# TRAP DOOR


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## DOORWAY


When I wrote of my pleasure and sense of accomplishment in having published two issues in 2016, little did I know that it would be a full two years before I produced the one you're reading. (And my apologies to this issue's contributors for the delay in getting your work in print.)

In that long-ago issue I lamented the meager response to the previous one and how that makes its contributors (and yes, the editor) feel as though their hard work is insufficiently appreciated. I was so pleased that many of you took my words to heart and came through with long and interesting letters – not a mercy LoC in the lot, at least not obviously. The welcome response created something of a conundrum for me. I didn't want to hold back any of the articles already slated in order to make room for this bounty, but neither did I feel right editing the letters so severely that they'd lose their flavor.

But then I decided that after two years the memory of the last issue would have faded somewhat, and that publishing a sample of the most entertaining and perceptive comments would bring them back into focus. I could then devote a good chunk of the space to at least include the mini-articles in LoC's clothing that some of you have delighted me with.

Last time I wrote glowingly of the treatment I was receiving for multiple myeloma. I was then still in the honeymoon phase with a newly approved immunotherapy drug that was

producing good results.

But then, as the treatment continued, some of the key tracking numbers began to slowly edge back up – not to where it had been by any means, but still a source of concern. My oncologist recommended that I go to Los Angeles to consult with his colleague, a well-regarded west coast myeloma specialist.

So…bring on the road trip! But wait…this is Los Angeles we're talking about.

My lead-foot days that in the past took me – stopping only for gas and lunch – from Oakland to Las Vegas for Corflus in twelve hours were long over. This would be Carol's and my first long trip since the Portland Corflu in 2013. That's only a few more miles than the Vegas trip, and we split it into two days. We rented a car for this trip since ours is old, very high mileage, and doesn't have cruise control. I need the latter because the neuropathy in my legs and feet makes long-distance driving a problem.

I wanted to be seen as soon as possible, because my next treatment diet would be based in large part on this doctor's recommendations. The first available appointment was the morning of November 1st, the day after Halloween, so we went for it, ignoring the implications of that sacred holiday. As we neared the city, we learned from traffic reports that a main street (Santa Monica Blvd.) in West Hollywood would be closed for that city's annual Halloween parade. This put much of its usual traffic onto always-crowded, stay-away-if-you-know-what's-good-for-you Sunset Blvd.

We got off the freeway and almost immediately we were in near-total gridlock. For over two hours we crept, inch by inch (Carol suggested getting out to push, just for the exercise) the six miles to our hotel. Most of this was through Beverly Hills, where the street is lined with the extravagant mansions of the rich and famous; it was like taking a slow-motion bus tour but without the dramatic music and hyperbolic narrative. Our original plan had been to unwind in the hotel for a little while and then drive to Canter's on Fairfax for dinner. But with Sunset as described and Santa Monica Blvd. closed and us not savvy enough to improvise another route, we ended up eating an extremely un-Jewish, very late dinner at the hotel restaurant. The local scene did have its moments, though. There were people in costumes milling around, and from the bar screams of joy as the Dodgers won the penultimate game of the World Series over the Houston Astros. (We were glad we were back home the next day, when the Astros took the final game.)

This was our first time in L.A. since around 2006, and we didn't want to miss out on having dinner at Canter's – the Jewish deli of my childhood and Carol's pastrami sandwich fantasy life – just because it was 6 a.m. So we drove there (after a night of sketchy sleep) when the traffic on Sunset was not yet maniacally awake. The place was exactly the same except for the prices. I had half a pastrami sandwich, a bowl of matzo ball soup, a side of cole slaw, and lots of coffee. Carol is never hungry early in the morning – she ordered a toasted English muffin and watched me pack away the calories.

The traffic was again clogged and maddening as we drove to the appointment, but the news from the specialist was good. He said I should continue with my existing treatment, but recommended adding a supplemental steroid to give it a boost. Most significantly, he said that "my kind" of myeloma – the kind that's preceded by years of its benign precursor MGUS ("monoclonal gammopathy of undetermined significance," believe it or not) – has a good track record for longer than average survival.

That bit of new information buoyed our spirits for the long trip home. I began taking the steroid immediately, and it soon brought that main tracking number back down to a lower range. And it stayed that way for almost all of 2018.

But no myeloma drug works forever and, sure enough, the numbers began inching upward this fall. For the time being we hang on

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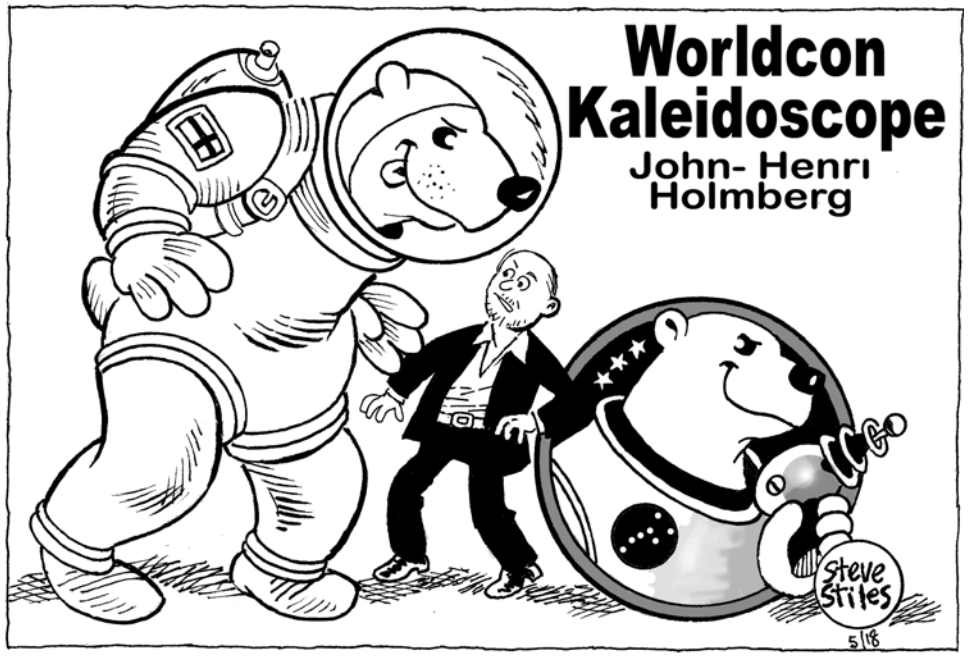



"Hello, John-Henri, welcome," Jukka says at the Mayor's reception. It's not Jukka the convention chairman who says this, not the huge, massive, immensely strong Jukka who cheerfully stomps around on stage dressed as a troll and a Santa and a creature, his fists large as hams; it's just one of all the other Jukkas on the convention committee. This particular one is the tall and slim Jukka you have to look up to in order to look at. "Here is your Finn," he adds and disappears.

My Finn is Pia, who will turn out to be my living GPS throughout the convention. She gives me my special cell phone with direct-dial numbers for a number of Jukkas and for her. So at any time of the day or night I can call for rescue or get answers to questions or be convinced to stay if the urge to escape happens to overcome me. But most of all, I suspect with growing conviction as the days pass, because it has a built-in tracer that always tells Pia exactly where I am, so that wherever I happen to be she can turn up at my shoulder and firmly but kindly point out that in seven minutes I am supposed to be somewhere else, and would I please follow her right now.

"I'll always want a Finn of my own," Walter Jon Williams says in the hotel lobby five days later when we're the last ones sitting, mainly because neither one of us has the energy left either to stand or to get up to our rooms but also because there probably still remains an undrunk minibottle from the minibars in our rooms somewhere in the mess covering the table. The hotel bar closed three hours ago and everyone else has disappeared. Is the convention truly over now? The convention is truly over now. We improvise a modern version of the old Tucker Hotel, the one Bob Tucker envisioned in the Fifties, when fans were poor and so a hotel running a perennial convention ought to travel around to pick them up. It was in order to build this that fans began mailing bricks to Tucker. The new version Walter and I discuss should, we decide, be named The Wilson Tucker Memorial Assisted Partying and Convention Hotel. The zestful fandom of Tucker's yore has been replaced by one

shuffling around behind walkers; what's needed is a facility where staff will if need be carry attendants to panels and bars. All staff, of course, must be Finns; without a Pia of their own, no one could possibly find the next lecture hall.

"Hi, we should have a drink, though not right now, I have a panel." John Clute this time. "How about in an hour?" "Sorry," I say, "I have a panel in an hour. A bit later." John nods and runs off. I've always been enthralled by his vocabulary. Who else can write so intricately about even a run-of-the-mill effort by A. Bertram Chandler that hardly anyone will understand his review? Who else could portray the natives of Helsinki the way he does, in terms forcing the reader to rush to his Oxford Unabridged before, reassured, deciding that John's characterization seems quite reasonable: "Was struck by a powerful sense that – though many of them are Christian, members of that monotheistic religion which has been uttering its diktats for so many centuries at us – so many Finns do not have physiognomies that easily express the sans serif monotheist gaze of the Christian right, who have always been so good at detecting sex offences in others. No wonder they were despised for being uncleanly chthonic before they made themselves into a nation a century or so ago. Because although they may be sinners, they don't have the glare."

Pia materializes at my shoulder. "Time for your next program," she says. "Follow me." The first panel of the convention, or at least my first: "Fantasies of Free Movement," with Nial Harrison, Nicholas Whyte and Rosanne Rabinowitz; Teresa Romero isn't here yet. The discussion feels slightly off key since one of us wants to talk only about Mohsin Hamid's novel *Exit West*, another prefers to talk about Dave Hutchinson's "Fractured Europe" trilogy, and I'd like to talk about the science fiction dream of endless frontiers and exodus to far worlds. We compromise and mainly talk about *Exit West*, which someone thinks is sf, someone else thinks is fantasy, and I think is a metaphorical mainstream novel with some magical realism thrown in, mainly to help the author exclude those parts of mass migration he feels are unimportant to his theme. I do manage to sneak in a minor piece of sf prescience: in Asimov's "Mother Earth," from 1949, parts of humanity have moved out into the rest of the solar system and apply strict immigration rules on those still living on Earth who want to leave their planet, since the spacers view them as ignorant, reactionary, and with little knowledge or expertise to contribute. Oh well. Huge audience, huge applause, so far one writeup on the net, but that one unintelligible to all panelists as it's in Finnish. So it goes.

This was early Wednesday morning, before even the opening ceremony. Interesting to have conventions going full swing before they're opened. I'm late for the Tuesday evening mayor's reception since the tram tracks through central Helsinki are being worked and we get stuck in traffic for half an hour. It doesn't matter. The mayor had something more important to do and sent a vice-mayor, and once there many of the guests find that the paper plates will bend when you hang your wine glass by the little plastic thing provided for this particular purpose. The cheerful tinkle of broken glass is heard from all over the huge room and I suspect that fans will forever be viewed as uncouth louts who can't hold their wine in Helsinki City Hall. Back to the Holiday Inn, a Lego rectangle added to one side of the concrete basin exhibition center. The bar serves an okay hamburger and tomorrow the con starts. You could always sleep. On the other hand, you can also sit in the bar and check whether anyone else turns up. Nobody I know turns up. On the third hand, nobody has gotten a badge to wear as yet, so how could anyone recognize anyone else? Nobody looks as we all did at NYCon III. By one in the morning I've read my mail and it's probably time to sleep.

It's funny that later speakers will usually refer back to what whoever happened to speak first has talked about. The convention solemnly, or perhaps quixotically exotically, opens with Finnish folk dances and folk singing and big Jukka stomping around on stage as a mythological being. Perhaps the badly behaved Jörö-Jukka, or even the fearful Unijukka. Those are in-jokes for Finns and I don't understand them either, so not to worry. Later on, when he returns as Santa, the guests of honor are introduced and expected to say something. I say something about my first world convention, which I realize with a feeling of monumental disbelief happened fifty years ago. Nalo Hopkinson says something about her first worldcon and Walter Jon Williams adds something about his. We seem to be in complete and touching agreement that this one will be great and that we're grateful and honored to have been invited. The audience expresses little surprise at this. Jukka bangs his gavel on a piece of Finnish wood and the convention starts.

For the TAFF/GUFF auction, someone has donated a stack of old fanzines and in the pile Murray Moore has found an essay of mine, on Le Guin's *The Left Hand of Darkness* and published in BSFA's *Vector*. He asks me to sign it for whoever will buy it. I ask him if I've made a fool of myself in it, since I have no idea of what I may have written back in 1969. He says that there's no reason for me to feel ashamed of it. So I write, "Hope I haven't made a fool of myself, and best wishes." Murray is indignant and points out that he's already vouched for the text being okay. But I intend to remain worried until I've reread the thing, which I'll probably never be able to find in the mountain of fanzines filling my attic. A day or two later, and more cheerful, he announces that someone at the auction seems to have paid 85 Euros for the essay. I should have brought a piece of that mountain along.

