans for me. To cut a three day story short, various folks started e-mailing me and talked me into it. It was Joyce Katz who put the deal over the top by telling me that she and Arnie were both looking forward to meeting me. My resistance crumbled like a March 1923 *Weird Tales* found in a Kentucky outhouse and I agreed to go. As it turned out, Joyce & Arnie themselves wound up not attending Corflu Zed but I wouldn't know about that till much later. Joyce & Arnie: you guys still owe me a convention!

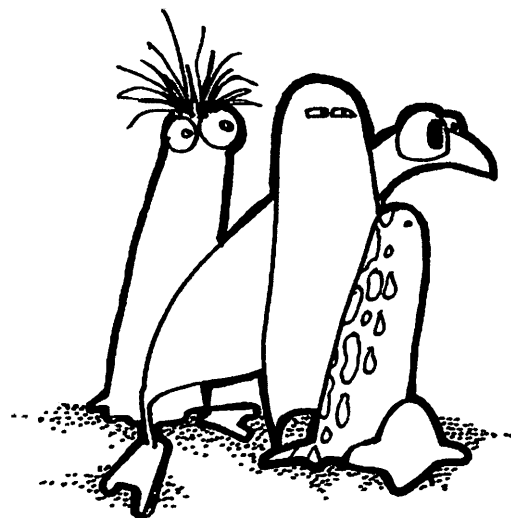
So I immediately began preparing for the trip to Seattle by publishing a fanzine. That makes sense in Corflu terms since the central focus of Corflu is fanzine fandom. Not everyone pubs a zine to hand out at the con of course, but just about everyone there has a strong connection to fanzines either as an editor, writer, artist or letterhack. I figured my street cred could stand a little bump in the polls so by dusting off a few old files and with the help of a few friends I pubbed my first new genzine in 22 years and called it *Smoooooth*... Look for it at efanzines.com as soon as I can figure out how to make pdf files out of scanned images. Having an armload of fanzines to hand around at a convention turned out to be quite a nice ice-breaker and garnered me a nice stack of zines to bring home in return, but I'm getting ahead of my story.

I hadn't flown in a commercial airliner since about 1996 and the post 9/11 horror stories of air travel in the US didn't exactly have me looking forward to the prospect. Everybody writes about their terrible experiences flying anywhere these days, but my trip turned out to be fairly painless. Arrived at the local airport in Blountville, Tennessee early that Thursday morning and made my

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way to the correct gate where I was greeted by an armed Homeland Security officer. In fact, he was the head officer for the airport and had come specially to see me before I got on the plane. His name is Brad and before he worked at the airport he was a volunteer with the same local Fire Department that I used to serve on and we'd worked many a car wreck and house fire together. While Brad and I were catching up I couldn't help but notice my fellow passengers waiting in the terminal staring at us as if wondering if I were an undercover Air Marshall or maybe a terrorist suspect. Either way, I noticed that no one sat near me on the short flight from Blountville to Cincinnati which suited me just fine. I had a fanzine to read, after all.

Spent an hour in the Cincinnati airport just walking from the gate I arrived at to the one I'd depart from, but that was with delays to gawp at the flying pig, to stop and buy a Coke and a snack to take aboard the plane to Seattle (\$2.50 for a Coke. Can you say, "captive market"?) and a bit of a browse through a bookshop where I picked up *In Odd We Trust*, the "Odd Thomas" graphic novel by Dean R. Koontz which turned out to be the perfect book to read on the airplane. To my considerable surprise I found it very difficult to read while flying. My seat was just behind the wing and was a little bumpy anyway, and the drone of the 737's engines was somewhat headache inducing. A lesson for the future, that. The flight west from Cincinnati took several hours and my seatmates were apparently zombies so I spent some time watching the terrible movie the airline provided (*The Express*. Avoid at all costs is my recommendation.) and some time reading my book but since I had a window seat I mostly watched the American landscape glide by underneath our wing. I somehow missed crossing the Mississippi River but was fascinated at how much detail I could pick out on the ground from 38,000 feet. I'd never been West of Chicago before and the landscape in the middle of America is amazingly wide open and varied seen from that height. I was entranced to see that much of the land below was clearly arranged in very consistent grids that had to contain a couple of hundred acres in each square grid. Eventually I realized that those grids must be the fenced and overgrown boundary lines of the original land-grant sections from when those territories were first opened up for homesteading in the 1800s. They run from just west of the Mississippi to up to the Eastern foothills of the Rocky Mountains and are a remarkable man-made feature of the continent. The northern Rockies themselves were magnificent to see. I gawped in amazement at the hundreds of large mountain lakes I could see nestled in the mountain peaks, apparently inaccessible from the ground without a lot of tough walking. And in the flatter areas west of the crest of the Rockies are miles and miles

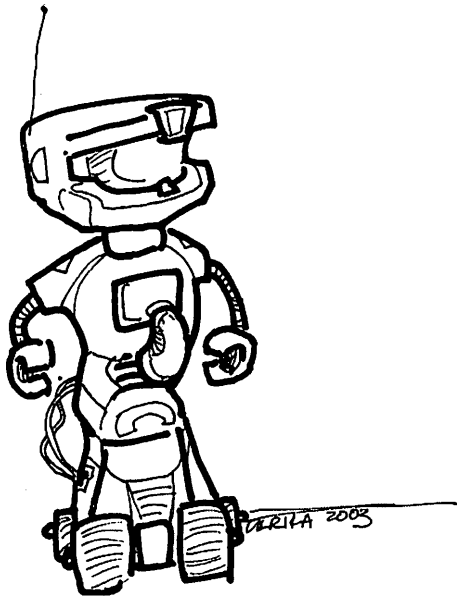


From

of glacial slide areas still dominating the landscape thousands of years after the ice receded.

The only other thing about flying west that seems important enough to mention to you is that going to the toilet located at the rear of a Boeing 737 while flying over the turbulent Rocky Mountains is—unless you are experiencing a true emergency—a bad idea. A very bad idea.

Seattle from the air is beautiful. Very green, very clean and orderly looking with lots of elbow room. It looks pretty darned good from the ground for that matter. As soon as we landed about 11:00 a.m. local time and were told it was safe to turn our cellphones I got a text from Randy Byers, "Meet you at Baggage Claim". There turned out to be a lot of fannish looking types—you know what I mean—wandering around the Seattle airport but when I spotted Vladimir Lenin's doppelganger sitting with the patience of Job near the baggage claim area I knew I'd found Randy. Randy had invited me to come out a day early to hang out with him and stay overnight at his home (Randy's Hugo Award greeted me as soon as I stepped through the door) which was remarkably generous of him particularly considering that he was one of the main people running the convention that weekend. If I'd been in the final hours of getting a convention started I'm pretty sure I'd be a little too distracted to entertain guests, but not Randy Byers. He and his associates had Corflu Zed running on cruise control by that point and I had a great day exploring the Fremont area on foot with Randy, who introduced me to his favorite local restaurant, Roxy's, which is a great place indeed. They serve up one of the best hamburgers I've ever tasted anywhere. "I flew 3000 miles for this hamburger," I told the cashier as we left. She smiled a very pretty smile and instantly replied "Everybody tells me that." We visited a great bookshop in Fremont, Bob Brown's, which has an excellent SF section and even had a good selection of pulps in the back room.



In fact, it turns out that Seattle may be one of the most bookshop-heavy places on Earth, or at least in my experience. I saw dozens of them as we traveled about the city and when we later got to the Hotel Deca in the University District (the Corflu hotel) there turned out to be an even dozen bookshops new and used within a three block radius of the hotel, and I'm not at all certain that I noticed all that may have been there. And I visited only a very small part of that amazing city. Other Corflu attendees have since written reports of their visits to many other bookshops throughout the area. I'd love to go back there someday and explore further.

Arriving at the Hotel Deca on Friday afternoon the first fans I saw were Dan and Lynn Steffan who were walking in from the parking lot. I should note here that while I know a great many active fans by reputation and from their photos in zines and on-line postings I'd met almost none of the Corflu attendees before that weekend. That, of course, was why the Corflu 50 Fan Fund was created in the first place, but before I got my convention nametag there were a lot of "Who's that guy? Is he with us?" looks and "Oh! So you're Curt Phillips!" stuff going on because except for a few fanzine articles I was an unknown quantity to most of this group. I'd have been tempted to write "Gary Farber" on my nametag, but they all knew Gary Farber...

*Catfish ain't expensive, neither is it free,
Some folks crazy 'bout it, others have to leave it be.*

Then into the hotel and there in the lobby were Ted White, Peter Weston, Frank Lunney (ok, I didn't recognize Frank right away but his zine *Beabohemia* happened to have been one of the first fanzines I'd ever read so meeting him there was pretty cool), and Pat Virzi — who instantly handed me a copy of *Ah, Sweet Laney!*, the mag-

nificent F.T. Laney collection she'd published for Corflu Quire in 2007. Thanks again, Pat! Also quickly met Rob Jackson, Bill and Mary Burns, and Sandra Bond — who handed me not one but two back issues of her excellent zine *Quasiquote* that she'd brought especially for me just because of something I'd written in a loc earlier. Several people at Corflu did similar acts of kindness for me throughout the convention which made me feel very welcome indeed. We soon moved to the convention room where more fans had turned up. There was Lenny Bailes working on a laptop. And there was my old friend from Myriad (a long gone apa we were once both in) Ulrika O'Brien with husband Hal, whom I'd not met before. Randy introduced me to the third member of the *Chunga* junta, Carl Juarez, who struck me as a very quiet fellow who observes closely and misses little. Needing to feel useful I went over to where Randy was starting to stuff large envelopes with convention materials and wrestled the job away from him, and then met one of the *Banana Wings* twins when Claire Briailey came over to help me. *Banana Wings*, which she and Mark Plummer publish, is one of my favorite fanzines and later that weekend I confessed to them my burning desire to have my name appear in their zine. "Well," replied Mark after a bit of reflection, "if you wrote something for us, that might do it." And later, after I'd got home, I did just that ("Spaceships in the Sky" by Curt Phillips, *Banana Wings* 38, May 2009) proving that sometimes the simple answers are the best ones.

But this was still Thursday night so it was back to Randy's house for a good night's rest on the very comfortable futon he maintains for visiting fans. The next morning Randy took me back to Roxy's for breakfast — they do a good omelet too — and we explored the sights of Fremont a bit more, visiting the Fremont Troll under the bridge, the 30 foot statue of V. Lenin downtown — what, doesn't your town have one? — and then back to Randy's Inner Sanctum where we talked books, pulps, gaslight era SF, and fan stuff; examined Randy's excellent collection of silent era DVD's and listened to the new David Byrne CD he'd just bought. I could have gone home right then and the trip would have been well worthwhile and the convention still hadn't started yet. Then it was back to the Deca where I was able to check in early and soon found myself in a huge and very comfortable double room up on the 12th floor, #1205, easily high enough to be buffeted about somewhat by Seattle's gale force winds that the locals all seemed to take in stride but which took me some getting used to. I noticed a couple of times that weekend that sharp and intense rain storms would blow in from the broad Pacific Ocean — completely unmoderated by any intervening mountains, of course — and would rage fiercely for about 5 minutes. Then the clouds would part,

the sun would shine through, and all would resume as though nothing unusual had occurred. Which of course, it hadn't. Not for Seattle, anyway. Different weather from what we have here in Southwest Virginia, but I could see myself getting used to it.

After cleaning up a bit I hurried downstairs to catch the small group going off to visit the Science Fiction Museum in Seattle. This is the famous museum that billionaire and closet SF fan Paul Allen built a couple of years ago and though it's smaller than I'd expected, it has some very choice items on display, evidently all from Paul Allen's collection. Met Seattle's Wally Weber on the bus ride over and I think I first met Chris Garcia and Linda on that side trip. At the museum itself I saw Steve Stiles for the first time. It was interesting to meet Steve there in a place where his own artwork should have been on display. There was a display devoted to fandom with a vintage typer and duper (an A. B. Dick from the 40s) and several good early fanzines like *Le Zombie*. Some of Greg Bear's awards and manuscripts were highlighted, and the bound manuscript of one of E. E. "Doc" Smith's Skylark manuscripts was on display. Forry Ackerman's 1953 Hugo Award for "Best Fan" was there under Plexiglas, along with several good pulps, vintage paperbacks and rare hardbound books. Curiously, a few of the pulps were represented by very poor photocopied mockups instead of the actual pulp. That made no sense to me since VG copies of those same issues can be bought on eBay every day. In fact, I have most of the same pulps they displayed in my collection and in better condition. But I don't have the Captain's chair and William Shatner's uniform from *Star Trek*. They do. And much else besides. My favorite single item was the cutaway model of the spaceship from *Destination Moon* that was used as a prop in the scene where Heinlein actually appears, and that was displayed on the way out of the building where you'd miss it if you weren't paying attention. We got the group together for a photo op with the life sized model of Gort from *The Day the Earth Stood Still* that greets visitors as you enter the museum and then jumped on the metro back to the hotel.

Got in with a dinner group that included Art Widner, Randy Byers, Colin Hinz*, Catherine Crockett, and Pat Virzi. It was a Greek restaurant with a name I can't remember now and couldn't pronounce then. On Art's recommendation I ordered a dish called "moussaka," but it just wasn't my sort of food. I'm one of those folks who only eats about 6 different meals ever and none of them

* Colin, Randy and I were three of the four contenders for TAFF back in 2003. Randy was the winner, but we'd all had such a good time in the campaign that we agreed that we'd all come out ahead for the experience.

are native to any country but America except for pizza. American food I can handle, and probably any English food (my wife Liz is English and she and her mother are great cooks), but beyond that I'm not very adventurous. But the food is hardly the reason to go to dinner with a group of fans anyway, now is it? We had a fine time talking about one thing or another. I got Art talking about his WWII service when he worked in an Army hospital, about Denvention (the second Worldcon), and our mutual friend Rusty Hevelin, and other such topics. Art Widner is a walking treasure of stories and experiences and it was great to talk with him again.

Back at the convention a panel did readings from old Corflu reports, of which after 26 Corflus there were plenty. A Virtual Con Suite had been set up again. When this idea was first implemented by Bill Mills at Corflu Silver the year before I was one of the few dozen fans out in the virtual audience eagerly drinking in as much of the convention as I could. I have to admit that it's better being on the other side of the camera. This time Liz was able to watch the convention at home and reports that she saw me a couple of times. Met Australian fans Damien Warman and Juliette Woods later that evening. They're good friends with Nick and Katrina Falkner in Adelaide which is interesting because Nick is Liz's cousin and has visited us in Virginia three times in recent years. I gave them my fanzine and an additional copy to carry home to Nick and they gave me a copy of their very impressive collection of writings about John Foyster, one of Australian fandom's best writers. Correction; one of fandom's best writers ever. Eventually went on up to the con suite in the hotel's penthouse where Suzle Tompkins and others had laid on a very nice spread of munchies which they kept restocking throughout the weekend. Colin Hinz caught up with me there and gifted me with a large batch of original photographs that a Canadian Army officer had taken in Europe during WWII. Colin told me that someone near his home had tossed these out with the trash where Colin had quite rightly recovered them and brought them to me. I'm delighted to have them in my collection and they — like most of the unique items in my collection of militaria — will eventually be donated to a WWII museum. Colin also gave me a nifty pair of old binoculars he'd picked up somewhere. He thought they might be as old as WWI but my research later indicated that they're actually as old as the American Civil War and are exactly the type that officers in that war used so they've joined my collection of Civil War stuff. Thanks again, Colin! I met Chip and Janice Morningstar who ooh'ed and ah'ed over Colin's photos with me and who discussed V2 rockets and Zeppelins knowledgeably — something that not everyone seems able to do these days.

Later that evening I finally met the fan known as Tobes. I shocked him into stunned silence by claiming that "Never in recent years has any one fan had more written about him in fanzines than you." He was still mentally reviewing that claim when I moved on to grab a computer and chat with the fans at home for a while. Peter Sullivan checked in from the UK as did Geri Sullivan, Scott Cranford, James Taylor and Teresa Cochran from Las Vegas (who had hoped to have been there themselves) and Steve Green in England. I seized the chance to endorse Steve for TAFF while there were a dozen or so folks on-line and since he later won I can claim that my endorsement didn't hurt him much. Since his TAFF trip Steve has been pubbing a regular fanzine on efanzines.com called *The Fortnightly Fix* (up to #6 now) that's well worth a look. And though not present himself he'd sent a short zine for distribution on the freebie tables which was a very nice thing to do. Colin came over to the computer about then and we tag-teamed some commentary for the VCS audience for a while. I got an invitation to Nic Farey's "Unusual Suspects" party (whoops, was that supposed to be a secret, Nic?) but was seriously exhausted and had to pass. And thus from all accounts the next day I missed one of the legendary fannish parties of modern times, but that's a story for Nic to tell himself — if he dares...

Saturday morning — hey, this convention's barely started! — found me waking at my traditional 0500 (damned biological clock adjusted to the West coast time zone but wouldn't let me "oversleep" anyway...). Found a superb jazz station (KWJZ, 98.9 Seattle — and available to listen to on-line! Google "KWJZ" and give them a listen...) on the radio and watched the morning sun rise slowly over Seattle. A commercial advertised for "RNs wanted immediately for a Seattle regional hospital. "Hmmm..." I thought. "I'm an RN. If we moved out here, apparently finding a new job wouldn't be that big a problem..." Thoughts like that kept occurring to me during my visit and for weeks afterwards. Once downstairs I found myself swept off to breakfast as the guest of Murray and Mary Ellen Moore and lo; it came to pass that we went to that same Greek restaurant. However I was happy to learn that they fried an excellent egg and so I had a very traditional eggs and bacon breakfast courtesy of Murray & Mary Ellen. Peter and Rob (who gave me a copy of his excellent *Inca* #4, thanks Rob!) joined us and kept things lively. Meeting Peter Weston was a treat largely because for the past year I'd been catching up with his absolutely delightful fanzine *Prolapse* (now re-titled *Relapse*) on efanzines.com. It's a fan historian's dream with insightful and in-depth articles about every aspect of British fan history. I consume each issue as it appears on-line and consider it one of the most important fan publica-

tions in our hobby. And Peter himself is equally delightful. He's one of the few fans I know who can match my interest in the Civil War and that's the American Civil War. One of my fears was that he'd challenge me on English Civil War Trivia and discover that my studies rarely go further back than the 19th century. It was largely for Peter's benefit that I lugged my Federal Civil War uniform along to the convention and wore it later that day for a panel on "Alternate Fannish Hobbies" where I talked about the similarities I'd noticed between the reenacting community and fandom. Colin talked about Meccano fandom — a topic that fascinated me. Had I ever seen Meccano or Erector sets as a kid I'd have gone crazy over them but I had no idea that such things existed until I was in my 30s and by then collecting SF was taking all my spare nickels. Others talked about their other hobbies and Art Widner had come to talk about "art cars" but that part of the panel didn't get very far because while I'd been talking about Civil War reenacting Art had asked about my uniform hat. Handing it to him to examine I urged him to try it on. It was a perfect fit and cameras started flashing all over the room taking photos of Art with that Yankee hat and his red shirt and wide suspenders. I ought to get another of those hats and send it to Art; he looked great in it. Liz told me later that she'd watched that panel on the Virtual Con Suite.

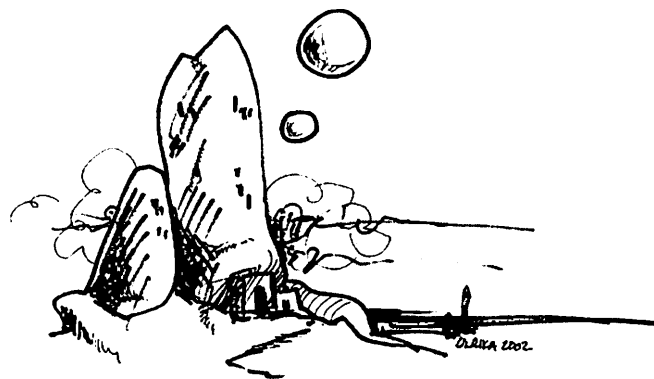
I took a little break after that to change clothes and rest a bit up in my 12th story room. Seagulls were doing fly-bys outside my window as I rested and I reflected on the calmness and peaceful feeling I noticed everywhere in Seattle. Mentioning this to Jack Bell the evening before, he observed that it was a well known pattern in the city that folks come to visit on business or for a convention or whatever. Then they come back a second time with their families to show them the city. And after that, they come out to stay. I can see the attraction. Learning to live in a city of this size would be an adjustment for a country boy like me, but Seattle doesn't feel the least bit closed in or oppressive like other large cities do. I could see myself living there someday and I think Liz would love it too.

Back downstairs I found Colin laying out stacks of mimeograph paper to collate and so I jumped in to help him finish that. I've always rather enjoyed collating, and it got me the first copy of his zine. Dinner was pizza in the con suite. Spent much of the afternoon and evening there talking with the very entertaining John Berry, with Claire & Mark, and had my first real conversation with Hope Leibowitz, Ian Sorensen, and others. Got to briefly meet Victor Gonzales who arrived for a flying visit and was almost gone before I learned that he was there. Running out to the hallway I caught him just before he was about to disappear into the elevator and at least got to say

hello. I wish he'd stayed longer. Finally got to have a good talk with Andy Hooper — who I consider to be one of the best and most enjoyable fan writers working today. I believe I'm hardly alone in that opinion. If the Hugo Awards were all that they should be, Andy Hooper would have a "Best Fanwriter" Hugo in his collection. But it's becoming clear that the segment of fandom that fanzines fans inhabit has moved beyond the Worldcon's Hugo Awards.

The Corflu auction was an unusually enjoyable one. I'd noted about 10 lots out of well over 100 that I was interested in, bid on two and didn't win any, but I had a great time anyway. The stuff I'd donated for the auction (260 odd *Goon Show* episodes on CD, a complete set of *Journey Into Space* on CD, some SF books and mags by fannish types) brought about 80 bucks all of which I donated to the convention. It was nice to feel that I'd helped out the convention finances a bit. If my numbers are correct the total auction raised about \$800.

The rest of Saturday evening was spent mostly in the consuite high atop the Hotel Deca. I believe it was sometime along about then that I found myself talking with Alan Rosenthal about pulp magazines and James Branch Cabell when it struck me that one of the things I enjoyed most about fandom is that you can pick a topic — any topic — and find someone at any gathering of fans who can talk with you about it knowledgeably. And conversely, take any two fans from anywhere, put them in a room together and they can quickly find dozens — maybe hundreds — of things to talk about together. Multiply that by the hundred or so fans we had at Corflu Zed and you have a Fannish Group Mind. This might seem completely obvious to many of you reading this article but to me — living as I do in near complete fannish isolation in Southwest Virginia — it's not something to take for granted. The people I work with, for instance, are genuinely good people nearly without exception, but they're as mundane as humans can possibly be and all they ever want to talk about is sports, reality TV shows, and how bored they are with their jobs. Sure, some of them read books, but these are mostly mundane female nurses I work with (if I haven't mentioned it before, I'm a surgical Registered Nurse at a large hospital) and what they read is Nora Roberts, Danielle Steele, and once in a while a Steven King book. At best. So I'm largely on my own out here. Fortunately the doses of fandom I get on the fannish Yahoo Groups like Trufen and InTheBar along with an occasional convention keep me going. Corflu Zed charged my batteries for ... well, let's just say that the propeller on my beanie is still twirling from the charge. Anyway, I'm not really sure I know how to fully say how deeply satisfying it was to be at Corflu, talking with other fans, drifting once again in the fannish constellation of luminaries,



soaking up the energy and sharing the glow. I appreciated it then and I still do.

Nic Farey was holding another party in his room — 1208 just around the corner from me. I stopped in and found the room rocking with about 12 — 15 folks. It was also so thick with smoke that I couldn't quite see across the room, a fact that would haunt Nic at check-out the next day when the hotel dunned him for extra clean-up charges but it was a solid party and I believe Nic wouldn't have had it any other way. That party went on long after I wimped out and went to my own room to collapse in slumber.