I say hello to Erle Korshak. In a little over a month he will be 94. Perhaps I'll be at the 100th worldcon after all. Erle's name is actually Melvin. He attended the first worldcon in 1939. Afterwards he co-chaired the second one, ran Shasta Publishers, had a mundane career in law and business and returned to conventions in the Eighties. I suspect he is the only NYCon member left, now that Dave Kyle is gone.

Pia appears at my shoulder in a puff of smoke. "Time for your next program item," she says. "Follow me." I have no idea of where I am or where I'm going to. A GPS is handy. Before we had them, we had to know where we were, how the place we traveled through was laid out and where to go. Now we're blind hens in an unfathomable labyrinth. Everywhere a mass of humans swells through corridors, up and down stairways, out of and in through doorways. Pia plows the hordes and I follow meekly in her wake. I tell her that I've realized that my phone has a tracer so that she'll know where to find me. "Of course," she says, but with a sly grin that actually admits to nothing. Is she putting me on? Or did I she just one-up my feeble joke?

Handing out Hugos takes forever. First rehearsals, then the pre-Hugos cocktail party, then the actual Hugos. The committee has kindly told me that of course nothing can be disclosed before the actual ceremony, but I shouldn't worry about possibly having to give a Hugo to that Nemesis of science fiction, Theodore Beale. I manage to jumble the envelopes and start by opening the one disclosing the winner of the category after the one I'm presenting, which is "editor, long form" or, as we used to call it back in the day, book editor. On the other hand, the winner, Liz Gorisky at Tor Books, is so nervous that she forgets to accept her Hugo when I try to hand it to her. Instead, she walks off to give her thanks and I stage whisper that if she doesn't want her rocket, I'd be happy to keep it. So she turns and pinches it.

And on the third hand, the next presenter, astronaut Kjell Lindgren, manages a great catch and tells the audience that he has always dreamed of getting to open a Hugo winner envelope, and this time almost got to do it. A nice guy, with an enviable career. Sobbing on the balcony at ten, reading Heinlein's *The Man Who Sold the Moon*, I

too dreamed of space but got stuck with a bunch of stencils and my typewriter. To the con, Lindgren has brought along the dust jacket from the copy of Joe Haldeman's *The Forever War* he took along for his 141 days in space, and gave it to Joe as well as a NASA affidavit stating that the cover has indeed spent time on the ISS.

During the panel on feminism in science fiction, someone in the audience makes a complaint. The panel quickly deteriorated into a listing of authors' names and story titles, since people actually asked for tips on things to read. Sheila Williams unwisely suggested John Varley's 1977 first novel *The Opiuchi Hotline*, since it's one of the first sf novels at length discussing gender changes, cloning, and DNA body modifications. A transgendered listener stands up, claims to feel uncomfortable with this and points out that it's obvious from the novel that Varley has no real knowledge of the specific problems and circumstances of transgendered. Sheila apologizes but hints that few people forty years ago knew much about the specifics of transgender problems and that Varley after all was unusually radical in even raising the issue. The rest of the panel mumbles agreement and moves on. I suggest re-reading C. L. Moore's "No Woman Born," a story that has usually been misread as a warning that cybernetics might strip us of our humanity, while I believe the clue to the story is in the fact that it's told by one of the men surrounding Deirdre, and that it is his perception that her refusal to accept his and her other male advisor's suggestion to give up her career means that she is no longer a "real" woman. Afterwards some of us wonder about how little it takes to make someone feel offended.

I was asked to give a presentation. Ghod knows what to present. A desultory audience of perhaps fifty or sixty fans have turned up. I am not what you might call an international celebrity, having written a number of books about science fiction in Swedish. Oh well. Time to gird one's loins and enter the fray. I tell them that I'll use my hour to talk on two subjects: fandom and science fiction. So I do. While I do so, a few people leave, some others enter. I suspect the sum total remains around the same.

Fandom, I believe, was the happy or unhappy result of a very small window of opportunity: Gernsback's *Amazing* appeared more or less at a time when the majority of Americans had still not accepted nor adjusted to technological and social change as a constant, and so in many cases their children encompassed a world view shared neither by their parents nor their peers. Consequently they tried to find others with whom to communicate, and found them through the letter columns of early sf magazines. Fandom was born, and carried on as outcasts and objects of pity for more than forty years, until the gradual commercial success of science fiction in popular media, starting with *Star Trek* and accelerating with *Star Wars*, made fandom redundant: no longer did pimpled youths reading Asimov or Heinlein have to resort to correspondence to find someone who would listen to their speculations on time machines, alternate universes or faster than light travel, since these were now as acceptable to their schoolmates as the best ways to serially murder coeds or the latest baseball scores. And so fandom sinks into oblivion when the last of us mimeo publishers perish.

As for science fiction, my outlook is just as bleak. I quote Barry Malzberg, a dear friend whom I asked for advice on what to say. Barry is perhaps no major harbinger of sweetness and light, but certainly one of truth. The email suggestion he sent said:

"My message to the surviving Disciples (I would not think there are even a dozen now): sf's doom was always central to its very purpose and longing, like Schrödinger's Cat it carried death in life just as it did life in death; it gave us the Century of Technology and Pain but only with a context which showed the fuse burning, burning, and now it is too late; too late for sf which is a husk of decadence and longing, too late for the fiction of 'democracy' and probably too late for the planet. Certainly too late for me who twenty years from now will be long obliterated; too late for all but memories of hope. But we burned, we burned so brightly; we lit flares against the sky, we longed to hear that 'sound beneath the sound' which drew Ruthven of *Corridors* ever forward, ever back, that sound of the engines of the night which embodied our light and our darkness, grinding away, taking us past the passage of the light.

"Tell them. Tell them that. And tell them that at one and two and three and maybe five cents a word we gave them death masked, at times, so brilliantly by life that it could give us glimmerings past the passage of the light."

I try to embroider a bit on this, giving the reasoning behind it: science fiction, a literature of the Enlightenment, based in a secular view of the world, in the supremacy of rationality and in a belief in progress, stands crestfallen in the current surge of irrationality and despair, and is succumbing to the triumph of fantasy, which is wishful thinking in literary form. Science fiction said, wishing won't make it so. Fantasy says, yes it will. How could we prevail? So today, science fiction has retreated. Into media-tie-in nonsense, into space war wish fulfilment, into perhaps slightly more ambitious rewrites of Robert A. Heinlein's 1950s juvenile novels by authors nostalgic for their own youth, and into post-singularity flights of fancy about posthuman protagonists who may entertain but who have little to contribute to those of us who still inhabit our mortal coils and look to literature to tell us what it means to be human.

Applause is, to put it bluntly, mild and scattered. Oh well. Harbingers of doom have never been particularly popular. John Clute rushed by, face gleaming with the rapture of a panelist in heat. "We must have a drink," I think he said, "but not now."

This issue of offensiveness turns up again at breakfast. I subject Ginjer Buchanan and John R. Douglas to some of my fears of identity politics and the notion of cultural expropriation. If drawn to their logical conclusion, they would lead to each one of us being able to write a single book: our autobiography. But nothing else. And even in our autobiographies, we must be careful to note that of course we can say nothing definitive about any of the other persons who may be mentioned in the book, their motivations, objectives, or feelings. Though apart from this, breakfasts at the Helsinki Messukeskus Holiday Inn are pretty okay. Nowadays, after a few too many newspaper reports about pigs living in their own filth and being scalded to death in Danish and Swedish ham factories, I have given up bacon entirely and eat scrambled eggs and sliced turkey, not that I expect the poor bird to have led a much more enjoyable life. Pigs are smarter than dogs, but quite a few birds seem to be as smart as pigs, and I'm sadly convinced that the difference between human and animal intelligence is only quantitative, not qualitative. Simak used to say that in a materialistic universe without gods, life and intelligence were the only primary values; I suspect that just as Freeman Dyson did a generation later, he may well have viewed the spreading of and respect for life in the universe as the only, and self-appointed task that might give meaning to existence. But regardless of whether Simak thought so or not, I applaud Dyson's view; it feels like a reasonable task to undertake as that work which Camus in his *The Myth of Sisyphos* suggests as the only response to the fundamental meaninglessness of being. And if so, why not start by behaving as decently as possible to our close relatives here on Earth? Nobody who has spent any length of time with cats could seriously claim that they are just automatons responding instinctively to stimuli. If they were, poor Cissi would have understood that all the doors and windows in our house lead to the same insides, a fact that Beatrice understood perfectly from the first time she ever set paw outside, and which grumpy Ludwig is also aware of, though like Petronius Arbiter he retains a naïve hope that during winter, at least one of the doors might lead to summer.

Crystal introduces me to Ted Chiang and Fia, the current future hope of Swedish fandom, is all over the place and gets an award for work above and beyond and Moshe Feder and Lise Eisenberg are standing by the lifts and we hug and grin and behave like you do when you meet friends you've known for decades but see too seldom. Randomly I meet them repeatedly throughout the rest of the convention; Moshe tells me that wherever he turns, I happen to be there, and he's not less impressive himself; wherever I turn, there he happens to be. I'm happy for that; there are much worse alternatives, and too many of those I've spent most of the conventions I've been to with are not at this one, in a few hopeful cases because of distance, other commitments, illness, dislike of worldcons, or cost, in many more disastrously because they will never again attend a convention or are gone forever. Spending your life in fandom is constant loss. With an almost invisible flash of lightning and a whispered SHAZAM! Pia appears beside me. "Time for your next program," she says. "Follow me." John Clute rushes past. "Hi, we should have a drink, though not right now, I have a panel," he shouts. "So do I," I reply. "Later." Followed by an hour of indeterminate talk about science fiction in the Nordic countries. Flemming Rasch is a nice Dane who looks much like several other nice Danes: unruly beard and unruly hair, soft-spoken and interested in the 1950s Danish sf pioneer Niels E. Nielsen. Jerry Määttä, a Swedish academic, this time is Jerry Määttä the lecturer and probably in vain begins to explain the complex publishing history of Harry Martinson's epic 1956 sf poem *Aniara*. The audience seems to consist of mainly Nordic fans who probably know considerably more about Nordic sf than we tell them during the chaotic panel, which is obviously misconstrued to start with: there is no one from Norway but two from Sweden, nobody who knows what if anything has happened in Iceland, nobody who knows Finnish. I manage to mention a couple of Norwegian authors and the fact that sixty years ago there actually was a Norwegian edition of *Galaxy*, lasting about five issues. The panel on "Reading as a Child vs. as an Adult" is at least as chaotic, since it turns out that two of the panelists understand the subject to be how today's young readers react to the stuff that turned oldpharts like us into fans a lifetime ago, while the other two think we should talk about how we react when rereading the stuff we remember liking as kids. Regardless, we arrive at the conclusion that Heinlein probably holds up fairly well while Asimov probably doesn't and Captain Future never did. These are insights that seem to have recurred periodically throughout the last few decades. The audience seems very mildly impressed. "Hi, we should have a drink, though not right now, I have a panel," John Clute tells me afterward. "Let's try later," I suggest.

Outside the hall, I meet Roger Wilson, who is there to interview me for Swedish public radio, which devotes an impressive almost half hour to the convention. For once a sympathetic journalist with a positive view on what we do and who actually stresses that the convention is primarily devoted to literature, not to dressing up as *Star Wars* characters, and that it actually is part of a do-it-yourself fan tradition going back to the 1930s, not a commercial fair where you stand in line for hours to buy absurdly priced autographs from bit players in 1970s TV shows. The program when aired turns out nicely, though it's still obvious that fans are enigmatic to people living in the outside world. The announcement states, "Our cultural reporter Roger Wilson attends Worldcon in Helsinki – the annual convention of the World Science Fiction Society." Oh well. How do you explain, in a minute or less, that in order for us to look adjusted to the rest of society George Nims Raybin set up a fictitious world organization to fictitiously arrange world conventions? Viewed from the outside, it does look as if we were all members of an international organization with a board of directors and some kind of actual existence. Which of course was just what it was supposed to look like.

I'm not faced by that particular discussion in my next interview, with Kristina Lindh from the Swedish literary *Vi läser*, which translates as "We Read." Instead she wants to talk about what the point to sf is, what it is and why, perhaps even a little bit about why it's always been viewed askance in Sweden. We talk for a couple of hours, then suddenly time stops in the bar and Pia appears by my shoulder, invisible to all the others sitting there frozen in time with their glasses halfway lifted. "Time for your next program," she says. "Follow me." I follow meekly.