Woke the next morning to see snow wafting past my window, completing the catalog of types of weather that Seattle could possibly throw at us. Brunch was on the convention and my flight home wasn't till late that night so I snoozed a bit late, packed up, checked my luggage with the front desk and checked out of the hotel. We all gathered in the convention hall for brunch followed by convention business like the FAAN Awards, selection of Winchester, UK for the next Corflu (well, I already knew I probably couldn't attend the next one anyway — though if someone will bring Corflu back to the East Coast some year ...) and a bit of impromptu Greco-Roman wrestling with Andy Hooper and Jerry Kaufman that somehow validated the entire convention weekend. You definitely had to be there to comprehend that. I was slightly disappointed that the planned softball game was cancelled but it was honking cold outside and there was a nice warm con suite upstairs waiting for us so it really wasn't that tough a call to make. I grabbed the microphone before Randy closed the convention and thanked the Corflu 50 Group for bringing me home to Corflu while Ted grinned a "told you so" grin at me from the rear of the room. With that, Randy closed the proceedings and the fans began spinning back to their normal orbits, each in his own way with some departing immediately and many more lingering for the afternoon. I scooped up some goodies from the freebie table — which at various times during the weekend had yielded up copies of old Worldcon program books, FAPA mailings, prozines like *Pulphouse* and the

German magazine *Orbit*, and a great many copies of *Lo-cus*. And several hundred general fanzines, many of them quite good ones. My suitcase was definitely heavier going home than it was coming out.

There was one further event of interest. I mentioned earlier that there were several bookstores close to the hotel. Someone happened to mention that James Morrow (*Towing Jehovah*) was doing a reading at University Books just around the corner in an hour so I saddled up and walked with 3 or 4 others over to hear him. I'm not a great fan of his work, but it's always interesting to see a major SF writer in person and get some sort of impression of the person behind the book. This is a writer with serious God issues and it permeates his work. He seemed like a nice enough fellow and his reading was quite good, but still not good enough to make me hang around to get a signed book. Instead I explored the SF section of University Books and found that it was stocked by someone absolutely expert in modern SF. Full current lines from all major and most of the important smaller publishers were well stocked along with a great backlist of important titles. SF readers in that part of Seattle have a great bookstore to serve them. I hope they appreciate how rare a thing that's becoming in the 21st century.

Back to the hotel where all the remaining fans had gathered upstairs in the consuite. Finally got a chance to sit and talk with Bill Burns—who is in high demand because everybody wants to talk with Bill Burns—and we discussed TransAtlantic cables and antique tech in gen-

eral. A very fun bit of geek chat between two unabashed geeks. Bill has rapidly become one of my favorite people in fandom. Tobes came over and visited for a while. Though he somehow has a reputation as a party-going wildman at conventions I found him to be a nice quiet fellow who's very enjoyable to talk with. Quite the renaissance man, in fact. (I hope I'm not killing his reputation with this...) He's the first person I've ever met from the Isle of Jersey and he explained a bit about how the political differences between Jersey and the UK worked. About that time Ian Sorensen snapped the best photo of me taken at Corflu Zed that I've seen, and I talked further with Andy Hooper, Murray Moore, and others. The day drifted into night and before I thought it possible, Frank Lunney was telling me that it was time to go. I'd talked with Frank the night before about sharing a cab to the airport and left him to make the arrangements. He did us up proud by arranging for a private car and driver for quite a reasonable price and we said our goodbyes and headed for the airport.

I hated to leave, really. It was a fine, fine weekend the likes of which I rarely experience and I'm very grateful to the Corflu 50 Group—which I've now joined in order to pay a little something back—for making it possible. All best wishes to those who attend Corflu Cobalt, and who knows? Perhaps I'll see you all at another Corflu some time.

*I'll be your catfish honey any old time,
You just call out my name, babe, and drop me your line.*

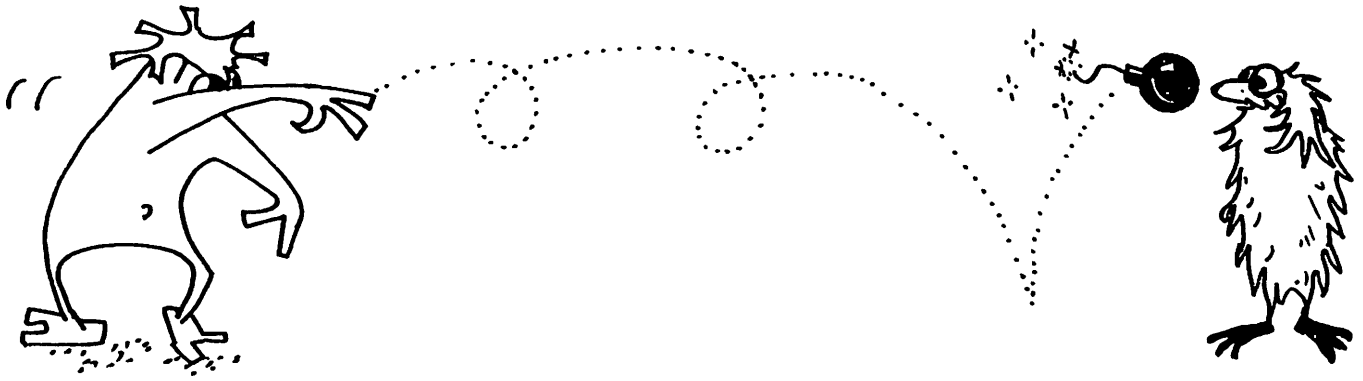
The Hoarder's Downfall

The problem I have in watching *The Office* is that I worked for some years in an office not unlike that shown on the show and I was one of the halfway competent employees who *daily* had to keep silent while moronic bosses, burned-out co-workers, and the occasional rat bastard introduced one idiocy after another into our workplace, took credit for my work or worse, ignored my work in favour of some nonsensical pet project of their own, and generally made cubicle life a living Hell. There was Evelyn, the office secretary who was a control freak.

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She would do things like keep all the office supplies locked in her desk and if you needed staples for your stapler, you had to go to her control centre, wait till she "noticed" you, ask politely for some staples, and if she didn't decide to pretend that she was out of them, she'd unlock her desk, slowly remove one stick of staples, break it into thirds, compare the three pieces and give you the shortest one. I'm serious about this. It was maddening, and that's just one example of many I could make. Don't even let me get started about the office coffee pot...

A few years later that plant was closed and we were all notified that we'd have to find new jobs in about 60 days. By then I had transferred to a different department



anyway and happened to be working night shift, although by then there wasn't much actual work to be done so I had some time on my hands. One night after everyone else was gone, I and a friend who had also once worked in that office snuck back in there, broke into her desk (we actually removed the lock and threw it away) and found it crammed full of office supplies.

There were about 200 Post-it pads, 30 boxes of staples, hundreds of brand new pens, and so on. We took it all — every paperclip, every rubber band, every notepad. Yes, it was wrong, and yes, we could have been fired if we'd been caught, but we'd already been notified that our jobs would be over in just a few more weeks and we were experiencing a bad case of "what-the-hell." We carefully didn't touch any of her personal stuff, but all the hoarded company property was fair game to us. We didn't keep anything ourselves except that lock, which I threw in a metal recycle bin somewhere, but we divided all those supplies more or less equally and left a pile of them on every one of the 60 or so desks in the department — except hers. Since she always came to work at 8:00 am while most of the Engineers in the Dept. came in as early as 6:30, all the swag was long gone before she arrived.

I'm told that she absolutely lost it when she walked in and found her desk violated. The folks in the office had thought that *she* had divided up all that stuff and passed it out the night before and a couple of them called "thanks for the stuff" to her as she walked in the door that morning, but when she found that her desk key didn't have a lock to open anymore, she screamed bloody murder. The boss — who also had a nice pile of office supplies on *his* desk — walked out and asked, "What's the matter?" She kept yelling so he took her into his office to calm her down. The door closed, and a moment later the employees in the office heard her yell "You've got my Post-Its!" Evelyn went back to her desk a little later and just sat there all day, glaring at everyone.

A couple of weeks later she took an early retirement package and then a few weeks later we all left the plant

for good. I signed up for nursing school and took a job in a lumber yard and one day after work I stopped by Wal-Mart for something. There was Evelyn, working the "20 Items or Less" check-out line. I was watching my dollars carefully in those days but I couldn't help myself. I went and picked out a small package of Post-Its and a small box of staples and went right to her check-out line.

"Why, hello Evelyn," I said in my friendliest voice. "Hello", she mumbled back. Then she ran my purchase over the scanner, reached for a bag, and — paused, holding those Post-Its and staples. She looked at my still beaming face. "Just can't have enough Post-Its and staples," I said, cheerily. She dropped them in a bag and did *not*, I noted, say, "Thank you." I left and have never spoken to her again.

Now on one level this is a funny story, but it's also something of a cruel story and I can admit that now, many years after the fact. Evelyn was a sad and pathetic person who may have had nothing going on in her life when I worked with her *except* the control she had over an office full of geek engineers. I know that what I did on those two occasions was mean and I'm not very often a mean person. But the thing is that Evelyn was a mean person every day that I ever knew her, and she enjoyed the power she had in that office to make our lives more irritating in those small ways. She knew exactly what she was doing and she gloried in it. Back when I was working in that office I would sometimes walk away from her desk with my 1/3 of a stick of staples and turn back to see her leaning back in her chair, smiling with contentment at what she'd accomplished at my expense. And I'd see that same smile when she did it to others. I was remembering that smile on her face as I unbolted the lock on her desk that night.

I've just confessed — for the first time — to having done a couple of things that I should be very remorseful about. But thinking back on it, I'm not sorry at all. Not one little bit. This has been just one little story of the madhouse office that I worked in for 5 years, long ago. There are many more.

One Life, Furnished in Early Fandom

From the Hagerstown, Maryland *Herald-Mail*: Harry B. Warner Jr., 80, of 423 Summit Ave., Hagerstown, died Monday, Feb. 17, 2003, at his home. Graveside services will be Friday at 10 a.m. at Rose Hill Cemetery, Hagerstown. The Rev. David B. Kaplan will officiate. Arrangements are by Andrew K. Coffman Funeral Home, Hagerstown.

Such a stark announcement. Bare of any flamboyance or pretense, just as Harry was himself. Just the facts, plainly stated. It was the sort of announcement Harry would have written and kept on file for just such a circumstance, and since Harry had been a long time reporter for that paper, for all I know he may well have done that very thing. His colleagues at the paper and the local folks in Hagerstown remember him as something of a loner. A nice, quiet fellow who preferred his own company and didn't seem to have many friends or any family. We here in fandom know differently. Harry had more friends and more family than most people ever do, and though this legion is spread far beyond the boundaries of Harry's hometown they all knew very well the address '423 Summit Avenue' and the man who lived most of his 80 years there.

I traveled to Hagerstown, Maryland in the fall of 1988 to visit and interview Harry. We'd not met before though I'd sent him a copy of my first fanzine (as was the custom for all new fan editors in those days) three years earlier and his was the first letter of comment I'd received. He would amaze me later that day by mentioning that fanzine and remarking that he'd enjoyed a particular article in it. I arrived in town just after high noon, as previously arranged. It was a small, quiet town. Only a few other cars moved along the main street. Hagerstown seemed... isolated, somehow. It was the kind of town where I would expect to see a lot of antique shops and used bookstores, but though I did look, I didn't see any of those things. There was a huge and very old cemetery not far from town and I noticed the characteristic shapes of Civil War era grave markers scattered among the more ornate late-

Victorian markers that are common in the Mid-Atlantic States. Turning at the next street led me to the foot of the hill that Summit Avenue ascends, and four houses along on the right was the most famous address in fandom: 423 Summit Avenue. It was a rather stately house, painted a sort of mild blue with a large porch and a newly rebuilt set of front steps. Before I could knock, the door opened and I met Harry Warner Jr.