But can't help thinking that times actually have changed a bit. I remember the first time I was interviewed at an sf convention, the one in Malmoe and Lund in 1965. I was fifteen, and a tabloid journalist appeared, took a photo of me and two friends, Norwegian fan Per G. Olsen, who became an editor and author, died last year, and whose name rolled by on the screen when we commemorated our lost before the Hugos, and convention chairman Leif Andersson, a graduate astronomy student who was 21 and later became an astronomer at the Lunar & Planetary Laboratory in Tucson, mapped the far side of the moon in NASA's *Catalogue of Lunar Nomenclature*, died from lymphatic cancer at 35 and had a crater on the moon named for him, and interviewed us. She seemed sympathetic as well, and we chatted for a while about sf and fandom, and next day our picture appeared in the paper: we are standing in front of the Lund observatory, and the caption reads, "Most flying saucer aliens are green and arrive from Mars, says astrologer Leif Andersson, Lund. But there are also a few red ones from Venus, adds student John-Henri Holmberg, Stockholm." Those were the days when it was truly a proud and lonely thing.

Bob Silverberg has put on a ribbon reading "First Worldcon" on his badge. People are kind and giggle. Kindly I mention that Moshe wants to publish his next novel. He snorts. A standing joke; Moshe has asked for Bob's next novel ever since Bob stopped writing novels. I remember Teresa and Patrick Nielsen Hayden from innumerable conventions and from parties at Bill and Mary Burns on Long Island in the early eighties. But perplexingly they are older now, as are so many fans I always think of as in their teens or twenties, just like we all think of ourselves. I take comfort in Bob Silverberg, who looks almost the same at 82 as he did forty years ago in Charlie Brown's garden bubble bathtub. While I listen to Ian Watson's bizarre memories of a convention in Croatia, John Clute rushes by. "Hi, we should have a drink, though not right now, I have a panel." "Sure, I'll be outside at some point later on, maybe," I get in before he is gone.

The expected number of convention attendees has now been surpassed by more than a thousand, and chaos is complete. There is no longer room for anyone inside and I leave with Gay and Joe Haldeman for Keith Kato's chili dinner party. Keith spends a day during most conventions cooking his various chili specialties. One Haldeman-spiced, that most are unable to eat. One mild, that virtually everyone can eat. And most times at least one made from some specialty of the location. In Helsinki, Keith had hoped to cook a reindeer chili, but was unable to get hold of enough reindeer meat until too late – we're talking careful preparations here, not a rush job. The day after cooking, Keith gives his dinner party, this time in a borrowed wooden house a few blocks from the convention. I try the Haldeman variety. Once upon a time I actually used to cook a pretty mean chili myself, but never in larger amounts than when I cooked one for the fifty people fellow fan John Ågren once believed would come to a party he threw a couple of years before he married my sister. Unfortunately only around twenty turned up and a couple of weeks after the party John told me that he had now grown tired of my chili. Keith's chili has just the right burn. Impressive. Then Pia floats up by my side, shrunk to a Tinkerbell size but with a whip-

lash voice. “Time for your next program,” she says. “Follow me.” Along the way I tell her that she really must read Shirley Jackson. Not even during a world convention is it possible to talk only about science fiction. But Jackson, in a way, gives a similar sense of estrangement.

This is an efficient, hands-on convention committee. Overnight most program rooms have been exchanged for larger ones, gophers have been placed as traffic cops in most hallways, and in every staircase signs have been posted: “RIGHT HAND TRAFFIC.” Simple things, perhaps, but they work. Suddenly the crowds flow easily through the conference center, suddenly there is room for those wanting to listen to the programs.

George Martin introduces me to someone as his first Swedish publisher and I introduce Swedish fan Johan Jönsson as my current publisher, since Johan wants to do a small-press book of reprinted essays of mine, and Ian Sales says doggedly that he usually is quite satisfied in publishing himself. Jessica, with whom I did the “How Good Is Heinlein to a New Reader?” dialog at last year’s Swedish national convention, runs past, lost in the crowds, and I tell her that I took an extra “I Grok Heinlein” sticker for her and she says she really wants one, she’s going to join the Heinlein Society. Next time I pass my hotel room I stick it in a pocket, then walk around with it for the rest of the convention since of course I never see her again, but back home I mail it to her. Things like that also happen at world conventions. Actually, come to think of it, things like that are what mostly happen at world conventions. You never find anyone again. Except for John Clute, who rushes past, saying, “Hi, we should have a drink, though not right now, I have a panel,” which is probably as good a summary as any.

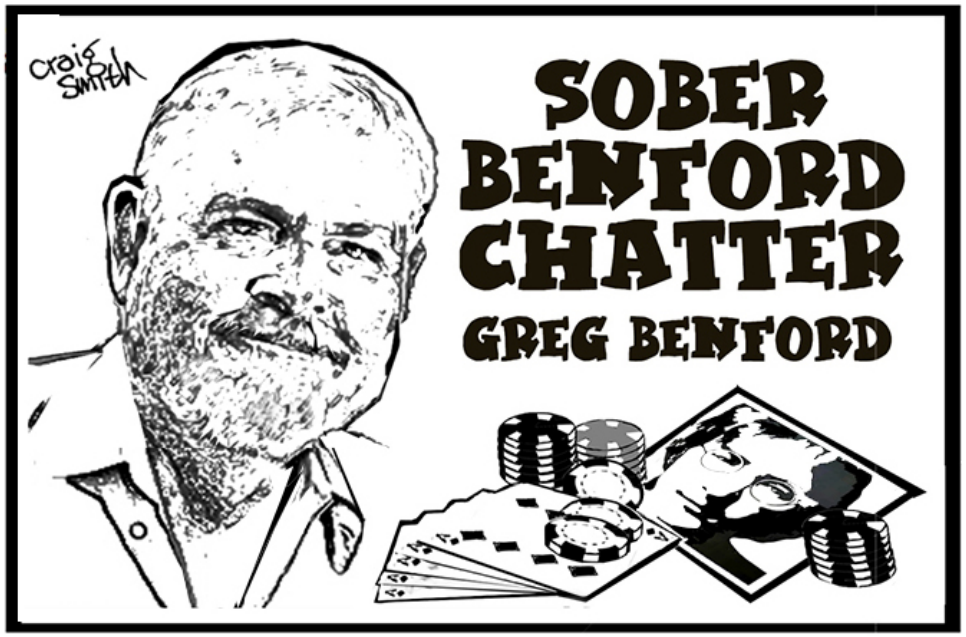
I’ve brought along a copy of my book on cum anthology from the 1950s Swedish sf magazine *Häpna!* for Danish sf scholar Niels Dalgaard, who wanted one, and we take the lift to my room where he gives me a copy of the latest issue of *Proxima*, the semi-prozine he edits, in exchange. Then it’s another night and time for George Martin’s annual Hugo Losers party. It’s been a long time since the tradition began when George and Gardner Dozois both lost at MidAmeriCon and drowned their sorrows in the bar; the parties are no longer held in hotel rooms but in rented bars, this time at the famous Steam Bar in Helsinki where at least 250 people step on each other’s toes while the bartenders work their strange and lovely concoctions and the exquisite canapés disappear at an alarming rate. Giant chairman Jukka appears and is given a silly face mask which he puts on top of his head. “My face is much too big for this silly miniature, which would only cover my nose,” he notes.

Ian Watson looks tired but wants a brandy and the line is virtually endless; when I finally get one for him Christina has told him that it’s time for him to get some sleep and they’re on their way. He stays on for the fifteen minutes it takes him to finish his brandy and talks about Ireland, where the 2019 worldcon will be held to no one’s surprise since nobody else had put in a bid. But the Irish, accustomed for centuries to take nothing for granted, still asked everyone to vote. “You never know, we might lose to None of the above.” Somebody wants to take my picture and I pose, draped round an impressive gilt and silvered statue next to the canapé table, realizing only too late that it’s actually a giant cake and that it’s rubbed off on my jacket sleeve. At least it’s tasty. I tell George he should write more science fiction short stories, and he says he thinks so too, and will, as soon as the Thing is finally finished.

Then Lena Jonsson and Lucy Huntzinger almost have their birthdays and celebrate them together and I get a Cthulhu necklace for each of them from the Wotan smiths working throughout the convention in the plaza outside the conference center, I talk about Heinlein and feminism with Eileen Gunn and later I end up at a bar table with Pavla Oubret who is from the Czech Republic although it’s just changing its name to Czechia, but who lives in Helsinki and wants to talk about differences between countries and how it feels to change to another language in accordance with whom you’re talking to. Pia has actually bought Shirley Jackson’s collection *The Lottery* and begun reading it, and wonders if all of Jackson’s stories just gives you a slice from some larger whole where the reader has to contribute both the beginning and what will happen after. They probably are, come to think of it. The dead dog party, nowadays of course part of the official program at most conventions, is held at a cheaper hotel on the other side of the railway tracks and it turns out that no one has warned the restaurant which consequently doesn’t expect three hundred new guests arriving simultaneously. A few are let in and everyone else is told to wait until other guests leave. We stand around for almost half an hour, a sad little remnant, until we give up and take a cab to another restaurant nobody else has discovered. Around half past ten we go back to Holiday Inn in another cab, but the bar is already closed since nobody had told them that the convention was still around although it was over, and so Walter and I get the contents of our minibars from our rooms and we sit with the others in the lobby, but gradually they give up and disappear. And we’re left, talking about Tucker hotels.

Chris Lotts comes up to apologize for mishandling a negotiation Ralph had promised to take care of for me just before his shocking death. That’s all water under a lot of bridges by now, and I tell Chris not to worry about it and that no apology was called for, but I do miss Ralph, whom I got to know at numerous book fairs in the late Eighties and kept in touch with. An unexpected soul mate with an astonishingly similar reading background: when I was reading *Have Space Suit – Will Travel* on the balcony outside my bedroom in Stockholm and looked teary-eyed at the stars, Ralph was sitting on the fire escape outside his bedroom in the Bronx, reading *Have Space Suit – Will Travel* and sniveling at the stars. We laughed until nearly thrown out of solemn publisher’s dinners in Frankfurt’s Brückenkeller and hung out in bars on Manhattan, and when his Danish subagent told him he would retire Ralph asked me to take over as his subagent for Scandinavia, and I very regretfully declined. But I’ve never been a salesman. Stephen Vessels wants to have our photo taken, and puts his arm around me. That’s okay, though my arms are too short and I can’t reciprocate, but his enthusiasm is volatile. Sometime later I talk to Ali Nouraei about Islamism and current problems in Europe and he is considerably more outspoken than anyone would dare to be in Sweden. I tell him that after the general amnesty granted by a friendly mullah, which promises that jihadists will be excused if in order not to become suspect they dress like westerners, shave off their beards, smoke pot and drink liquor and in general behave like normal people before getting down to killing them, it’s really guys looking like him we should worry about, not the ones with full beards and wearing kaftans. That doesn’t make him more cheerful. On the other hand, he isn’t religious. Somewhere, at some point, Ylva appears in the madding crowd, I run into Mats, later on Bellis and Johan and Carolina and Tomas and Maths and Nicolas and Hans, and it almost feels as cons used to feel even though so many who have always been part of them are missing. Not even Lars-Olov Strandberg is here, who has followed me through life ever since the first time he phoned me when I was thirteen and he began nagging me to come to the next club meeting in Stockholm. Not Pete or Peter, rich or Dave or the other Dave, not even Andy with whom I’ve walked most of the art shows I’ve ever walked, not even Per, who I worked with daily for over a decade, or John, who became part of the family. Lost in time, like tears in rain. When he gets in a cab with Liz, John waves at me: “Let’s have that drink next time you’re in London!” And the airplane rises out of Helsinki and I have taken off my convention badge and no Pia appears at my shoulder.

— John-Henri Holmberg




Long ago, far down the tattered corridor of memory, I wrote columns for *Void* called "Happy Benford Chatter." Them was de days, yes. I titled my *Void* editorials that because either Ted White or Pete Graham referred to them that way. So I complied.

I recall writing them as my only outlet while studying for my BS with brother Jim at the University of Oklahoma. I would pound away, after days of thought, with *Void* trying to make a monthly schedule. First draft and done. I wrote everything in my early pro writing career that way, too.

We'd given up publishing *Void* because we focused on a college degree. Jim and I went to OU because it was nearby Dallas, where we lived as our father, a Regular Army officer who had fought in WWII and Korea, conmanded the Texas National Guard.

Our father had pressured us to join the Reserve Officers Training Corps and go into the Army after graduating in engineering. Our mother took us aside and revealed that in grammar school she had learned our IQs. Our average in the late 1940s was 156; she didn't recall individual scores, but the separation was only two points, she said. "These are really high," she concluded. "You can do anything you like!"

Back to our senior year at Thomas Jefferson High, Dallas. The SATs that year revealed that we had two perfect scores (100%), so she was right. For kids from Alabama farm country, this was a revelation. Until then, we'd just been sf fans.