He was a rather gentle looking man, and was 65 at that time. He'd retired from a long career as a newspaperman not long before the time of my visit, but he was dressed as if for a day at the office, even wearing a tie. He invited me to enter and stood for a moment while I took in the surroundings. Walking into Harry's living room was like walking into the 1950s. The furniture, rugs, wallpaper, and the very atmosphere all belonged to an earlier time. It wasn't that anything seemed old or worn; in fact the room was clean and as neat as a pin. It's more that nothing in the room seemed to acknowledge that the current year was 1988 instead of 1950.

We sat down, I on a heavy overstuffed couch and he in what was obviously 'his' chair in the corner of the room that had the best natural light for reading. Across the room to my left was a low built-in shelving unit filled with hundreds of record albums, many of them classical or opera. Huge old floor speakers and various components of old but high quality audio equipment were located in that area. By the front door was a large basket that evidently held several pieces of mail including what looked to be about a dozen fanzines. When I asked, Harry told me that this was the mail from yesterday that he hadn't gotten to yet, rather than the previous week's mail as I had assumed. To my right I could see a parlor that evidently served as Harry's office. Centered in that room was his old manual typewriter. My eyes were drawn to that legendary fannish machine in the same way that in some alternate universe they would be drawn to the Enchanted Duplicator in whatever mythical room it sits.

"So that's the machine that launched a million locs, is it?" I ventured. Harry chuckled. "Hardly that many. I still try to respond to every fanzine I receive, but I doubt if that typewriter could stand that pace, and I'm pretty sure that I couldn't." Personal computers were starting

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to hit the market in those days and I asked if Harry had thought about getting one. "No, I've never liked computers for writing. I had to use one for my last three years at the newspaper but I detest those terminals. Several years ago I bought an electric typewriter but I just don't use it. I find I still prefer my old manual typewriter." I had to admit that the fanzine locs that I'd received from Harry seemed to have a certain presence with their slightly faded ink and their slightly misaligned keys.

Since I'd come there to do an interview I thought I should ask the usual background questions. "No," replied Harry, "I haven't always lived in Hagerstown. I was born in Chambersburg, Pennsylvania, but I came here before I was old enough to know anything about it. I've lived here ever since."

CP: *When you were growing up, did you ever know anyone else who was interested in science fiction?*

HW: Not a soul. Never knew anybody who read science fiction until I'd started corresponding and started planning my first fanzine. Besides me there's never been anyone from Hagerstown active enough in fandom to have become generally known, though there are a few people here who go to conventions. But I've not had any direct contact with them. There have been fans that've lived here for a short time and even published fanzines from here. Chick Derry, an old time Washington fan lived here for maybe six months, and there was another young fan named Jerry Forrest who put out one issue of a fanzine while living here and working for the Health Department. Then he moved to the Southwest and I never heard of him again.

CP: *Did your work as a newspaper reporter help develop your fanwriting style?*

HW: It may have helped me in meeting deadlines for fanwriting. I got into the habit of meeting deadlines for the newspaper and that made it easier for me to write to schedule for the fanzines. I doubt if it had any effect on my writing style though. Very different types of writing. Most of my fanwriting is just comments or material derived from other fan's comments.

CP: *As you know, you are somewhat famous for keeping yourself relatively isolated here in Hagerstown. Why have you only rarely traveled around to conventions and such?*

HW: Well, I'm not the gregarious type. I've always been happy doing things by myself or with just one or two other people. I hate to travel at all. I hate to drive or ride public carriers and my job for 40 years prevented me from doing too much traveling. I had to be in Hagerstown



at certain times to cover certain events and there was no getting away from that. So it was just a combination of circumstances. I've been perfectly happy with the fanzine aspect of fandom. I haven't cared too much for the conventions. Halfway through the first day of a convention I would start to wonder if I wouldn't be happier at home listening to music or watching a ballgame. There're just too many people at conventions and most of them are interested only in some sub-fandom other than fanzine fandom. Of course I suppose that this is also the strong point of conventions in that at least you have a chance to meet interesting people who aren't involved in fanzines.

CP: *What's the truth about the legend of how you once left a convention early to take in a baseball game?*

HW: You know, I thought you might mention that. To me it was no different than going out to a special restaurant would be, but that story has taken on a life of it's own. At the 1971 Noreascon in Boston (where Harry was the Fan Guest of Honor—CP) I did spend one afternoon at Fenway Park. I got permission from the chairman of the convention committee. He even offered to pay my taxi fare but I walked. I made no secret about it, but I figured it was probably my only hope of ever seeing a baseball game at Fenway Park, so I went.

CP: *Do you see much difference in how fandom is viewed these days by people involved in SF today as compared to the '40s and '50s?*

HW: Yes and no. I don't think the fans themselves are really different in any basic way, but several things about fandom have changed. One difference is that fandom doesn't produce graduates to the professional ranks the way it used to. Most of the people coming into the pro ranks today have never been involved in sf fandom at all.

Back in the '60s it seemed as if every other sf pro either still was or had been an active fan for years and years.

CP: *What do you think it is that's characteristic among the very different sorts of people who become a part of fandom?*

HW: Oh, I don't think there's any common factor, really. [Jack] Speer thinks that all fans are handicapped in some way or another but he has to stretch 'handicapped' to cover so many different circumstances that I don't think his theory holds up. For instance, he thinks growing up in a small town is a handicap. And an attempt was once made to prove that all fans are either first-born children or only children, but I don't think there's anything to that. There are those who claim that 'intelligence' is synonymous with 'fandom' but the evidence is yet to be provided on that claim. A fan has to be intelligent enough to read but outside of that I don't think there's any common factor.

CP: *That sounds something that might have been inspired by Slan (by A.E. Van Vogt, Astounding Science Fiction, Sept.-Dec. 1940) and reminds me of Claude Degler and his 'Ozark Love Camp' idea.*

HW: Degler may very possibly have been inspired by *Slan*. I think that novel may have inspired a lot of individuals at the time into thinking that maybe fans were a 'chosen race' because the Slans in the story were separate and different from the rest of humanity, and fans in those days did feel a sense of being 'different' somehow. But Degler seemed to take that sort of thing to heart like no one else.

CP: *What were your favorite science fiction books and writers in the days when you were first becoming an active fan and how does that compare with what you're reading these days?*

HW: I liked *Astounding*, mostly. *Unknown* was a favorite. I admired *Galaxy* very much and I think that Horace Gold was an extremely good editor who has never gotten the recognition he deserves. In many ways *Galaxy* was better than *Astounding* and *Analog*.

Most of what I read these days tends to be detective stories and literary classics. I don't read very much science fiction anymore. When I do I usually re-read some of the older classics from the '30s, '40s, or '50s. I don't see very much of what I consider to be true science fiction appearing these days. Most of it is very thinly disguised stories of today set in the very near future, or fantasy disguised as science fiction.

CP: *Who are some of the 'classic' SF writers that you do still enjoy re-reading?*

HW: I've always liked "Doc" Smith though not many people do anymore. And David H. Keller, who is all but unknown today. To that you can add Stanley Weinbaum, Henry Kuttner, and certainly Ray Bradbury and Arthur C. Clarke.

CP: *What sort of fanwriting are you doing these days? Do you write any regular columns?*

HW: I did have a regular column in Marty Cantor's *Holier Than Thou* but I understand that Marty has suspended that fanzine so I suspect that'll be the last regular column that I ever write. I'm sorry to see *Holier Than Thou* come to an end. I think it was an excellent fanzine and Marty always lined up some first-class material for each issue.

CP: *What would you say are some of the most important fanish documents; books and articles that you'd suggest that I search out and read?*

HW: Certainly [E.T. Laney's] *Ah, Sweet Idiocy!* and [Sam Moskowitz's] *The Immortal Storm*. It was Sam's book that inspired me to write *All Our Yesterdays*. I suppose I was just intrigued at the idea of continuing Sam's history. There was a letter from Bill Temple that was published in *Voice of The Imagi-Nation* back in WWII that is certainly a seminal document. It discussed the reasons why a person becomes a fan and stays a fan, and it's been reprinted in recent years. Probably you'd have to include the write-up in *Time* magazine about the first World Science Fiction Convention. That article immortalized the phrase "Gosh, Wow, Boy-Oh-Boy!" and that'll probably go down in history. You'd have to read *The Enchanted Duplicator* and something by John Berry — the Irish John Berry — probably his "Goon" series. You should read lots of Terry Carr's articles. "My Fair Femfan" is one of my favorites. Jack Speer's *Up Till Now* is important for being the first look at fandom's history and the inspiration for all the fanhistorical writing that followed it.

CP: *What are your thoughts on the problems of access and permanence of fanzines, particularly your own?*

HW: In my first year or two of fanzine activity I used to keep carbon copies of all the articles I wrote and I kept the zines in neat order, but I soon stopped bothering with that. My fanzines now are in no particular order and I wouldn't be able to find any particular zine without a lot of searching. I fear that a lot of older fanzine material — not just my own zines but in general — are in danger of being lost if indeed they aren't already lost to the ravages of neglect and time.

CP: *Are there any universities interested in preserving your collection?*

HW: I haven't heard directly from any university, no. I've heard from fans who've urged me to contact this or that university to consider a bequest, but I'm kind of pessimistic about chances for fanzine survival in big mundane libraries because I've heard so many horror stories about what happens to library holdings when an administration changes or when they start to run short of space.

CP: *What do you think would be the best way to ensure the survival of fanzine collections?*

HW: Through dealers I suppose. *(We had earlier been discussing the then-recent sale of a large collection of fanzines to a certain college. — CP)* Dealers might pay them more respect than university libraries since they can make some money out of them. Now if something turned up that I thought was really safe; if the Library of Congress or the Smithsonian were interested in them, that would be fine. But I'm sure that neither of those institutions have the space to spare for fanzines.

CP: *I've heard it said that in the '30s and '40s there was no thought at all that fanzines would last beyond the immediate interest of those who were the first to read them. Was there really no thought that fandom in those days was the start of something that was going to continue for years and years?*

HW: I don't think there was. When you're young you don't think much about your future. When you're in your teens you don't think you're ever going to be old enough to retire. I think it was the same with early fandom. It just didn't occur to us that fandom was something that would still be around 50 years in the future. I suppose that's another way that fandom today differs from fandom back then. We didn't have all this back history of fan-nish tradition to consider that you do today. I'm not going to speculate on whether that was more of an advantage for us then or for fans now, though. No, we were just science fiction fans then. We thought about space travel and atomic energy and so forth but I don't remember anyone ever seriously considering the future of fandom.

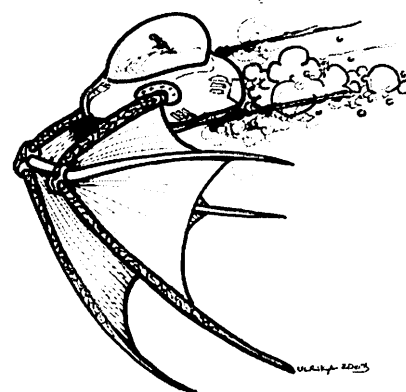
CP: *How does the future of fandom and science fiction look to you now?*

HW: I just don't know. I hope it'll continue, and I think it should continue, but whether it can survive the changes in the ways people behave and the ways people entertain themselves, I don't know. Books are getting to be more and more expensive. Some paperbacks are more expensive than videocassettes now. *(At the time of this interview in 1988 a new paperback cost \$4.50. — CP)* Unless some revolution in publishing comes about I fear for the future of books, or at least for books published for a mass market. It's not that hard to imagine a day when

science fiction fandom dies out because no one can afford to buy books just for reading pleasure. Fandom itself is a different matter, as you know. I'm sure it'll go on in some fashion, but it won't be the same as when all fans generally read most of the science fiction magazines. But fandom really moved beyond that long ago. And there are still a lot of good fanzines being published and a lot of good fanwriting being written. I hope there always will be.

That afternoon passed before I was aware of it and all too soon I knew it was time to go. I talked Harry into letting me take a few photographs, my favorite being the last one I snapped of him on impulse outside in his yard just before I got in my car. It shows him just the way I remember him today; smiling, relaxed, a fan that has enjoyed his years in fandom and is content with life. Of course, on the way home I quickly thought of far better questions that I should have asked him or better ways of asking the silly ones that I did ask. But that was many years ago now and none of it matters anymore. I didn't ask him if he thought that "Fandom Is A Way Of Life." I didn't have to. Harry helped demonstrate to me that although fandom is based on things and ideas that most people outside of fandom would consider trivial, that doesn't matter at all so long as whatever fannish way of life we choose to live is lived well and lived according to the standards that we each choose for ourselves. Harry lived much of his life in that house at 423 Summit Ave., but he explored the world through the letters and fanzines he wrote and read. And we fans who are left to testify can surely say that Harry Warner, Jr., blazed new trails and explored them well.