But the family had little funding. When the OU Club of Dallas offered Jim and me four-year scholarships, we went there. We'd already decided on OU before the scholarship appeared, in August as I recall. It would be close to where our parents were. Dad was ordered to command a battalion on the Korean Demilitarized Zone for a year, which didn't allow any civilian family. Mom wanted to find a house near the University and look after us. Fine. We liked physics better than engineering and changed majors. Physics suited us. We got our BS degrees in three and a half years, 1963. I made Phi Beta Kappa and we were on our way to PhDs – mine in 1967 and Jim's January 1969. *Void* was long gone, ably produced by Ted White, Terry Carr, and then Pete Graham as well.

So through 1959 to 1962 I kept writing. In my *Void* editorials I learned to ape the *Void* Boys voice. Style equals substance! I was the youngest and always felt I was hanging out with the hip kids. Witty, urbane, Ted and Terry were making their way into publishing, and Pete into…something I never knew. So I studied voice in writing, and later, in graduate school, began writing short stories. They were far better than those I wrote in high school. I sold my first in 1964. Since then, about 230 stories and thirty novels, with ten other books, nonfiction and the like. Terry Carr and Pete Graham are gone from us. The skills I learned then remain.

The two memoirs following here are ways to reconsider my life through incident, a trick I learned from fiction writing. They aren't chatter and not really happy. Yet true.

So the column title can endure, with an adjective change. Occasionally, I still chatter.

I'm old now, 76, learned and wealthy. I've learned from my fannishness, from fiction, from physics.

I am more sober in viewing the world. It, alas, doesn't seem to learn well.

***Losing Lennon***

On a sunny Sunday in 1980 I drove over the sweeping, majestic bridge onto Coronado Island. The old hotel was as majestic as it had been in *Some Like It Hot.* Elegant white ramparts gave onto open balconies in the subtle, salty breeze. David Hartwell had asked me to come speak to the annual Simon & Schuster sales meeting. I had driven down from my home in Laguna Beach, along the classic California coast, recalling my days in La Jolla, where in four years I had gotten my doctorate, a brand new wife, and discovered surfing. The California dream had become mine.

After checking in I met David at lunch with the S&S boss, Ron Bush. The menu was delightful and as we clinked glasses of wine in salute to the success of my novel *Timescape* a short Latino man approached. Bush rose, mouth awry in surprise. "Carlos Castaneda!"

The compact, weathered man wrote *The Teachings of Don Juan,* relating his experiences under the tutelage of a Yaqui "Man of Knowledge" in the desert vastness. His many books had sold more than twenty million copies in seventeen languages. They used a superbly concrete setting, dense with peyote, animistic meaning. The man himself *Time* had described as "an enigma wrapped in a mystery wrapped in a tortilla" was calm, smiling, soft-spoken. I had read several of his books while studying Zen Buddhism, liking the mysterious winds, the shiver of leaves at twilight, the hunter's peculiar alertness to sound and smell, the rock-bottom scrubbiness of Indian life, the raw fragrance of tequila and the vile, fibrous taste of peyote, the dusty lives, the loft of a crow's casual flight.

Ron Bush was overjoyed to see Castaneda appear, since the mystic man had never before accepted any of his publisher's many invitations. Hartwell was transfixed, asking the man about his background, to which (as I recall) he said, "To ask me to verify my life by giving you my statistics…is like using science to validate sorcery. It robs the world of its magic and makes milestones out of us all. We are not."

David told me later than a new Castaneda book could bring in as much profit as the entire Timescape Books imprint in a year. Sobering, I thought, since I thought Castaneda's tales were mostly hokum.

I assumed that would be all the drama I would see at a sales meeting, so I dutifully went with David to meals and cocktail parties. I had already turned in another novel to him, *Against Infinity,* and in his room we did some editorial changes on the manuscript. In June 1980 Simon & Schuster had issued a tiny hardcover first printing of *Timescape,* not even enough to fill pre-orders – which meant none came west of the Mississippi, killing my west coast book signing tour. *Timescape* won several awards including the Nebula, but the lack of copies meant it would never get on the Hugo ballot. I was not pleased, but the Simon & Schuster advance of $50,000 had $40,000 of rider clauses, which would pay out if the paperback sold well. So I was there to pal around with the sales folk.

The next day, December 8, I spoke to sev-

eral meetings of salesmen, trying to shape *Timescape*'s drama in terms that made it seem suspenseful, when in truth it was a slow, steady book. But it had won most of the field's major awards and S&S wanted to push a lot of paperbacks out the door. I went body surfing on the waves at the western beach, the same spot where much of *Some Like It Hot*'s comedy was shot. David and I went out to a seafood restaurant nearby for dinner and returned to the hotel's entrance to a buzzing crowd.

A woman turned to us and said, "John Lennon's been shot!"

"How is he?" David asked.

"Dead!" the woman cried and burst into tears.

On a large TV in the bar the details came through swiftly. Lennon was pronounced dead on arrival in the emergency room at the Roosevelt Hospital at 11:15 p.m. Some guy named Mark Davis Chapman had fired five shots into Lennon at about 11 p.m. This was outside the Dakota apartment where Lennon lived on Manhattan's Upper West Side. Annie Liebovitz had photographed a nude John embracing a black-clothed Yoko Ono that afternoon and then the couple had gone to a studio to record a song. (It was the cover of *Rolling Stone's* 22 January 1981 issue.)

When they returned in a cab, Chapman silently handed Lennon a copy of *Double Fantasy*, and Lennon obliged with an autograph. After signing the album, Lennon asked, "Is this all you want?" Chapman smiled and nodded. Chapman had been waiting for Lennon outside the Dakota since mid-morning. When he shot John in the back he then took off his coat to show he carried no more than the .38 Special he used, put the gun down, and sat on the sidewalk. Lennon died within minutes.

In the lobby murmur I could say nothing. Lennon was a few months younger than I was, with his life before him. No more songs like "Norwegian Wood" or "Imagine" or…. In that era, long after their breakup, I think people still identified with individual Beatles. I felt John was closest to my sensibility, more intellectual and ironic. He balanced well with McCartney, whom the ladies liked more – their cadence informed the shifting lyrics of their many songs. I felt as though I had lost a close friend.

An anxious crowd buzzed all around the hotel. David ordered a gin and tonic and I had one too. He reminded me of a report he had heard about a story I had written in the 1970s. Rumor had it that Paul McCartney had read my story, "Doing Lennon," in a Year's Best anthology of science fiction, and had passed it on to Lennon. I suddenly recalled that story from 1975 vividly. In it the lead character is pretending to be Lennon in the far future. He has had Lennon killed at the right time, so the character could be cryonically preserved, all prepared with plastic surgery and memorabilia, at the same year. All that was backstory to the tale, in which the imposter enjoys fame, performs imitations of the great Lennon, and runs into further trouble. I wrote it in one sitting, by dictation, and despite its dark elements always thought of it as a comedy. It had several plot twists and when McCartney is also revived from cryo the pace accelerates.

David and I pondered. Could that small point, an assassination mentioned in passing, in a story about the power of celebrity, have influenced the assassin…?

I felt a sullen despair creep over me. "Doing Lennon" was about adulation and longing gone bad. Apparently, as the news stories built through the night, the assassin was just that sort of fan. I had another drink or two. The hubbub in the bar lasted over an hour and to break the mood one of the regional salesmen came over to our table and asked if we would like to be in a poker game they held every night.

David said no; I said yes. It would take my mind off the tragedy.

The salesmen had a big suite with an ocean view and a huge bar. I had some wine as we settled down around the main, round table – about ten players. For that big a crowd, we agreed to use two decks.

I liked seven-card stud because you saw more exposed cards and so could count and calculate. Two decks complicated the usual game. I had done this in the 1960s playing for money and to my surprise the basic counting methods came readily to mind. The salesmen eyed each other and made some jokes about "the professor" maybe bringing to bear his math skills, to which I just smiled, shook my head, looked down at my cards.

I memorized the salesmen's names and used them in the game, always a good social grace. I traded jibes and murmurs with them through the hands, making bets on each new shown card round. I could do my card count with a glance around the table. We bet with each new shown card. Usually bets and raises were in the range of five or ten bucks.

I won some at first and then throttled back. I was here to be pals with the guys (and the few gals) who would push my novel. Banter ran on, laughter, road tales, and several bottles of wine appeared on the table – not a common practice in money games. I drank cabernet and made a few wins. Play ran faster. Most raises were a few bucks, with some pots I gathered in running up to $30 or so. More wine. Jokes, fewer now, and frowns. I kept track, eased off in big confrontations, let statistics make my decisions. And that is all I could really remember, later.

I woke up face down on my bed, needing to pee. I made my bleary way in the dark and only when the bathroom light went on did I note that I was fully clothed. I shucked off the clothes, noticing that the pants pockets were stuffed with dollars. Blinking, I stumbled back toward bed. By the bathroom glow I saw stacks of cash on the dresser, side tables, even the floor.

Sour taste in mouth. I had a hammering headache, too. A clock told me it was 10:30 a.m. I had to give a talk to sales people at 11.

Shower, dress again, practice the ragged smile. I got through the talk and turned lunch into breakfast. I went back up to my room and eyed the ocean, thinking of going out surfing again, though I still had a muzzy headache. The cash littering the room I counted: $850 or so. Not trivial.

I went down to the beach and David Hartwell was walking along, talking to some sales people and Ron Bush. He saw me in a swim suit headed for the crashing waves, my fins in my hand.

"What happened last night?"

"I had a hard time. Y'know, the Beatles will never have a reunion."

"The guys say you suckered them in at poker."

"I got drunk."

"They say you played faster than they did and you had a lot of luck."

"I know how to count cards, calculate odds. Look, I want to go catch those waves—"

"Stay over tonight."

"I'm due back in Laguna – "

"Play poker again."

"I have a lecture tomorrow at noon – "

"Play and lose."

He was right. That's what I did. I lost it all back and then a little more.

The paperback of *Timescape* did earn out that $40,000 of rider clauses in 1981. Sure enough, not enough hardcovers meant I missed the Hugo ballot. Hartwell had been shrewd, in the long run, about the novel's prospects. It has sold over a million copies since. Simon & Schuster named his line of books Timescape Books, which lasted a few years. Books published under that imprint won the Nebula Award the first three years for me, Gene Wolfe and Michael Bishop.

But good books weren't pulling in enough for Simon & Schuster execs, so they folded the line and let David go. As Arthur Hlavaty recently remarked, an oversimplified history of sf is, Ballantine became Del Rey. Sales can drive out quality.

Ultimately, David went to Tor Books, where he remained the rest of his life. There too he invigorated a long parade of superior science fiction and produced the best series of anthologies the field has ever seen. (Simon & Schuster has now begun a new imprint, Saga, in hopes it will turn into a quality line.)

David was the best editor I ever had. I can't listen to Lennon songs these days without a certain wistful smile. With both him and now David gone, they somehow blend together, two greats I was privileged to have in my own time.

***A Brush With Madness***

In the winter of 1993 my university, UC

Irvine, asked me to present two talks in a public lecture series on risk. I had done some risk assessment for several federal agencies, notably of the nuclear waste repository in New Mexico, the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant, that I described in my nonfiction book, *Deep Time*. So I gave the lectures, larded with statistics and examples of how we vastly overestimate some risks and ignore others – which is still true. We think we're better off controlling our transportation, for example, but driving a car is far riskier than taking an airplane.

The talks got a big audience, several hundreds. At both, I noticed that a man sat at the very top of the bowl-shaped lecture hall and peered intently at me the whole time. After the talk, a dozen or two gathered near me to ask questions. That intent, frowsy-haired man stood at the edge, never saying anything. I found his intensity unnerving and carefully stayed in the hall until he had gone, then went to my car and drove home.

Done, then. But on April 4, 1996, I opened the morning *LA Times* to see a big color photo of the same man: Ted Kaczynski, the Unabomber. The FBI had sought him for years. He had killed three people, blinded and dismembered others, with mail bombs. He improvised explosive devices contained in a cardboard box, wrapped in plastic bags with various tape and rubber bands. With lengths of pipe, soldering wire and explosive chemicals, including black powder and smokeless powder he rigged triggers that went off when the package got opened.

I had read about this bomber but never thought back to those lectures. I decided to say nothing about it, except to my wife, Joan. About a week later an FBI agent knocked at my office door. Did I recognize this man? – same photo of Ted Kaczynski. Yes, I did. I was on a list he made of people to bomb. I told the FBI agent my story. Not seen him since? No.

"Can I see the list?" No, we're keeping it secret. There may be copycats who will use it.

I nodded. Anything I should do? Not really.

Shortly after this my biologist friend Michael Rose came by my office with news that the FBI had visited him, too. Same story: he was on the list, along with fellow evolutionary biologist Cynthia Kenyon. Michael thought the Unabomber had seen a profile of him in *Scientific American*. Why Ted Kaczynski's politics would oppose extending human lifespan was puzzling. Nor was why he cared about my notions of how to assess risks.

"I'm used to crazy-looking people showing up at my talks," Michael remarked. I wasn't.

The FBI did not ever disclose the names on Kaczynski's list. I kept quiet.