I think that if Harry were still with us, I wouldn't particularly want to ask more questions about fandom or fanzines. He's already answered all my questions in thousands of locs and articles that I expect I'll find in good time as I read old fanzines. No, I think if I could ask Harry just one more question right now, I'd ask if he'd like to go and see a baseball game with me. It's a beautiful spring day today, the sun is warm and the winds are fair, and I think the Red Sox are playing at home ...



Watering Can Surprise

An InTheBar extract, starring: Harry Bell and Curt Phillips. Extras, in order of appearance: Mike Meara, Graham Charnock, Ian Maule, John Hall (Uncle Johnny), Frank Lunney, Pat Charnock, Rob Jackson, Marty Cantor, Ted White.

Last weekend I laid some coco-shell over the soil in the potted olive tree on the patio. Coco-shell needs to be watered in so that it binds together and this is best done with a watering can. I keep a watering can in the workroom of the studio, so I went in to get it.

Oddly, there appeared to be some liquid in it. I say "oddly", because whenever I use it, I always empty it. I swilled it around and noticed a smell. Closer inspection revealed a very strong smell, an unmistakable smell, the smell of piss. In the bottom of the watering can was a considerable quantity of old piss, so old it had mold on it.

Now, I confess that if I've been caught short, rather than run up to the loo two floors above, I might on occasion take advantage of one of the old gesso containers I have in the studio, but I've never used the watering can and I always wash out whatever I do use.

Somebody has been pissing in my watering can! Because it was so old, I can't be certain who, but it has to be either the very strange man who came to service the alarm system, or the quite nice man who came to service the boiler. Bastard.

— Harry

My money's on the very strange man. He probably thought: "this'll alarm him". And he was right.

— Mike

My money's on him, too, if only because he's strange. He comes into the house and stares. It seems I have to tell him how and where to check the alarm system, before he can stop staring and get on with it. He makes me very uncomfortable.

— Harry

Does he stare at you in particular or just things in general?

— Mike

I can't say what he does when he's not in my house, but when he's in my house, he stares at me, as if awaiting instructions.

— Harry

So he was probably caught short and was too socially inept to ask to use your loo, then. If so, he didn't think it through, did he?

— Mike

The detail I found incongruous in Harry's story was that the piss had mold on the top. Now, as someone who has come across old bottles of long-standing piss in the past, and quite honestly who amongst us hasn't, the one thing that doesn't occur, due to the chlorine in the piss, is mold. Can I suggest Harry was mistaken in his assessment of the watery waste, and that before launching unwarranted attacks on honest tradespeople, he should at least have sent the liquid for a full laboratory analysis to determine its exact nature.

— Graham

Chlorine in piss? Ammonia more likely.

— Ian (the failed chemist)

I think that's more likely. Chlorine would be good in a way, though, 'cos it would be self-bleaching, with all the attendant benefits.

— Mike

And they wouldn't have to add it to swimming pools because we all piss in them anyway. God, the intelligent designer, didn't really think the piss thing through properly, did he?

— Graham

Plus, it would probably prevent urinary tract infections. He probably left this bit of the design process to some lowly sub-angel who had also failed his chemistry, like Ian.

— Mike

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No, Ian's not a sub-angel.

—Harry

An interesting point, Graham. Were your bottles of piss (I've never had any of my own) closed? Or were they open to the air, ready to receive airborne yeasts, like Trappist beer? I confess I might be wrong about the mold, however. I didn't get too close to look inside — the smell was pretty damn strong — so it might have been simply scum. The bloke who did it is.

—Harry

He might have been ill, and simply had to go that very second. Besides, it could be worse. Samuel Pepys dropped a turd in a tankard of ale once.

—Uncle Johnny

Samuel Pepys
Knew both weirdos and creeps,
But crapping in their ale
Is a bit beyond the pale.

—Mike

Have you tried telling him, "Do not piss in the watering can?"

—Frank

Oh my, Frank. That's much too direct and would risk insulting the person or persons unknown who have crept into Harry's garden shed to clandestinely relieve themselves. Matters of this sort must be handled with the utmost discretion and good taste, and a bit of elegance would not go unappreciated as well. I would suggest that instead of rudely accosting all of his visitors with such instructions that a small and very tasteful brass plate

be affixed to the side of Harry's watering can that reads something like:

"In order to promote the pleasurable employment of hygienic home gardening practices, the management of this estate respectfully requests that all visitors should kindly refrain from relieving themselves in this watering can. Alternate facilities of a clean and pleasant nature that have been specifically designated for this purpose, have been established elsewhere on the grounds, and may be easily located upon application to the estate owner. We greatly appreciate your cooperation in this matter and would like to express our most sincere hope that your next micturition experience should be a pleasant one. (signed) H. Bell & Co., Prop."

I think that should fix the problem rather nicely, don't you? And assuming that no one ruptures their bladder while reading the message, propriety is assured.

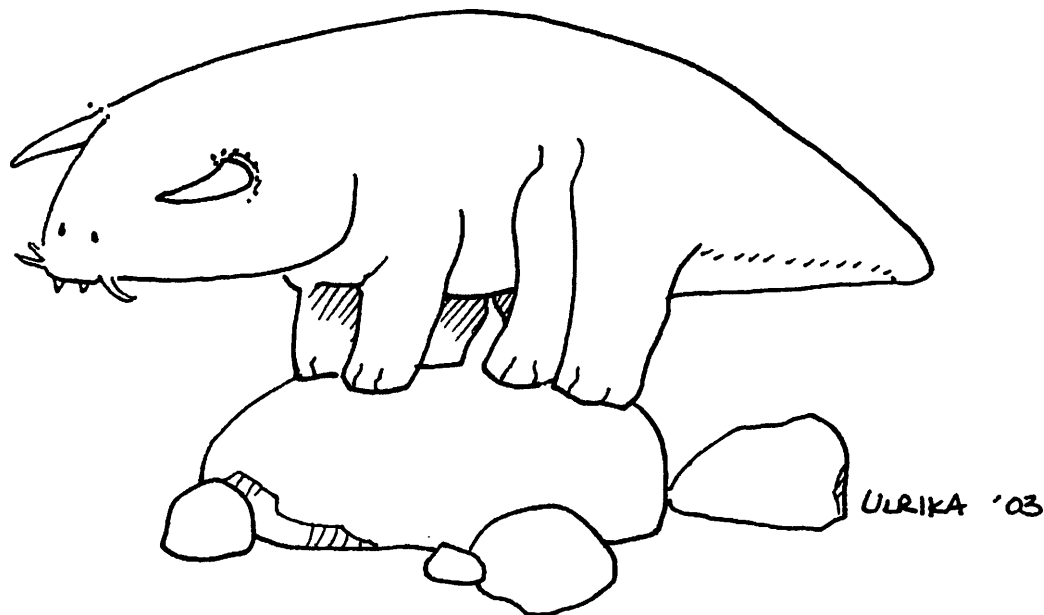
Whatever did you folks do before I came along to solve these little problems for you?

—Curt

He's not due back until next year, but I'll try to remember for then. Of course, if he makes a habit of it, he might have been fired.

—Harry

Well, if you want to leave a true impression on the incontinent little fellow, there's another tack you could take. See if you can find an old air raid siren (perhaps from a local military surplus store?) and some flashing red lights. Affix these atop your gardening shed and build a sort of false roof to camouflage their installation. Then, run the wires to a non-interruptible power source of some kind



(with a bit of care you could probably splice them into your home wiring somewhere) but run one side of the wiring to the floor of your shed. Cut the wire (only one lead, mind you) and strip about an inch of insulation from each cut end. (Did I mention that you should turn off the power before you work with those cut wires? That's important...)

Turn your watering can upside down and drill two small holes at each end of the bottom of the can. Run one bare wire into each hole, seal the holes around the wires with a bit of wax, and return the can to an upright position on the floor of the shed and in a location that one might wish to find it if one were to enter that shed for the purpose of micturition. Carefully rake gravel or dirt over any wires that might be visible. (If your shed happens to have a concrete floor it may be necessary to remove it with heavy construction equipment or dynamite and then bring in a load of gravel or dirt.) Leave the door to the shed noticeably ajar. Then restore the power to the line and wait.

When your impatient visitor enters the shed to relieve himself, the liquid urine will cover the bottom of the watering can and — since urine conducts electricity (don't ask me how I know that) — the rising urine will close the electrical circuit thus activating the air-raid siren and flashing lights and alerting you to the fact of micturition in progress. With a bit of luck, the stream of urine entering the watering can will remain uninterrupted long enough to allow the electrical current to travel *up* the stream of urine and thus give your visitor an absolutely unforgettable experience, and quite possibly making it impossible for him to ever again relieve himself in any normal fashion without medical assistance.

I don't think you'll have any further bother about unpleasant surprises in your watering can after that, though it may become quite a bit more difficult for you to hire anyone do any kind of work at your home from that point on. A small price to pay, says I...

— Curt

It might be somewhat difficult to use the watering can afterwards.

— Pat

I imagine that the police will have taken it away for evidence after the first victim is found, so you'd have to buy a new watering can anyway...

— Curt

"First" victim?

— Pat

The first one with a burnt wiener.

— Rob

Well after all, Pat, defouling the watering can is only where the problem *starts*. Does Harry have a birdbath in his garden? We'd *have* to protect that too, wouldn't we? Think of all the Blue Tits in Harry's garden that need looking after. And what about the ornamental fountain? (Surely Harry has an ornamental fountain in his garden — and if not I think we should take up a subscription and build him one as a nice surprise. I'll contribute two bricks.) I have contingency plans to protect the integrity for each of these circumstances and many others besides.

My plan for the fountain involves several electric motors and a trebuchet so I may need the assistance of Bill Burns to properly install that one, but now that we're turning the massed Engineering Talent of All Fandom to the problem of protecting Harry's garden, I feel quite certain that no one will ever again dare to take a whizz within miles of his home by the time we're through. In fact, Harry might have to start making periodic trips to the pub down the road several times a day just to use their facilities. But he'll have the cleanest watering can in the entire British Isles to gaze at fondly, and that's worth something, isn't it?

— Curt

And if enough people contribute enough bricks we can build the Tucker Hotel as an annex to the ornamental fountain. Or, at least, as an annex to the birdbath.

— Marty

Curt, old fella, don't you think that might be taking it just a teensy weensy bit too far?

— Pat

It was the part about Harry having to trek down to the local pub several times a day, wasn't it? I *thought* that might be asking a bit much...

— Curt

But talking about protecting Harry's garden, what's your plan for combating rodents?

— Pat

That's easy! All Harry has to do is schedule a week-end convention to be held at his house. The rodents will read the announcement in *Plokta* or one of the other fine fannish news venues, and will immediately realize that the hoard of fans about to descend on the place will devour every crumb of food for miles around, and they'll sigh, pack their little bags, and decamp for greener pastures. My guess is that they'll head for Haverfordwest,

Pembrokeshire — but that's just a guess, mind you. I have no particular inside knowledge of the thinking of British Rat Fandom ...

—Curt

Jeeze, Curt! I thought your previous solution was elegant, but this one is *diabolical*. You're clearly in the wrong line of work. Your head should be harvested and

placed in a jar at one of those think tanks, where you can spend all day every day thinking up ideas like this. And I mean that both admiringly and sincerely, I'm pretty sure.

—Ted

I didn't even get to the part where Harry has to buy night vision goggles and a diving suit ...