The crazed bomber is often cited as being a genius-turned madman. He went to Harvard at age sixteen and later earned a PhD in mathematics from the University of Michigan. He had become a faculty member of UC Berkeley in 1967, the same year I joined the Livermore Lab and had a Berkeley office too. I had never seen him and he resigned a few years later.

Years later still it emerged that among his many books in his isolated Colorado cabin were "Asimov's Guide to The Old Testament" and "Asimov's Guide to the New Testament." I knew it was a commentary that described the Bible not as a theological work, but as a historical account incorporating fact, propaganda and myth. This was the only science fictional connection to him. So his targeting of me meant nothing about my fiction writing, apparently. But why should his anti-technology stance, as revealed in the essays he forced into publication, catch his eye? I thought this over and finally just shrugged. He was a mathematician, unbalanced, so…nothing to learn. Except that in our deeply interconnected world, openness means vulnerability.

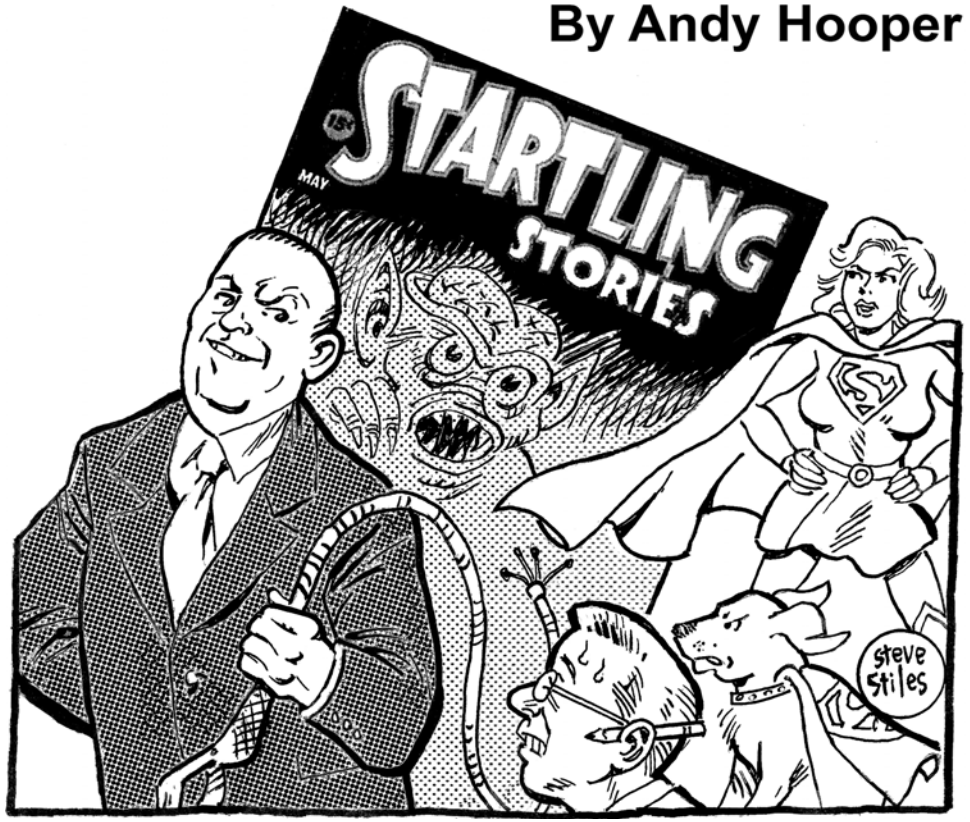
I have seen disturbed people before and since these two incidents. I was once followed from a book signing by an insistent and increasingly hostile guy who insisted that he ranked with Einstein. He had simply rearranged the $E=mc^2$ equation and posted it as an advertisement in a shopping newspaper. So where was his Nobel?

You can't make this stuff up.

—Greg Benford

# Weisinger's Worldcon

## By Andy Hooper




The World's Fair Science Fiction Convention, later known informally as the "Nycon," was the largest gathering of working and soon-to-be working professionals in the field of fantastic fiction to date. The program in the fourth-floor auditorium of Manhattan's Caravan Hall on Sunday, July 2, 1939, included the introduction of more than two dozen writers and editors, and a significant number of attendees would be published within three to five years of the Nycon, despite the intervention of the Second World War.

This was a critical evolutionary innovation for the SF con. It opened the field's eyes to the potential benefits that conventions held for professional writers. In contrast, the previous convention in Newark, held May 29, 1938, had included exactly eleven writers and editors among the more than 100 attendees. In *The Immortal Storm*, Sam Moskowitz lists them as Otis Adelbert Kline, Eando Binder, L. Sprague de Camp, Frank Belknap Long, John W. Campbell Jr., Lloyd A. Eshbach, John Drury Clark, Leo Margulies, and "Mort Weisinger, editor, *Thrilling Wonder Stories*." (There are just ten names on this list, but Eando Binder was a joint pseudonym for brothers Earl and Otto Binder.)

Those pros present had been suitably lionized, and got an earful of debate and fan politics, but probably hadn't had much chance to "do business" at the event. Writers at the Nycon had the chance to listen to John

W. Campbell Jr., soon to be the most powerful editor in the field, trace the evolution of science fiction and thereby illustrating the attributes of the stories that he wanted to buy. It's hard to imagine a more valuable use of a Sunday afternoon for the aspiring SF professional in 1939.

We know a great deal about the motives and aspirations of many fans who attended the Nycon, and perhaps even more about pros who were mere fans in 1939. Isaac Asimov attended in the expectation that he might be barred for his association with the Futurians, six of whom were actually "excluded." Harry Harrison and his cousin "snuck in" to the program because he was self-conscious about not having purchased a membership, even though the event itself was free. Thirteen-year old Betty Cummings was one of the few "single women" at the convention; the wolfish Forrest J Ackerman had her sign his program book, along with all the other female attendees who would oblige him. The fact that her father was Ray Cummings, among the best-loved of the pulp SF pioneers at the convention, made her seem more remarkable, perhaps even a little aristocratic. Within three years, she would be selling her own stories, first to comics and romance magazines, and then a long series of children's books, working straight through the end of the 20th century. She was one of the last survivors of the Nycon, passing in September of 2017.

It is harder to imagine how writers like Ray Cummings and Abraham Grace Merritt – also among the few people over the age of fifty in attendance – looked at the experience. Both of them had already made a significant fortune from their writing, and were by no means lacking for attention. But the idea that their most fantastic works might be perceived as seminal classics of an emerging genre must have been an exquisite vindication. The convention's Guest of Honor, artist Frank R. Paul, was evidently delighted to have his art given so much positive attention, and seized the opportunity to explain his process to a rapt audience. Leo Margulies, the editor of so many titles at Standard Publications, and John W. Campbell Jr. of *Astounding Science Fiction* both had a particularly morbid curiosity about the Nycon. They had attended a "sit-down" with the rival factions seeking to hold the 1939 convention, and had half-heartedly endorsed the claim of Moskowitz and New Fandom on the strength of the evident work which they had done to organize the con. One imagines they both quietly wondered if the convention would be a poorly-attended flop, or a contentious train wreck. It must have been an unexpected pleasure to see it so well-attended and received.

**Swisher & Campbell**

In "Campbell's Worldcon," the previous installment of this series, I wondered where Campbell and his wife Dona might have gone after the formal program was over. Did they take in the warm Sunday evening in Manhattan, or did they want to return to Newark by nightfall? Poring over the membership list for the past several years provided me with a likely answer – because Campbell would almost surely have seized the opportunity to spend the evening with his friend, the chemist Robert D. Swisher. And Swisher's wife Frances was also a close friend of Dona Stebbins Campbell. The couples had become friendly during Campbell's undergraduate work at MIT, and it had become a rare pleasure to see them face to face. Others may have been present, but it seems likely that the Swishers and the Campbells ate together on the evening of July 2nd.

Fred Pohl, that Hugo-winning fan writer of the early 21st century, pointed out the significance of this relationship in his online chronicle *The Way the Future Blogs* in October 2011. Inspired by the publication of Campbell's collected letters, Fred found a number of exchanges between Swisher and Campbell from 1934, when Campbell was writing his "Don A. Stuart" stories and trying to find his way in science fiction. Campbell had left MIT because he couldn't pass the German language class required for Bachelor of Science candidates. Corresponding with Swisher was a way of keeping in touch with the scientific world to which he wanted to belong, but it's also clear that Swisher was one of the handful of acquaintances whose intellect Campbell truly respected.

Campbell knew that Swisher appreciated the kind of "thought-experiments" that underlay many of his favorite stories, and he shared some of these in his letters. But mostly, he revealed how obsessed he had become with the state of the professional science fiction field in 1936, he shared his opinion of most of its successful writers, and was particularly interested in the editors who controlled its magazines. And in 1936, the editor he admired the most was not F. Orlin Tremaine, who would eventually choose Campbell to succeed him at *ASF*. Campbell ranked him second. The editor he found most interesting, to the extent that he briefly aspired to be his assistant, was Mort Weisinger, then recently installed as the editor of *Thrilling Wonder Stories*. It would have been a different world, observed Fred, if Campbell had gone to work for the Beacon/Standard Magazine group, instead of Street and Smith's *Astounding*. His ability to identify and nurture writing talent would have been just as acute at another magazine; who knows, perhaps this would have led Alva Rogers to write *A Requiem for Wonder* in 1964.

**The Morty Instruments**

Who then was Mortimer Weisinger (April 25, 1915 – May 7, 1978)? He did just about everything an active science fiction fan could do between the ages of thirteen and twenty, then moved directly into the field as a professional in several capacities. He certainly had the quintessential fannish background of the 1930s. His father Hyman (sometimes Herman) Weisinger and his mother Anna were both natives of Austria, who listed "Yiddish" as their native language. Hyman was involved in the garment industry in the 1920s but by 1930 was the manager of a shipping company, and in the 1940 census, he gave his profession as "inspector" at a wholesale egg distributor. In the same census, Mort was still living at home with the family in North Bergen, New Jersey, and gave his profession as "Magazine Editor."

He was born in the Washington Heights neighborhood of Manhattan, but the family relocated to the Bronx, where Mort attended school. He discovered science fiction in the summer of 1928, when he borrowed a copy of the August issue of *Amazing Stories*, which contained both a "Buck Rogers" story and a chapter of E. E. "Doc" Smith's serial "The Skylark of Space." He soon became an active correspondent with other science fiction fans, and in 1931 joined "The Scienceers," the New York based group now generally acknowledged to be the first science fiction club. The Scienceers had a number of things which set them apart, including the fact that their first president, Walter Fitzgerald, was an African-American, and held the first official club meeting at his apartment at West 122nd Street in Harlem. They were the first fan club to attract the attention of a professional editor, when Hugo Gernsback himself presented a program of readings and talks by the staff of *Wonder Stories* at the Museum of Natural History on September 27, 1930. Unfortunately, Gernsback failed to pay for the room in which the program took place, and left the Scienceers to foot the bill. Walter Fitzgerald and some others were talked into reforming as a rocketry club, which caused an instant schism, and two groups persisted under the sobriquet of "The Scienceers" until they quietly reunited in 1932.

And all that was before Mort Weisinger even joined the group. When he did come along in 1931, the club still had two elements he found powerfully attractive. The first was the club fanzine *The Planet*, which soon featured his contributions. The second was the presence of another kid from the Bronx, Julius Schwartz. Julie was just two months younger than Mort, and they soon became very close friends, plotting all kinds of empires together. In the debate between science and fiction that characterized early fandom, Weisinger and Schwartz were very much on the side of fiction. Thus, in 1932, they collaborated with Allen Glasser, the publisher of *The Planet*, and Californian Forrest J Ackerman, in the creation of *The Time Traveller*.

This is provisionally considered the first true science fiction fanzine, as earlier efforts, including Ray Palmer's *The Comet*, included material on astronomy and other scientific subjects. *The Time Traveller* subtitled itself "Science Fiction's Only Fan Magazine," and it proved to be a remarkably durable institution. It went through two title changes, to *Science Fiction Digest* and then to *Fantasy Magazine*, under new Chief Editor Conrad H. Ruppert. The last issue was in January 1937. Its most noteworthy accomplishment was the publication of a 17-part "round-robin" novel titled "Cosmos," which began with the July 1933 issue of *Science Fiction Digest* and ran through the January 1935 *Fantasy Magazine*. It was contributed by a remarkable list of professional writers, including Otis Adelbert Kline, E. Hoffman Price, A. E. Merritt, "Doc" Smith, Edmond Hamilton, P. Schuyler Miller, Raymond A. Palmer (twice!) – and John W. Campbell Jr. This began a long tradition of professionals contributing to fanzines, and while most pros now share memoirs, non-fiction or criticism in the amateur press, rather than fiction, it's a practice that continues to the present.