—Curt

Nights of Thunder

Above everything else, it's the noise that overwhelms you. The noise of 43 perfectly-tuned NASCAR engines roaring and screaming their way around the half-mile, high-banked oval track while 130,000 highly charged race fans scream their approval. It not only fills all five of your normal senses, it takes hold of your body and shakes every muscle and every nerve until you come to feel that you and the cars and the 130,000 fans and the lights and the track are all welded together into one supercharged life form that might achieve escape velocity at any moment and hurl itself right off the planet. This is NASCAR racing at the Bristol Motor Speedway and at this track it's all flat out, all the way. I wasn't a race fan before I worked the ambulance crew there at the race last fall, but now? Let me tell you about how I came to be quite literally in the middle of that night of thunder ...

I had joined the local volunteer Fire Department in the winter of 1996 and after several months the pace of activity there had settled into something of a routine for me. My Department serves a largely rural part of the county and the more widely distributed population base means that we usually answer one or two emergency calls each night. In between times we stay at the fire hall, training and maintaining equipment, and I get to hear a lot of stories about the calls my more experienced comrades have worked in the past. Many of them have previously worked with rescue squads in larger cities and often describe running eight or ten, even twelve EMS (Emergency Medical Services) calls per shift. Thinking that it might be good for me to get some big-city experience too, I went to the Bristol Life Saving Crew last fall and signed up as a volunteer. The pace was a lot faster with the crew. My first night with them I ran seven calls and the second night we ran nine calls—a couple of them rather messy

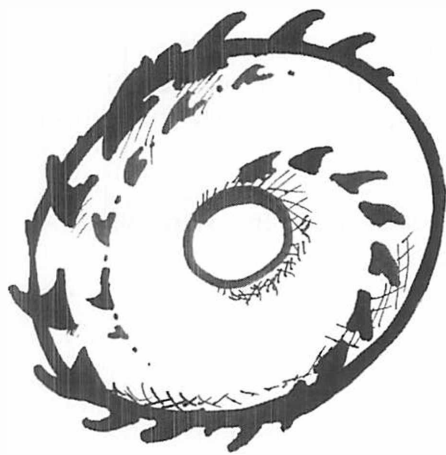
ones—and didn't get a chance to come back to the station until the end of our shift twelve hours later. I'll have to tell you about some of those calls sometime.

Bristol happens to be the home of the Bristol Motor Speedway. It's one of the oldest racetracks on the NASCAR circuit and is unique for its half-mile oval track with curves so steeply banked you can't walk up the surface of them without stooping over in a half crawl. It's just like a giant Hot Wheels race track. The drivers love it because it's so different from the bigger tracks like Daytona or Charlotte. The fans love it because unlike the bigger tracks, there's not a seat in the house where you can't see everything that goes on, and with 43 cars crowding onto that track there's a lot going on. Wrecks happen fast and often, and the drivers that race on the NASCAR circuit aren't the least bit afraid to risk scraping the paint off their cars. All 43 of them will gladly tell you they each came there to win.

Forty-three drivers and 130,000 fans means a lot of work for EMS workers, and about 200 EMTs, paramedics, and firefighters were recruited from area agencies to work this race. It just so happened that my crew had the assignment to work inside the track itself, thus serving the drivers, their crews, and the relatively few fans able to acquire pit passes. This seemed to me to be a lot more fun than dealing with the 130,000 fans up in the bleachers all day, so I signed up to work the race with the crew.

Our day started at five o'clock that morning when we reported to the crew hall to get our assignments. As

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CLRIKA '03

I arrived a medivac helicopter was just landing in the parking lot next door. It turned out that the race track had leased the copter, so as to cut down transport time in the event of an emergency with one of the drivers or fans, and we were to provide the flight crew. Watching it fly out to the track a bit later I reflected that with our own helicopter we must have every base covered. Since I had a certification to drive the largest emergency vehicles (most of the crew didn't have that, but as a firefighter I did) my assignment was to drive the Disaster Truck. That sounded pretty exciting until I got my first look at it; the Disaster Truck is actually a retired Pepsi-Cola delivery truck that was donated to us after it became too expensive for the local Pepsi plant to maintain. It now contained three complete army-style field triage hospitals all carefully stuffed into its cavernous rear end. It drove like a lump of mud, and as I rocketed down the highway at a blazing 25 miles per hour, I wondered if it had been christened "Disaster Truck" before or after Pepsi gave it away.

I did arrive in time for the safety lecture, and after parking the truck under the grandstands I joined it in time to hear some of the basics about dealing with wrecked race cars. The first thing to keep in mind is that they get hot. Real hot. Their motors produce a lot more heat than a regular car and much of it is dispersed into the frame and body of the car itself. The flame retardant suits that the drivers wear is as much to protect them from the normal heat of racing as from the possibility of fire in a crash. In the event of a wreck the crash truck and our ambulance would be the first on the track to respond, and we were warned not to touch the cars with our bare hands (I later found out the hard way that they were indeed that hot). Then we were shown the ways to reach in and quickly release an unconscious driver from the safety harness, to unhook the radio and air conditioning lines from their helmets, and how to pull the driver out through the window while keeping the neck and

spine supported — all this assuming that the fires that often accompany a wreck would let us get close enough. The fuel used in NASCAR is of a higher octane than you or I run in our cars and when it burns it's a bit harder to extinguish (I was to see this for myself later that night).

Another responsibility for the crash crews is to make sure that the master switch in each car is turned off. When there's a wreck, the drivers are going to bail out as quickly as they possibly can and run for the pit walls. The master switch cuts the power to the vehicle, and turning it off reduces the possibility of fire as the car is being towed back to the garage area.

I mentioned earlier that I'm not a race fan; one illustration of this happened a bit later that day. I'd been told that those switches were located in different places in different cars and I thought it might be a good idea to take a look at a few of them. Spotting a car and crew that didn't seem to be too busy, I walked over and asked one of the fellows standing around it if he'd show me where the switch was on that car. He was a tall lanky fellow in his 60s with a big mustache and wrap around sunglasses. He looked at me kind of funny and asked why I wanted to know. Maybe he thought I was thinking of jumping in and trying to take a few laps, but I explained that I was on the crash team and I might have to go out on the track and help rescue a driver in the event of a bad wreck. He grinned at that and said, "Well, we sure want you to know how to do that! Come on with me," and he then gave me a complete tour of the car and showed me all the controls and safety harnesses. He showed me how to quickly remove the steering wheel to allow more room to work on a driver, and gave me some tips about helping a hurt driver out of a car — mostly to let him do it himself as much as possible. This guy seemed to know a lot about racing.

"Are you a driver too?" I asked.

He gave me a long look and a slow grin and said, "I been around the track a time or two. I just own this team now." I thanked him and shook his hand and he walked off, still grinning.

I walked over and had a look at the side of the huge car carrier which housed that particular race team. The carriers are usually decorated with the names of all the sponsors as well as the name of the driver and owner. Turned out that I'd just met Richard Petty, the single most famous driver in NASCAR history. I think I'd have recognized him if he'd been wearing his hat.

Those car carriers are fascinating vehicles in themselves, containing all the tools, spare motors and parts, plus a full kitchen, bath and shower, bunks, all the pit

crew equipment, and everything else that the full race team needs during the two or three days they stay at a track for a race. The back wall of the carrier folds down to become an elevator that lifts the car up to its storage space overhead of the crew section. They usually carry two cars up there to each race—the extra is for when the primary car wrecks during practice or qualifying, but can't be used as a replacement if a crash occurs during the actual race.

They pack the carriers into the infield pretty tightly and those fans lucky enough or with enough pull to get inside the infield spend all day trying to catch a glimpse of their favorite drivers and maybe get an autograph. I'm surprised that they allow fans in there at all since NASCAR fans seem pretty dogged about getting all their various souvenirs autographed.

Like I've said, I'm not a race fan. I was there to do a job and I have to tell you, the drivers just seemed like regular guys to me. I talked to several of them that day and I suppose that because I was wearing the crash team uniform and not hounding them to sign something for me they treated me more like one of their associates. The only driver that I wasn't able to approach freely was Jeff Gordon—one of the hottest names in NASCAR today, but that may not have been his fault. Though wildly successful he seems to be highly unpopular with many fans—when he hit the wall during this race thousands of them stood up and cheered. Gordon actually seemed to have bodyguards with him, and he was whisked out of sight whenever he wasn't needed on track. The only time I saw him that day was at the infield church service held for the drivers and crews Sunday morning. He and his wife sat near the front. I noticed that several other drivers attended as well. Since these same folks travel around to the same races weekend after weekend I imagine they start to feel like a fairly close community after a while. Some of the teams had their children with them and they all played together in the infield.

After the church service I reported in to the field hospital where I'd be working out of most of the day. I was assigned to the lead ambulance when the race started and was to be available in the crew area until then. Even though there were over 1,200 people working or roaming the infield, we only had one non-race related call that day: a woman with one of the teams who got a bit too much sun on that hot August day. It was a different story out in the grandstands. The race started at 7:30 PM, but by noon the stands already seemed full of hot, sunburned race fans. It was quite a sight to stand in the middle of all that and just watch them. The stands were constantly glittering with the reflected sunlight off the bottoms of

soft drink and beer cans. There were several accidents: cuts, bee stings, heat exhaustion, and so forth. A few people fell on the stadium stairs and got bruised up a bit. There were a couple of fistfights among drunk race fans, but these were quickly broken up by the Sullivan County Sheriff's deputies who were out in force. There wasn't as much of that sort of disturbance as I would have expected given the circumstances. I later learned that pretty much all the fans understood that any fight for whatever reason would automatically mean arrest and immediate transport out of the track—and so they kept quite well behaved for the most part.

I listened to all this on the track headset radio that all the EMS workers were wearing. Later in the afternoon I listened in to one incident that happened in the stands; a woman approached one of the EMTs out in the grandstands and reported having chest pains. He took her to the grandstand aid station where she was checked out with a heart monitor, and what they saw made them advise her to allow them to take her to the hospital in town immediately and be seen in the ER. She refused. Then they had an ER doctor come out and talk to her and tried for about 30 minutes to get her to change her mind. All she kept saying was, "I paid too much for these tickets and traveled too far to leave here before the race is over," and she still refused to leave. All a doctor or an EMT can do is give advice and offer to help a patient. Any unimpaired adult has the right to refuse any medical treatment, and so the lady went back to her seat and watched the race, even though she had been advised that she seemed to be having a heart attack. Moments after the race ended she was brought back to that same ambulance by those who had been sitting with her. By then she was in severe pain and gasping for breath. Unfortunately at that point the medivac helicopter had just left to transport another patient, and the roads were so congested with outgoing race traffic that it took nearly 45 minutes to get her to the hospital by ambulance. She got to see her race, but she died in the ambulance on the way out of the track.

I knew nothing about that until much later. Out on the track practice had started and we got into positions to respond if one of the cars should happen to crash. Stock car racing evolved from an amateur sport that started back after World War II. Regular production, or "stock", cars were souped up and raced on dirt tracks on weekends by the people who then drove them to work on Monday morning. Today, stock cars still look like regular cars on the outside, but the only real resemblance is in the body style. Inside, everything has been hand-built and fine-tuned to give top performance with minimum weight. There is a seat only for the driver and it's custom designed for him like the seat for an astronaut. The mo-

tors are far more powerful and far louder. When one car starts, it fills the entire stadium with an uncomfortably loud noise. When all 43 are running, you have to have hearing protection or you'll go deaf. I tried slipping my headset off during the race just to see if I could stand it, but the noise was so loud that I honestly thought I'd ruptured my eardrums—they rang for days afterwards. All the race crews were wearing headsets of course; communication was impossible without them.

Race time was getting near. ESPN was broadcasting the race and they had several crews at the track; they even had their own helicopter hovering overhead during the race. There were also three small aircraft flying around towing advertising banners all day long. They'd change them every hour or so, and I was surprised at the ads. (Why would race fans be a good target audience for prefabricated homes, a local video store, and a particular brand of soap?) There were pre-race ceremonies—a parade of NASCAR dignitaries and drivers around the track in convertibles, followed by fifty Harley Davidson motorcycles roaring around the track, each with an American flag flapping from the back. The crowd loved it. Then it was time for the drivers to enter their cars. Our ambulance moved to our position just inside the first turn (where a lot of wrecks usually happened) and the pace car moved out followed by the tightly bunched race cars.

They went around the track at maybe 70 miles per hour while the cars sorted themselves out into their assigned positions. One lap, two laps, three—then suddenly the pace car darted into the pit area and over the radio we heard the race controller shout "Green, green, green!" as the cars leapt forward at top speed. I thought I'd seen them go fast in practice, but that was nothing compared to this.

I'm standing just behind the pit wall not thirty feet from the cars with nothing but air between us, and the pack shoots past me so quickly that I can't turn my head fast enough to watch them go by. The wind pulls at my clothing, and as they pour into the curve I'm showered with bits of hot rubber from the tires as they bite into the rough concrete surface. Momentum pushes the cars up against banked curves so steep that earlier in the day I'd been unable to stand up straight on them. Forty-three cars all pour into a path two lanes wide, all thinking only of getting there first. Blue flame shoots from their exhausts like roaring, thunderous monsters belching fire. The roar as the pack shoots by resonates within my body—it absolutely shakes every part of me inside and out. This is a Hot Wheels fantasy made real.

The first car to drop out is #74—Randy Lajoie. In spite of months of constant work and testing on that car,

some mechanical problem has knocked him out early. The pit crew pushes his car behind the pit wall. Atop his car hauler their friends and family sit and watch the rest of the race but there's no excitement in their faces now. To either side of them other teams watch their cars. Their race is still alive.

There's a wreck at the far end of the track. I can't see it from where I am, but the crowd is on its feet. The yellow caution flag is out and damaged cars begin darting into the pits. Furious work with torn sheet metal, tires changed, gas shot into the tanks, and the cars drop off their jacks and shoot back into the pack. I see a heavily damaged #18 car being pushed behind the wall by its angry, disgusted crew. There are dozens of photographers everywhere, darting about like hawks and shooting hundreds of photos. The pack roars on. The pace is fast and unrelenting. Everything happens so fast and every member of the race teams has to stay focused on their particular jobs. Used tires from the previous pit stops get carefully labeled in chalk and stacked aside. They'll be loaded in trucks after the race and hauled back to the manufacturer, Goodyear, for analysis.

The miles roll by. Or, rather, they roar by—these drivers are intent on what they're doing. Five hundred miles of unrelenting high speed tension. Five hundred laps. Two thousand left hand turns. A crash right in front of me—it happened so fast I didn't see it! Sheet metal is flying through the air, and a large piece skids to a stop at my feet. The wrecked cars slide on around the curve and stop out of my sight—just banged up, no one hurt. Most of the cars are banged up pretty good now, with tire marks from other cars burned into their sides. Swappin' paint, they call it. A few still look pristine, but they're running at the back of the pack. The #88 car—damaged in the last wreck—shoots by with the entire front end missing, but it charges just as hard as any of them. One of my favorites is the #00 car of "Buckshot" Jones. He's already been in two major wrecks and his car is badly chewed up, but he's still right in there racing hard.

Eight laps from the end of the race the inevitable happens. A wreck coming out of Turn 4 piles up at least six cars and damages several others. One car smashes into the outside wall and bursts into flame. The fans sitting on the other side of the fence scatter wildly up the bleachers. As it burns we leap into our ambulance and wait for the fire truck ahead of us to get through the opening in the pit wall. People from the pit area are in our way, photographers mostly, who scramble for a good shot while the car burns.

The red flag comes out—race stopped. Drivers jump out of the other five wrecked cars and scramble for the

pit wall, but the driver of the burning car is still in there. We're sitting there with lights and siren going, but people are still running between us and the track. I hear the track announcer shout over the radio and the track PA system, "Get out of the goddamned way, people!" as track security arrives to shove the people blocking us out of our way. I notice that they aren't very gentle about it either, but they get the job done fast. We enter the track and the driver is finally helped out of the burning car by the firefighters. He's hurt. Another ambulance gets to him first and rushes him to the infield hospital.

Race control comes over the radio and asks us to check all the wrecked cars just to make sure that no one got overlooked in the excitement. Two of us jump out of the ambulance and run to check them. All are empty, but on the third one I notice that the master switch is still on. Leaning in, I learn the hard way just how hot a race car can get. I turn the switch off (thank you Richard Petty) and the wreckers arrive to clear the track. Walking back to the ambulance I pass the car that burned. On an unscorched fender I see the decal of one of its main sponsors: Kingsford—the company that makes barbecue charcoal.

Eight laps to go, and the battered survivors line up for the restart. They've all worked hard just to get here and everyone is still determined to win. Four laps are run under caution and then the pace car shoots into the pits and the cars leap ahead just as hard as at the start. They slam into each other, pushing and shoving like angry snorting bulls trampling anything in their path. One car passes another on the last lap to win. It's over—I am almost numb with the noise and the excitement. I don't even

register who actually won. It seems almost an anticlimax. There's another race in another state next weekend and the crews are already loading up to head back to the shops. Most of them have a lot of rebuilding to do.

Back at the infield hospital, the driver from that burned car has back injuries. He's strapped to a backboard and I help load him in the ambulance to be driven out of the track to the medivac helicopter waiting just outside. As it lifts off the spectator who had complained of chest pains earlier in the day arrives back at the aid station in the grandstands and says, "I'm ready to go to the hospital now." Then she collapses...

We remained on standby for hours while the track emptied and the crews packed up. Since the race ended well after midnight I had assumed that the crews would probably stay till morning, but they packed up and left quickly. The last one was gone within an hour, but the fans lingered far longer. I drove the Disaster Truck back to the station, glad that it hadn't been needed. The roar of the race still pounded in my ears.

It had been an extreme day, but I don't think it had turned me into a race fan. However, there was another race scheduled for Bristol next April, and I realized as I left the track that I intended to be back there in Turn 1, waiting for a crash that I hoped wouldn't happen. Why would I subject myself to such an ordeal again? I can't answer that question even now. The race was an experience that I'd never imagined for myself (and still don't fully understand), but I do know that I like being part of the racing action in the small way that I had been. There'll be more "nights of thunder", and I'll be back.

Spaceships in the Sky

Once, many years ago, I dreamed of spaceships in the sky. No, that's too vague a way to start. I'll try again.

Long ago, when I was a child, I would sometimes go to sleep at night and dream of spaceships in *my* sky. I'm talking about a whole series of actual dreams—whatever dreams might be. I used to think that I knew what dreams were. Then one day I found something that made me realize that I'll never really be sure of what the visions I see in my sleep mean.

I don't know for certain when they started. I may

have been five or six, or possibly even younger. Did I have these dreams as a baby sleeping comfortably in my infant's bed? I suppose I'll never know, but as far back as I can remember until I was about 12 years old I experienced a series of dreams in which I was visited by spaceships. Sometimes it was just one ship, other times there might be two. Each one was very different from each oth-

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er but the same ships would reappear more than once, apparently at random. As the dreams started I would be outside, usually near my childhood home, and later out on the playground of my elementary school, or at some other familiar location. Once in a while I would be out in the woods or in some strange but comfortable place that I'd not been to before. Usually it was daylight in the dreams, but sometimes the skies I saw were night-time skies; the ships would simply cruise across the sky and sail about, usually playfully, seeming to cavort in the air over my head like birds enjoying the warm summer winds. Though all were different in appearance, they shared some common characteristics. They were all 'bulgy' — I'm not sure how else to say it. They were generally roundish (although many were elongated into cylinders) with few sharp edges if any, and seemed to be inflated or perhaps pressurized from within. They usually had windows set in irregular patterns, most had atmospheric fins or obvious control surfaces of some sort (it would be several years later before I understood what control surfaces meant when considering spacecraft, but when I did understand it I realized immediately that my fleet of dream spaceships had them), and they were nearly all brightly colored and well lighted. Some even glowed.

And they all moved around where I was on the ground as though they were watching me just as carefully as I was watching them. They swooped, they dived, they did barrel rolls and long slow sweeps across the sky and once in a while they descended down to nearly where I was and hovered; almost as if they were waiting to see how I would react. If I walked towards them they'd climb back into the sky, so very soon I would just stand and watch them as they moved through my boyhood dreams.

'So what?' I can almost hear you thinking. 'Curt has read science fiction most of his life. It's no wonder that his head is filled with thoughts of spaceships.' True enough — now — but I found my first SF book when I was 11, and I'd been seeing the ships for many years before that. Or you might be thinking that I'd seen *Star Trek* or other SF shows or movies on TV as a kid. I was born in 1959 and so was seven when *Star Trek* premiered in 1966. But I never saw *Star Trek* — not even once — till its third and final season in 1969, and besides, the ships I saw looked nothing like the ships of *Star Trek*. Mine were way cooler.

Or you might be thinking that Curt is just plain crazy. Maybe so, but I'm comfortable with my craziness, and it occurs to me that while other crazy kids had imaginary playmates to entertain their young childhood, I had imaginary spaceships. I'll take that deal any time. If anything, in fact, my lifelong obsession with science fiction may

well have started because of those dreams, in an attempt to understand them better. I've always been a 'hard SF' reader. Did I become oriented that way in an attempt to explore the mysteries of my childhood dreams? For what may have been the same reasons, when I was a teenager I built and flew dozens of model rockets; and many years after my last dream of spaceships I took a job in electronics with a worldwide corporation that built a variety of aircraft, rockets, missiles, and hardware for NASA and the military, and I worked there for the next two decades until the local plant was closed. Was that career decision motivated by the lure of a good job in the sciences, or was that another attempt to touch in some tangible way the reality of craft that sailed the stars? The job, of course, was more drudgework than anything else as many jobs are, and after I accepted that my company was probably never going to branch out into building spaceships I settled down and just worked the years away.

But I haven't even told you the weird part. The truly bizarre and stunning part of the story that has amazed me, confused me, and intrigued me for the last four decades. Because one day, when I was 15 years old, I saw one of my spaceships in the real world. It didn't just *look* like the ships of my dreams, it *was* one of them. Not quite believing my eyes, I moved closer to it, reached out, and touched it. It felt like... paper. It was a page in a book that collected the artwork of a British artist named Chris Foss, and although I *knew* that I had never seen that book or any other artwork by that artist before, I *knew* that spaceship. It was not a ship *like* the ones in my dreams, but the exact same ship! And on the next page was another! And another! I didn't know the artist, yet I somehow knew his spaceships. The impact of what I was seeing rather stunned me. I remember feeling light-headed and even a bit sick to my stomach from the impossibility of my realization. I don't believe in 'paranormal' events at all, yet here was something that I had absolutely no explanation for at all. Still don't.

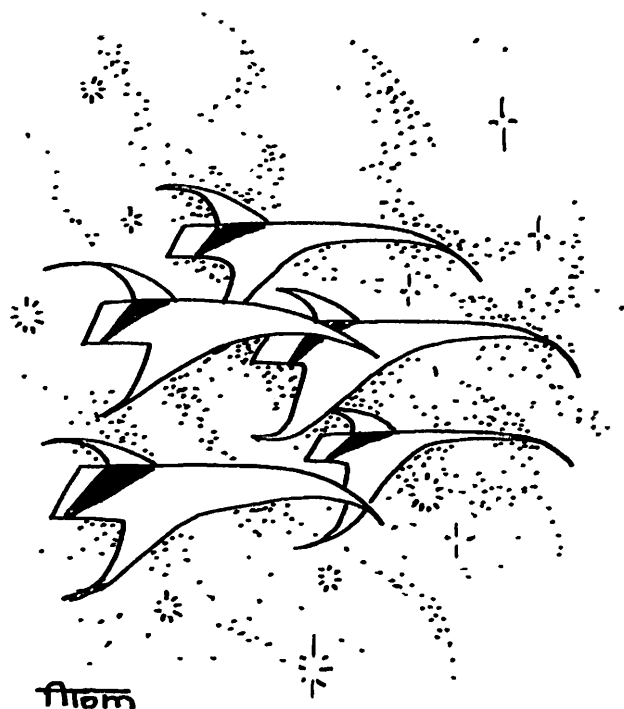
Hang on. It gets a bit stranger.