Mort was likely a classmate of Julie Schwartz at Theodore Roosevelt High School in the Bronx, and later received a degree from New York University. But his professional ambitions were clear while he was still in high school; Gernsback ran his first short story, "The Price of Peace," in the November 1933 issue of *Amazing*. The "Cosmos" project in *SFD/FM* was an accomplishment which every professional editor in the field had to notice. In early 1934, Schwartz and Weisinger took advantage of their celebrity by forming the first literary agency devoted exclusively to science fiction. The first client of the "Solar Sales Service" was Edmond Hamilton, but several more contributors to the "Cosmos" project were soon represented by them.

**Startling Wonders**

Weisinger sold two more stories to Gernsback in 1934 and 1935, and was in regular contact with him through the Solar Sales Service. But Mort didn't want to *write* for Gernsback as much as he wanted to *be* Gernsback. Or failing that, he wanted to be Charles D. Hornig, the teenaged managing editor of *Wonder Stories*. When the Beacon Magazine chain (later renamed Standard Magazines in the 1940s) acquired the *Wonder* titles on February 21, 1936, Hornig was out, and editor Leo Margulies hired Weisinger to address the workload represented by the addition of the Wonder magazines to the *Thrilling* series. In August 1936, just a few months after his 21st birthday, he was officially designated managing editor of the new *Thrilling Wonder Stories*. This required his resignation from the Solar Sales Service, and the cessation of some of his fan activities, but he and Julius Schwartz would work together again in the future.

Critics give Weisinger a mixed grade as editor of *Thrilling Wonder Stories.* He was probably following a house policy as well as his own instinct by emphasizing action and adventure over the "thought variants" that previous editors David Lasser and Hornig had frequently published. The term "Bug-Eyed Monster" was coined to describe one of the magazine's more florid covers under his watch. The magazine also instituted a comic strip the month that Weisinger took over. Drawn by Max Plaisted, it was titled "Zarnak." Not well-received, it ran for just eight episodes.

At the same time, Mort was a fan, and knew what fans liked. He solicited new stories from pulp kingpins like Ray Cummings, and ran several pieces by the admiring John W. Campbell Jr. His "Brain Stealers of Mars" series began in the December 1936 issue.

As *Thrilling Wonder* was a bimonthly magazine, Weisinger immediately asked his readers if they would support another science fiction magazine appearing in the alternate months. Their positive reaction eventually brought about the publication of *Startling Stories*, beginning in January 1939. *Startling Stories* always featured a complete novel in every issue; the initial offering was *The Black Flame* by the late Stanley G. Weinbaum, along with a tribute penned by Otto Binder. Most of these novels were adventurous space operas by familiar pulp authors like Edmond Hamilton and Manly Wade Wellman. Many issues featured "Hall of Fame" shorts previously published in Standard titles like *Air Wonder Stories*, and Weisinger frequently let prominent fans choose them.

Weisinger asked for simple, active stories that were seen as more accessible to younger readers, but they also tended to please readers attracted by the nearly naked women who were a frequent feature of *Startling's* covers. These policies were only reinforced when Otto J. Friend took over from Weisinger in 1941. *Startling* paid a less-than-competitive half-cent per word, but longer works were always presented in a single issue and never serialized. Writers padded the novels with increasingly lurid dangers, and were glad to get paid in a single check.

This was Mort Weisinger's situation in July 1939: He had daily control of two significant science fiction magazines. He had participated in one of the first and most successful amateur magazines in the field, and had apparently avoided any real involvement in the various feuds that had plagued New York fandom. By any standard, he had garnered a "Big Name" within fandom, and had used that to leverage a promising professional career out of a hobby, something which was very akin to magic in the economic world of the 1930s.

Still, even if he was appreciated by pros like Campbell and Weinbaum, he was not really one of the keynote speakers at the Nycon. Moskowitz made a great fuss over Leo Margulies, who was Mort's boss, describing him as "the editor of *Thrilling Wonder Stories*." This was technically true, as Margulies was the executive editor of the entire "*Thrilling* group." But Leo's remarks made it clear that the passion and intelligence of fandom were something of a revelation to him. Weisinger, on the other hand, was one of them. He made a few remarks at the end of the program, after Margulies and Campbell and GoH Frank R. Paul had all had their turn. Not surprisingly, he told a series of stories that emphasized his acquaintance with many of the professionals in the room, describing the humorous ways in which some of them had entered the field. These were received with good humor, but as Weisinger came at the end of several hours of programming, no one noted the specific subjects or circumstances of his anecdotes.

The gathering must have been a memorable reunion for Weisinger, who always enjoyed being in the company of Julius Schwartz, and Allen Glasser, whose skill with both letter press and stencil-cutting had been critical in producing *The Time Traveller* and its descendants. And how often had they been in the same room with contributing editor Forry Ackerman? It must have been something of a dilemma to decide who to drink with, his oldest friends in fandom, or all the writers he wanted to publish.

**Interlude: Letter from Portland**

After I published the first part of the "Biographical Directory of the 1939 Worldcon" in *Chunga* #25, our correspondent Steven Bryan Bieler wrote us a detailed letter of comment which will appear in the 26th issue. Reading through the biographies of the many pros in attendance at the convention, Steve had a number of interesting demographic observations, one of which seems particularly apt at this point in the story:

"The first thing I noticed is how many of these 'professional' guests (some were too young to have started their careers) were not science fiction or fantasy writers at all. They were from comics. The 1939 Worldcon was a watershed for comics."

Steve didn't elaborate on this simple declaration, but having traced all those careers myself, I shared his conclusion completely. It's quite a revelation to see just how many writers in the room in Caravan Hall would end up writing for comic books in what we refer to as the "Golden Age of Science Fiction." And this applies to Mort Weisinger more than anyone else present. He remained the editor of *Thrilling Wonder* and *Startling Stories* until March 1941, and even succeeded in making *Thrilling Wonder* a monthly magazine for a year. But the overall

health of the pulp magazine field was failing. He had to find another way to present the kind of fantastic stories and characters that he had fallen in love with at age thirteen. And the obvious choice was the comics.

Mort Weisinger is now almost entirely remembered for his work in the comic field; his earlier work is comparatively unknown. He exercised iron control over two of the field's most important characters, Batman and Superman, for nearly thirty years. In March 1941 he took a job as an editor at National Publications, the firm that would eventually become DC Comics. Working at National, he had some of the creative control that Campbell enjoyed at *Astounding* and *Unknown*. He collaborated with comic artists in the creation of characters including Aquaman, Green Arrow and the Golden Age Johnny Quick, a precursor of the Flash. For most of his career, he personally supervised the great majority of DC's comic titles across all genres, in a manner than can only be described as tyrannical. Every comics fan worth the title can tell at least one Mort Weisinger story.

It is tantalizing to wonder what sort of conversation Weisinger may have had with Jerry Siegel, the co-creator of Superman, when both of them were present at the Nycon. Siegel had begun writing for National in 1935, and would still be working there when Weisinger came on in 1941. He created eighteen different characters or groups of characters between 1935 and 1943, when he was drafted by the US Army. He spent three years in Hawaii, writing for *Stars and Stripes*, after which the ten-year contract that he and artist Joe Shuster had signed in 1935 had expired. They had been very well compensated for their work, eventually earning $20 per page, but understandably felt they deserved some share of the huge revenues which DC Comics would enjoy from their creation. Their litigation began in 1947, and continued well after Siegel's death in 1996.

**For Victory and the Legion**

Weisinger's career in comics was also interrupted by a period of military service, but the army was as eager to use his "civilian" talents and experience as they were Jerry Siegel's. He was given the rank of Sergeant in the Special Service Corps and assigned to write scripts for a USO troupe stationed at Yale University. He shared dormitory rooms with actors William Holden and Broderick Crawford. Later, he wrote scripts for a radio drama titled "Sustain the Wings," which was produced back in New York City. During this period he met and courted a woman named Thelma Rudnick; they would marry on September 27, 1943. They raised two children together, a daughter named Joyce and a son called Hendrie.

When Mort got out of the army in 1946, his job at National was waiting for him, and he returned enthusiastically to the world of alien heroes and super science. He edited many of DC's titles over time – National began branding itself as "Superman-DC" (the "DC" stood for "Detective Comics," the original home of Batman) as early as 1940 – but always concentrated on Superman and Batman. The Caped Crusader was usually edited by others, notably including Julius Schwartz, but Weisinger remained in direct control of Superman and his many spinoffs into the 1970s. Mort either helped devise or at least signed off on dozens of elements of the "Superman Mythos," including Supergirl, Krypto the Superdog, the Negative Zone, the Bottle City of Kandor, different shades of kryptonite and the Legion of Superheroes.

The Legion is an intriguing case – one wonders if its name was a sort of homage to Jack Williamson's popular "Legion of Space" series, and there's no denying that it was pure science fiction. In *Adventure Comics* #247, published in April 1958, Superboy meets three super-powered, time-traveling teenagers from the 30th century. They were part of a club called "The Legion of Super Heroes," and they drew their inspiration from heroes of the distant past – like Superboy.

The story was so popular that Weisinger implored its author, the pulp-era survivor Otto Binder, to bring them back for more adventures. They remained a club composed of teenagers, all of whom theoretically possessed some unique superpower. They hung out in a clubhouse that looked like a yellow rocket jammed nose-first into the ground – innocent enough, but in the era of the Hugo award rocket, also an image with weirdly insurgent connotations for a life-long science fiction fan.

In the 1950s, Mort also became the story editor for the *Adventures of Superman* television series, and made several trips to Los Angeles to work on the show. He described roughing out fifteen different storylines for the program on the train ride out from New York. He was fond of pointing out that several writers had gone from DC to Hollywood through this experience, and remained to work on other successful shows like *Perry Mason*. He certainly did facilitate the careers of writers – at bargain rates – but what else is an editor really expected to do?

Most writers metaphorically rolled their eyes when asked to describe what it was like to work for Weisinger. The profitability of DC Comics meant that his checks always cleared the bank, something which Hugo Gernsback himself could not claim. But he was demanding, demeaning, profane, scornful, impatient, and quite simply exhausting to work for. Some older writers that had written stories for him at *Thrilling Wonder* must have received better treatment. But younger artists and writers were routinely terrorized. And it's even more galling to most writers to have an idea stolen than it is to be stiffed for payment, and several contemporaries assert that Weisinger was a compulsive thief of ideas. He was notorious for getting writers to pitch a story to him, then giving the idea to a writer that he thought could do a better job with it. As a writer, this makes me wish I could dig him up and kill him again.

**Carrot, Stick or Gun?**

Former *Legion of Superheroes* artist and writer Jim Shooter, who eventually became editor-in-chief at Marvel Comics, started working for Weisinger to support his impoverished family at the age of fourteen. As a freshman in high school, he was drawing layouts and composing stories that were read by comic fans around the world – a gritty echo of the experience of other precocious creators including Weisinger himself. But, as Shooter wrote in his blog in 2011, Weisinger seemed to have little empathy for his young protégé's situation:

"First of all, my family needed the money. Badly. Second, my editor, Mort Weisinger, mean as a snake at his nicest, would have screamed at me more than usual if I was ever late.

"Mort would call me every Thursday night, right after the *Batman* TV show, to go over whatever I'd delivered that week. He'd call me other times, too, whenever, but Thursday night was our regularly scheduled call. The calls mostly consisted of him bellowing at me. 'You fucking moron! Learn to spell! What the hell is this character holding? Is that supposed to be a gun? It looks like a carrot! These layouts have to be clear, retard!' When you're fourteen and the big, important man upon whom your family's survival depends calls you up to tell you you're an imbecile, it makes an impression….

"It got to the point where any time I'd hear a phone ring I'd clench up, white-knuckled. Very Pavlovian. Even in school, or some other place that was ostensibly safe, a ringing phone jolted me.

"Mort used to tell me I was his 'charity case.' He said that the only reason he kept me on was because my family would starve otherwise.

"By the way, Mort did call me at school once. They sent somebody down from the Principal's office to bring me to the phone. Some question about a cover design…."

It's possible that Weisinger was particularly uninhibited in his treatment of the fourteen-year old Shooter, but this is by no means a particularly uncomplimentary account. He was notorious for taking advantage of the financial difficulties of writers like 1950s Batman scripter Bill Finger, and delighted in keeping him waiting for hours before he could beg for a desperately needed advance. In a field charac-

terized by hard-heartedness, Weisinger stands out as a notably difficult boss, particularly for someone working from far-off Pittsburgh like Jim Shooter – who often paid a ruinous 55 cents for Express Air Mail to keep Mort at bay.

Bill Woolfolk, a longtime writer at several different comic companies, wrote an obituary for Weisinger that Roy Thomas felt just too caustic to print. But it has resurfaced online in Ken Quattro's blog "The Comics Detective," which allows me to quote him here: "Most writers who worked for Mort Weisinger would probably have paid to buy a ticket to his hanging but they could not afford the price that scalpers would have charged. His fellow editors in the same large office – Jack Schiff and Murray Boltinoff – always looked forward to my arrival because I mocked him as a modern Dracula who liked to suck the lifeblood from writers." Weisinger took any admission of need as an opportunity to gain leverage, and once told Woolfolk that writers were lemons to be squeezed dry and discarded.

Mort also had his fans, particularly among comic readers in their early teens who were generally *thrilled* by every development in the lives of Superman and his ilk. But many also saw him as responsible for the juvenile tone which Superman and other DC comics retained throughout the 1960s. He was also responsible for the practice of commissioning stories to match a pre-existing cover painting, something which had also been common in the pulp magazines.

**The Heirs of Pulp**

Weisinger's career in comics was long enough that any kind of roster of his writers and artists would be tediously long. Even the list of future comic book writers who attended the Nycon program on July 2, 1939, is extensive. But it also clearly illustrates just how important science fiction was to the evolution of the comics field.

The first name on that list has to be Julius Schwartz, whose association with DC Comics was even longer than Mort's. He served as the editor of Batman's adventures for fourteen years, and developed the character into one of the two or three most important protagonists in comics. During the war years, Schwartz briefly became Weisinger's nominal rival when he was named editor of *All-American Comics* in 1944. But the two were reunited in 1946, when National Publications purchased *All-American*, part of the consolidation that created DC Comics. He worked on all of DC's important characters across his career, and he did a great deal to give them more interesting backgrounds and motives. He was also a much-loved figure in both comics and SF fandom, and returned the affections. In recent years, his reputation has been tarnished by multiple accusations of persistent sexual harassment, a pervasive phenomenon in the comics industry. With the special case of Julius Schwartz aside, I'm simply searching through the text of the "Biographical Directory of the Nycon" from *Chunga* #25 to produce an alphabetical list of members who became involved with comics:

As observed above, Otto Binder began writing stories for comic books in 1939, after another talented Binder brother, Jack (1903-1986), was hired as an illustrator by the early comic book "packager" Harry Chester. Otto worked for Fawcett Publishing's comics division from 1941 to 1953, and was responsible for stories involving Captain Marvel and all the characters and titles that spun off from "The Big Red Cheese." He also contributed frequently to Timely Comics, the forerunner of Marvel, and wrote stories featuring Golden Age characters like Captain America, the Human Torch and the Sub-Mariner. Later, he also worked for DC Comics, and made major contributions to its canon, including the first "Bizarro World" story for Superman.

David Coxe Cooke was best known for writing on aviation and paranormal phenomena, but he also wrote scripts for Timely Comics (later Marvel Comics) in the 1940s. Elizabeth Starr "Betty" Cummings Hill was the only daughter of Ray Cummings and the former Gabrielle Wilson. A noted author of children's books, she made her first sale to the comics in 1942. She specialized in stories about animal characters, like "Clancy the Colt" for *Goofy Comics* in 1943, and "The Mouse and the Moose" for a 1944 issue of *Barnyard Comics*. During World War II her father, Ray Cummings, wrote scripts anonymously for Marvel Comics, which were among his last works of fantastic fiction.

John Giunta, a New York native, was a talented artist who worked for Archie, DC, Fawcett, Harvey, Hillman, Tower, and lesser comic publishing companies in the early 1940s. He drew the first comic adaptation of the Cisco Kid, and was closely associated with the Fly, a science-fictional superhero published by Red Circle, a subsidiary imprint of Archie comics. In the 1940s, the young Frank Frazetta was Giunta's student and assistant; the two apparently reinforced a mutual tendency toward deep black shadows and surface details.

Starting in the 1940s, Edmond Hamilton wrote for some of DC Comics' most famous characters, and helped create the Justice League. He and Weisinger also created the Captain Future franchise, which ran from 1940 through 1951.

Prior to selling his first short story in 1951, Harry Harrison worked as an illustrator, collaborating from 1948 on numerous comics with Wally Wood, who would ink over Harrison's layouts. Harrison also wrote most of the *Flash Gordon* newspaper comic strips in the 1950s.

Like most of his professional experiences, Charles D. Hornig became briefly involved in comics through his association with Hugo Gernsback, and his short-lived *Superworld Comics* imprint.

Ken Krueger was a small press publisher and book dealer who also became a passionate fan of comic books. Although his work in the field was limited to publishing underground artists, he was one of the founding directors of the organization that eventually became the San Diego Comic Con.

The first issue of *Marvel Comics* would hit newsstands in September 1939, with a cover illustration by Frank R. Paul. A copy of that book sold for $325,000 at auction in 2015.

Charles Schneeman was a 1933 graduate of the Pratt Institute. In addition to his prolific cover work for science fiction magazines, he drew instructional comic strips in the Army Air Corps. He also produced work pseudonymously for romance comics in the 1950s.

Jerry Siegel, as we have seen, was one of the few members of the convention working in comics well before the Nycon. His first sales were the musketeer adventure "Henri Duval" and the spooky "Dr. Occult," both of which appeared in *New Fun* comics in October 1935. He became the comic art director for Ziff-Davis publications in the 1950s, and wrote for a variety of other comics, including some memorable but pseudonymous "Human Torch" stories for Marvel in the early 1960s.

The individual who signed the convention register as David Verne was one of several pseudonyms used by David Levine, more commonly published as David Vern Reed. In the 1940s, Julius Schwartz hired him to write scripts, most notably for Batman, where he "ghosted" under Bob Kane's byline, which was the arrangement through the 1950s.

Manly Wade Wellman's work appeared in many publications, but to fandom, he was most associated with Farnsworth Wright's *Weird Tales*. In the 1940s, he wrote dozens of scripts for the comics.

That's sixteen individuals present at the convention with some professional connection to the comics field. Perhaps that isn't such a large number – it's only about ten percent of the convention attendance. But we're not counting any writer whose work was later adapted to comics, which certainly includes Isaac Asimov, Ray Bradbury, L. Sprague de Camp and Henry Kuttner, among others. And given the huge influence that Mort Weisinger and Julius Schwartz had on comic books, I feel fairly comfortable agreeing with Steve Bieler: 1939 was a watershed year for comics, just as it was for science fiction.

**Gossip Guy**

Perhaps fittingly, Mort Weisinger was

also known for the book *1001 Valuable Things You Can Get For Free*, which was reprinted annually for more than a decade. He also served as a judge in preliminary rounds of the Miss America Pageant, and later wrote a mainstream novel, *The Contest*, a behind the scenes drama composed in the Harold Robbins/Jacqueline Susann mode. Weisinger received $125,000 for the film rights, but no movie was ever made.

If this seems somehow incongruent with his work at DC, it's worth noting that in most weeks, Weisinger devoted just three days to his work on comics, and then spent two or three days researching and writing "gossip" copy for *Inside Story* and *This Week* magazines. The latter was a weekly newspaper insert rather like the modern *Parade* magazine. He inspired at least one libel suit, by reprinting an unsubstantiated story that boxer Rocky Marciano had been involved in a fixed fight. He would eventually contribute more than two thousand articles to magazines including *Esquire*, *Cosmopolitan* and *The Saturday Evening Post*.

He retired from active editorial work at DC in the early 1970s, but continued to be active in professional groups like the American Society of Journalists and Authors. At the time of his death from a heart attack in 1978, he was organizing the Society's Seventh Annual Nonfiction Writer's Conference. His papers are collected at Syracuse University.

—Andy Hooper

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*(Doorway – continued from page 3)*

the myeloma specialist's prognosis of slow progression ever more tenaciously, or – best of all – FDA approval for one of the new drugs that's clogging the journals with its promising results.

The roller-coaster ride continues.

In recent years several readers have confessed that *Trap Door*'s small print is a challenge to their eyes. And I have to admit that without my strong prescription reading glasses, I too would find it a chore to decipher its pages.

There's actually some fannish tradition in maintaining a high word count to physical space. Back in the early '50s, Earl Kemp's *Destiny* used the same half-letter size format as *Trap Door*. And going him one better, even earlier Donald Day's *The Fanscient* and John Grossman's *Scientifantasy* both crammed their words onto each quarter-letter size page. What they all had in common was their use of a type size so small that they make the 9- and 10-point type I use here seem generous. I assume that they and I share the same reasoning: to offer a genzine with a broad range of material while minimizing printing and postage costs.

Of course, one big difference between then and now was that we were younger and most of us had decent vision. Even more important: they didn't have the internet. But we do, and because of that I can make an offer that some of you may find hard to refuse.

On a one-on-one basis and for your eyes only, I'll send you a PDF of the current issue at the same time as the print edition. Or, if you can live without the latter, I'll send just the PDF. If you've only read the print edition and haven't ever checked the back issues at *efanzines*, you can go there to see if enlarging the page size of the PDF will work for you.

Please let me know, perhaps with your comments on this issue (pretty sneaky, eh?). And don't thank me – I'm doing this for fandom.

—Robert Lichtman

# the CRACKED EWE by GARY HUBBARD

I was going through some old stuff recently and came across a business card from the House of Whacks, a Chicago-based fetish shop owned by a woman named Cindy DeMarco. It's long gone now, but I met her at a BSDM convention in Chicago where I bought a pair of black latex gloves from her. Let's see…that was back in '96, I think. I wasn't a rubber fetishist or anything like that, but I liked those gloves. Wearing them made me feel like a Mad Scientist – like Rotwang from *Metropolis*, *y*ou know. I've always wanted to be a Mad Scientist, but I couldn't get the grades in school. However, you might be wondering what an everyday, vanilla guy like myself was doing at an S&M expo. It's a long story and, of course, I'm going to tell it to you right now.

You see, I have this friend, Rbt, who is what I would call a serial romantic. It seems that, like Haji Baba from the song, he was always falling in love. Tragically, none of his amours ever lasted very long. He never married and remains unmarried to this day. To speculate on why not would be pejorative, so I'm not going to do that. But the thing about Rbt is that while the affair lasts, he's wholeheartedly into the interests of his current love object. If she was into yoga, he was into yoga; if she liked ice skating, he liked ice skating. Fortunately, he never ran into any girl from some kool-aid cult, but he did once follow a harpist to a music camp in Scotland. Rbt had to deal with the fallout from these affairs once they were they were over, but that usually didn't affect me in any way. However, one time he got involved with a woman veterinarian who raised ferrets.

Now, ferrets are essentially weasels that have been sort of domesticated since the time of the Pharaohs of old, and when Rbt's affair with the vet ended, he wound up with custody. I say they are domesticated animals, but they don't act like it. Whenever I visited him, I'd find them tearing around his house, getting into things, knocking over lamps and chewing up his books. There was one little rat who'd always attack your feet if you weren't wearing shoes and his bites were pretty painful.

"Rbt," I said. "You should keep those things in cages!" He allowed that I was right, but cages cost too much – or at least more than he was willing to pay for them – until he found out about this place in Wisconsin (basically a feed store) just over the border from Illinois, that was selling them for cheap. He didn't have a way to bring them back to Michigan, however, and this is where I come in: At the time I owned a pick-up truck that would be perfect for the task, so he suggested we drive up there, pick up a few cages, and bring them back to Michigan. He also mentioned that the National Leather Association was holding a convention in Chicago that weekend and, knowing that I'd majored

in Anthropology and had an interest in strange tribes and their unusual ways, he suggested we take it in on our way back home. I never thought he personally went in for that sort of thing, but as it turned out he'd recently taken an interest in a young woman he'd met at the university who did and she was going to be there.

I met her shortly before we left. I'll call her Leather Girl, because I don't remember her name and that makes her sound like someone from the Legion of Superheroes – which is sort of apt, because superheroes and people in the BSDM both wear masks. However, on this visit Leather Girl must have been in her civilian identity, because she was simply wearing jeans and a teeshirt. She struck me as a little stern and way too young for Rbt; she being in her twenties and he in his forties, but there you go. After a little chit-chat, Rbt asked me if I'd like to see her tattoo, because he was under the impression that I liked tattoos. This, however, was a misapprehension springing from an incident that occurred many years earlier when I was sitting in the cafeteria on campus and spied a woman sitting at a table across the room from me who had a tattoo on her ankle. She was attractive – in her mid-to-late thirties, I'd say – and dressed in a conservative business suit. The contrast between her conventional clothing and her tat was so charming, that I mentioned it to Bess, who proceeded to tell everyone in the world that I liked tattoos, which was just not true.

Of course, when I was a kid you could get those paper tats that you licked and slapped onto your arm, and when you peeled it off you had a distorted and incomplete image of Mickey Mouse or Donald Duck on your bicep. As an interesting aside, a few years ago someone was passing around flyers in our neighborhood claiming that those paper tattoos were actually printed on blotter acid, and that parents should beware. This was, as far as I know, just one of the moral panics that were so fashionable in the late eighties.