Chris Foss was — and is — a very accomplished artist and illustrator of SF books, mostly British. And if you go to the Internet and Google the name 'Chris Foss' you'll find a great many websites that showcase his work as well as the best such site: his own*. There you'll find many pages of his vibrant interstellar art, with gallery after gallery of his cover paintings, and many of them will show you the same sort of bulgy, brightly illuminated and totally beautiful spaceships that I saw in my dreams. The trouble is, I apparently dreamed of them years before Foss could possibly have painted them. His

* www.chrisfossart.com

biography states that Foss began creating his SF artwork in the late '60s. But I first saw my nocturnal space fleet long before that—at least as far back as 1964 and then for many years thereafter. I couldn't *possibly* have seen any of the spaceship artwork of Chris Foss before those dreams started, simply because they didn't exist at that time. And I've never to this day even met Foss—who grew up in England, while I grew up in rural south-west Virginia—and so there wouldn't seem to be any possible way that I could have even accidentally have been influenced by his artwork. Even if the timing is years off, it's *possible* that I might have seen some of his earliest published work and forgotten about it, but I doubt it. I have a better memory for science fiction books than for just about anything else. And Foss's work is very distinctive—as I'm sure those of you familiar with his work will agree. I'd have remembered it. His style is quite unique and for a while there in the '70s it seemed as if all British SF paperbacks had a Chris Foss cover. There's never been another SF artist with a style quite like his, either before or since.

Of course, when I was a child and started having those dreams, I didn't realize that the ships looked like anything other than odd spaceships. 'Odd' in that they didn't look like the rockets that NASA was launching, that is. In fact, I never made the connection with Chris Foss until the dreams were long over. The series didn't just fade away; they *stopped* very definitely. I don't know why they stopped any more than I know why they started. Maybe I had somehow gotten all that I needed to get or had learned all that I needed to know from those dreams, or maybe—and this is the thought that still haunts me just a little, even though I'm now decades away from the boy who once saw spaceships in the sky—maybe the ships were finished with *me* and it was just time to go. Was there a test in those dreams? Did I fail it somehow? I don't know, but I remember the final dream just as vividly as I remember going to work this morning. As it opened, I was walking out the back door of a house I'd never seen before, although I felt that it was my own home. It was night, and the stars were brilliant. I sat down on the steps of a wooden deck and looked out into the deep sky. And here they came, all of them; all the ships that had ever sailed in my dreams at night, flying single-file over the mountains behind the house, directly over my head and on into the Southern sky. I can close my eyes and in my mind I can see them still. They sailed slowly at about the pace of a hot-air balloon, and flew majestically; some rolling about their axis, some tumbling like Ferris wheels. They made no sound but were brilliantly illuminated and completely impossible to ignore. They were all cruising by overhead like ships of the line



passing for one last Grand Review and I somehow understood that the ships had gathered to say goodbye to me. I didn't know where they were going, but wherever it was I knew that I couldn't follow. It was the grandest dream I ever had and I woke up blinking at the sunlight streaming in through my bedroom window, and aching with the knowledge that it wasn't real.

Years went by. I was now happily married and raising a family, and had just finished building a house. When I say 'building a house' I mean that I and two other men actually built it, from designs that my wife and I had bought and greatly modified. There was a deck on the back of the house and not long after we'd moved in I walked out through the back door one night and was sitting out on that rear deck just to watch the sky, as I often did. And I happened to look up at the stars at a certain angle—and suddenly my entire world stopped dead in its tracks. I was wide awake and I was sitting on the deck of the house that I'd seen in that dream over 20 years before. It was the same deck, the same house, and the same countryside and mountains surrounding it. It was *the* same place that I'd been to in my dreams at the age of 12.

I had never forgotten those childhood dreams of spaceships in the sky, and I couldn't help myself for what I did next. I got a chair and a blanket and spent most of that night (till about 4 that next morning) on that deck, watching the sky. I think I told my family that I'd heard that there was going to be a meteor shower, but now I've told you the truth. I went back in for a moment around midnight and rigged up my stereo and headphones on a long cord so that I could go back out there and listen to Pink Floyd's *Dark Side of the Moon* as I watched the sky;

and I was very content just to sit out there, waiting for the spaceships. They never came, of course, and about 12 years later we sold that house and moved into town. But I still sit outside at night sometimes and watch the skies.

I've never visited England, but I hope to do so some day. And when I do, I'm hoping I can attend a SF conven-

tion where Chris Foss might also be in attendance, or I might possibly even contact him directly to try to arrange a meeting. You see, I have never in my life asked a writer or an artist the 'where do you get your crazy ideas?' question, but if I ever meet Chris Foss, I'd really like to ask him if *he* ever sits outside at night just to watch the sky. And then I'll ask him what he's hoping to see out there...

Afterword

Many years ago when I was a very young fan and 'twere all farms 'round here, I used to sit in my high school Latin class and daydream about all the incredible things I might someday do in fandom, like publish my own fanzine, become the OE of FAPA, become friends with Elder Fans like Bob Tucker, go to Worldcons, create a hoax fan, become involved in a loud and furious fannish feud, and complete my collection of *The Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction*. That daydreaming is undoubtedly why my grades in Latin class were not, perhaps, as good as they might have been, although I *can* tell you that "omnia Gaulia" is indeed "in trey parte divicia", so Mrs. Pless — my Latin teacher — must have succeeded in shoe-horning a little classical book learning in between my fannish ruminations in spite of my efforts to the contrary. But in none of those self-indulgent daydreams did I ever imagine that there would someday be a collection of some of my fan-writings, or that it would be assembled and edited by some of the most talented and celebrated fans of the modern era. To Claire Brialley and Randy Byers I offer my most humble thanks for producing this fanthology. To Carl Juarez, the behind the scenes mastermind whose graphic design talent makes *Chunga* look incredible issue after issue, thank you for investing that same talent in the present work. To Ulrika O'Brien, with whom I long ago served a tour of duty in a wonderful and much missed apa called Myriad, thank you for the artwork you've contributed. To Steve Stiles (who — if there's any justice in fandom — should be recognized as the master fanartist that he is with a Hugo Award), my thanks for the terrific cover you created for this collection, and to Claire, Randy, Ulrika, Pat Charnock and John Purcell, thank you all for pledging your names and your endorsements to my TAFF campaign as mu nominators.

I have always been blessed with good teachers, good

friends, and incredible luck. All three of those things have played significant roles in creating the volume you are holding in your hands at this moment. In fandom, my teachers have been some of the best and most talented writers that our subculture has ever produced. To name and thank just a few of them, Walt Willis — who, though we never met, taught me through a lifetime of the wittiest fan writing in history that great writing always finds an audience even across oceans and even across time; Lynn Hickman — whom I knew very well indeed and who helped teach me that the true importance of a life in fandom isn't a matter of how many science fiction books and pulp magazines you collect, or the accomplishments you strive for and achieve, but rather the people you become friends with along the way; Rusty Hevelin — the most "at peace" man I've ever met, who showed by example that no trauma and no setback can stop a fellow who decides to never be stopped; and Bob Tucker — my personal choice for the greatest fan of us all — who told me to "never let the truth get in the way of a good story", and who taught me by his style and example that happiness is really just a matter of surrounding yourself with good and happy people, no matter where you find them. These four fans, and perhaps a few others, are as much to blame, er ... to thank for the articles in this collection as is anything that I brought to the party. May you all have such people as these in your lives too. And of course, being fans yourselves, you can.

I have found that being a success in fandom requires a wife, husband, or companion who is at least sympathetic and at best complicit in the peculiar madness that is science fiction fandom. Finding such a person is no easy task and applicants are typically scarce on the ground. In my case this is where improbable and incredible luck came into play when Lizbeth Bailey moved to Abingdon from her native England in 1974, transferred to

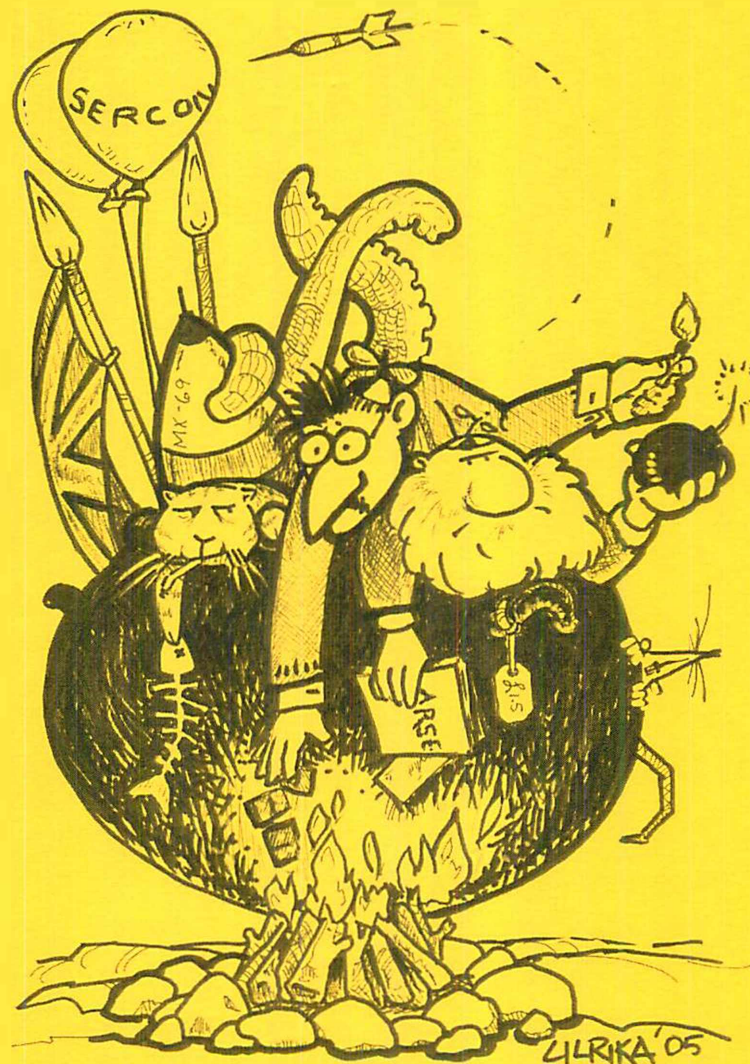
my high school, met me, and decided — after due consideration — to marry me. Why that was a good thing for her is a question that I've never wanted to examine too closely (for obvious reasons) but that it was a good thing for Curt is beyond question. Those who know him best will tell you that Curt Phillips became a much better person after Liz arrived, and better still after daughters Emilysarah and Amanda joined the ongoing adventure. These ladies have made every day of my life feel like a gift. My goal is to never take those gifts for granted. Who could not have a wonderful life with a family such as mine?

The articles in this collection were written over several years for different publications and for different reasons. Some were written because someone published a fanzine so amazing that I wanted very much to become a part of it. Some were written because I had something I wanted to say to someone who'd understand what I meant even if they might not know what I was talking about. Some were written because I wanted to *try* to write something that might be funny in the same way that Walt and Bob

were funny, and at least one was written because what I had inside me hurt so much that I felt I had to write it down before I could sleep that night. None were ever written with the expectation that they were particularly good, or that they would last. *Are they any good?* That's only for you to decide. I just hope that you find something in these bits of my life that might connect with a piece of yours.

Better friends than I deserve have assembled this collection as a promotion for the 2014 Trans-Atlantic Fan Fund, better known as TAFF. It is one of the oldest traditions of this fandom that connects you and me, and in my opinion one of the best. Randy will have told you elsewhere in this volume how to learn more about the history and the current (no matter when you read this) TAFF race, and I hope you'll take his advice and investigate TAFF further. It has been well worth my time, and I suggest that it might be well worth yours too. Irregardless of who you might vote for, please support TAFF itself and *vote!*

— Curt Phillips
Abingdon, VA, 2014



TAFF gives you Happy Feet!



Vote Now!

*For further information or to download a ballot, visit taff.org.uk
or contact one of the current TAFF administrators:*

Europe: Jim Mowatt, 273 The Rowans, Milton, Cambridge, CB24 6ZA, United Kingdom.
Email jim.mowatt@gmail.com.

North America: Jacqueline Monahan, 2991 El Cajon Street, Las Vegas, NV 89169, USA.
Email jaxn8r@msn.com.

Votes must reach the administrators by midnight on 22 April 2014.