When I was a kid, the only adults we knew who had tattoos were old Navy buddies of the Old Man, and those usually depicted mermaids or hearts with the word "Mom" in them. I asked my mom if I could get a real tattoo – my brother Ron was keen for it, too – but she nixed the idea. I thought she would go for the heart, but no dice. Nowadays, of course, there are tattoo parlors on every street corner and everyone seems to be sporting ink – even my niece, who's a child psychologist and has two children of her own.

The thing is: I liked *that* tattoo on *that* stranger's ankle, but ever since I've become less enamored of them. Like with everything else, people nowadays are just going too far and marring great swaths of their pristine flesh with ink. For example, there's this guy who shops in the same grocery store as I do whose head is covered in Maori tattoos, and unless he's from New Zealand it looks like a case of cultural appropriation to me.

But getting back to Leather Girl, she only had this one tattoo – on her back. When Rbt asked her to show it to us, she nodded and carefully pulled up the back of her teeshirt to reveal a small butterfly printed on her left shoulder blade. You'd have to ask her why she was okay with flashing a couple of middle-aged men, but for my part I was a little embarrassed.

When I announced to Bess that we were going to a BSDM convention in Chicago, she said she wasn't interested in coming along, but didn't seem to mind that I was going. However, she did pull me aside and told me to be careful. I just scoffed. Careful of what? I ask you. I was just going as an observer, not a participant after all, so what could happen? I haven't gotten this far in life by *not* being a chickenshit you know.

Well, here we are now at the convention. After we parked in the hotel's parking structure, we got out of the truck and checked the straps holding the cages to the bed to see how they were doing. While we were at it, some guy passed by and said, "What are those for? They're too small to hold people." By that we knew we were in the right place.

We checked in and went up to the room Rbt had reserved for us. While he absented himself downstairs, I sat on one of the beds and checked out the movie directory to see what was playing on the hotel's porn channel when Rbt returned with a woman – but not the Leather Girl. No, this was Name Withheld upon Request, an old SCA friend of ours. (He had a lot of female friends he didn't know romantically; he wasn't exactly a Lothario, you know.) She was a native Chicagoan and had heard that Rbt was in town and, curious about the reason, invited herself along to the leather show.

The heart of any convention, of course, is the Dealer's Room where all sorts of small-scale entrepreneurs put their wares up on sale. It was like any comic book show, cosplay convention fair or SF con I've ever been to – except for the things they were selling. The first thing I noticed was a table right by the door that had a display of butt plugs on it. They were fashioned from black rubber and came in a wide range of sizes. Some of them had horsetails attached to them (which conjured up a few amusing images in my mind). Actually, I wondered how you could push one of those into your bottom without pooping them right out again. In fact, some of them were so large I couldn't see how anyone could stick them up their rectum and live to tell the tale.

As I looked around the room, I observed that few of the people there – except for the dealers – had on much leather. In fact, they seemed a pretty ordinary-looking crowd; maybe with a few more nose rings than usual, but no vampire or Marquis De Sade types. I could have been at Corflu for all I knew. Apparently S&M is just a commonplace hobby, engaged in by commonplace people.

The three of us quickly got separated in the crowd. Rbt and Name Withheld disappeared while I was looking at a display of chains and whips where I bought a wide leather belt that was decorated with chain loops. I don't know why I bought it, and I never wore it, but Bess did. She used it to accessorize a Halloween costume at a party at her church. She put it around a monk's robe she had left over from our SCA days and carried around a large rubber axe. She was supposed to be an executioner, but, at five feet even, she looked more like Phil Foglio's character, the Petite Mort.

I wandered around the room, taking in the various displays of fancy apparel, jewelry and torture devices on display until I happened upon the House of Whacks booth where, standing behind a table, were two women in rubber dresses, and on the table itself lay the fateful gloves. Ms. DeMarco noted my interest in them and asked me if I wanted to try them on. I demurred at first, but since she insisted I gave in. But first, I had to coat my hands with baby powder to get my fingers in them – rubber, you see, is unique in combining the qualities of slipperiness and maximal friction. But once they were on, those gloves felt good, they felt really really good, and I was lost. After I bought them, Ms. DeMarco gave me some advice on how to care for them and threw in a catalog from her store and a business card.

Next I ran into a couple from Sweden who were selling a variety of masks, hoods and ball gags. I saw a leather domino I liked that I thought would go swell with my gloves. Now the only other thing I needed was a double-breasted suit and I could fight crime like some masked avenger from a Republic movie serial.

After that, I came across a girl in a baseball cap who described herself as a baby dyke and offered to polish my boots. She started out in the usual way, applying the polish with a brush and all that, but then she spit on my boots and started licking them all over. It was a little startling, but by the time she was done, I had a pretty good shine.

I continued to I wander around the room and eventually found Name Withheld being fitted for a corset. She was standing there with it wrapped around her middle while a woman in back of her was pulling all these strings as tightly as she could. There were so many lacings that her back looked a little like an old-fashioned telephone switchboard.

"Can you breathe all right?" I asked.

"No!" she replied breathlessly, but she was smiling and her eyes were aglow. She was obviously happy with being trussed up like that, and in fact she wore that corset the rest of the day and well into the evening.

We caught up with Rbt, who was with a couple of young ladies in rubber dresses who were representatives of a store similar to the House of Whacks. He was wearing a leather dog collar with a silver chain attached to it and a pair of fur-lined manacles. He had a funny expression on his face. It was – how shall one put it – beatific? Transcendent? He appeared to be in ecstasy, and when he noticed my quizzical expression, he explained that sometimes an Alpha Male, such as himself, yearns to be submissive. I didn't think this was an original idea with him, but something they'd put in his head, but the effect was real enough. Was this a hitherto undisclosed side to my friend? While I was pondering this, one of the women turned to me and said: "You, sir, look like a Master."

What? If Bess had been there, she would have laughed, and even I had to chuckle a little bit. Me? A Master? Come on. In actuality, I'm as timid as a rabbit. But perhaps her perception was colored by the fact that I shave my head and I'm a little ugly too. Ron always said I looked sinister. More probably, it was just because she wanted to sell me a dog collar too; unlike Rbt's, this one had pointy studs all around it, but no chain. At her insistence I tried in on. It made me feel more like that bulldog in the Tom and Jerry cartoons than a Master, but I suddenly realized what was going on here. One of the greatest dangers the field anthropologist faces studying exotic tribes is the temptation to go native, and that was exactly what was happening. Name Withheld had her corset, Rbt his handcuffs, and I was carrying around a bag of fetish gear.

There was going to be a presentation in the hotel ballroom later that evening. We decided we were going to go out and get something to eat beforehand, but there was to be a piercing demonstration at 2:30 that I wanted to see. Neither of the others were that interested, so I went by myself.

I'd once had a piercing, you see. That was right after Bess and I saw *The Breakfast Club*, and there's this scene near the end where Molly Ringwald gives Judd Nelson one of her ear rings and he replaces one of his own with it. I thought that was so cool that Bess took me down to a local mall where I got my own ear pierced and selected a nice ornament for it, a cloisonné yin-yang symbol. I wore it for a while, but no matter what I did my ear kept getting infected and I had a constant earache. My own experience aside, however, I was interested in seeing what the latest trends in body ornamentation were and I wanted to ask about Prince Albert.

A *Prince Albert*, if you don't know already, is like an ear ring, but it goes through your penis, and I wanted to ask if the stories about how Queen Victoria's consort had one to keep his enormous wang from showing through his tight pants were true. I must stress here that I didn't actually want to see anyone sporting one; I was merely gathering information. In any event, this particular session had nothing to do with that. Instead, it was a demonstration of recreational torture where one person stuck long pins into their partner's body. Bondage I could see, and spanking? Okay. But this was a little extreme. Till now, this leather show hadn't seemed any different from any other hobby, but now I wasn't in Kansas anymore.

I reconnected with my friends later and we went out to eat, while we recounted our separate adventures. Name Withheld proved her worth by guiding us to an excellent restaurant where we ate lamb curry with *injera* bread among other things.

Back in our room, we got ready for the evening's entertainment. Name Withheld still had her corset on, only this time it was over a short dress and she was wearing high-heel leather boots and had acquired a riding crop from somewhere. Rbt was just wearing jeans and a teeshirt, but he had his dog collar and chain on – hoping someone would yank on it, I presume – while I decided to wear my mask and gloves.

In the elevator down to the lobby, we ran into some other con attendees – and the cat suits and leather chaps were out in full force. I'd seen little of this during the day, so I guessed that fetish gear must be strictly evening wear. We made our way across the lobby to the ballroom, startling a family of Japanese tourists along the way.

Unfortunately, the show wasn't much to speak of – just a bunch of amateurish skits that involved bondage and piercing. It would have been nicer if there had been music – aren't there any BSDM songs? The MC, on the other hand, was pretty good, and told a lot of jokes that were actually a bit funny. She referred to one time when she was walking along the beach with a gay friend who'd suddenly stopped and picked up a couple of seashells and – noting how flat-chested she was – recommended them as a bra. "What is it about you men?" she asked. "You're all so obsessed with breasts, even when you don't want them." After that, she introduced the Master and Boy of the Year, who accepted their awards and made a pitch for the National Leather Association's charity: leukemia research.

Once more, we'd split up during the show, but I found Rbt in the hall on our floor. He was talking to Leather Girl, who was standing in front of an elevator with some other people. As I approached, they disappeared into the elevator and that was the last I or Rbt ever saw of her. She'd gone up to a room party with her friends, but Rbt wasn't invited. He was kind of disgruntled by that and moped all the way back to our room where we found Name Withheld waiting for us. She come across a notice for an off-site party and said we should go. Rbt declined and crawled into bed, but I was curious, but we went downstairs and got into a cab with another couple.

We drove through the night and I didn't know what to expect at our destination, but I was imagining something like the Playboy mansion, with naked starlets in nine-inch heels running around near an Olympic-size swimming pool. But the cab took us through a suburban part of Chicago and turned down a dark street. I vividly remember that there was a street light on the corner where we turned that receded farther and farther away from us as we went along.

The cab driver, meanwhile, was getting nervous. He couldn't find the address we were looking for and, presumably knowing Chicago better that the rest of us, suggested we turn back. But the guy in the cab with us spotted some people he knew on the sidewalk and said, "No, there are some of our people." So we paid the driver, got out of the cab, and joined the crowd to a nondescript building set back from the street.

The part of the building facing the street was completely blank, but halfway along the right side was a door and some windows and the lights were on. Inside, it appeared to be a video store, with cases of VHS tapes stacked on a shelf behind a counter. The group turned to the left where there was a door that led to another room. I noticed signs on the door as we passed through it that said "No Sex" and "No Nudity" along with a number of other Cider House Rules, which made me wonder if they were put up there for the cops, because what else were these people here for then?

The other room was a much bigger space than the one we'd been in. It was all plain concrete and cinder block and dimly lit. I wondered what use it had been put to before it became a dungeon. Across the room there was a small bar and a man behind it who was chatting with a couple who were sitting on some stools in front. We went over there and the man handed us a couple of Cokes – no alcohol being another of the rules. Name Withheld and I sat down on a nearby sofa and listened to the conversation the folks at the bar were having, but it wasn't about anything interesting and I can't remember a single thing about it.

All around the room, couples were sitting on couches and talking quietly to each other. Large screen TVs hanging on the walls were showing pornographic movies, but this affair seemed pretty dull to me. Then a couple got up, disappeared down a corridor that was labeled "Showers," and returned pushing somthing that looked like a wooden cross on casters. They pushed it into the center of the room and the lady mounted a platform at the base of the cross face in while her partner tied her wrists to the crossbeam. Then he produced a hairbrush and proceeded to spank her with it – very gently it seemed to me, but she started moaning after a while. Another

couple followed suit. The woman leaned over the back of a couch and the man began slapping her with his hand.

Now you might expect that from here on things would start to get a little wild, but these two spanking sessions only went on for a few minutes, then the parties involved settled down and things in the room got quiet again. By now I was getting a little bored. I had come, I had observed, and like any good anthropologist, it was time for me to retreat somewhere and correlate my data. So I suggested to Name Withheld that we go. I was also more than a little worried about how we were going to get back to the hotel, but as luck would have it, we found that another cab had pulled up in front of our destination and was letting more people out.

All the way back, I kept wondering if we hadn't left the party too early – because leaving a party early and hearing later about how wild it had gotten after I'd left has always been a pattern with me. Maybe I have a dampening effect on parties, who knows.

Back in the room, we found Rbt where we'd left him, snoozing away, and I was preparing to settle down myself when Name Withheld said to me: "You know, I really wanted someone to spank me back there. Would you?" She handed me her riding crop, turned over, flipped up the back of her skirt and bent over. I didn't see that coming. I was now facing a pair of pink panties and an existential dilemma. What to do? I gave her a couple of light taps to the rear and told her that was all I was allowed to do under penalty of law. Then I grabbed a book and left the room. Never let it be said that I don't know how to leave a woman unsatisfied.

It's now three am, and I'm down in the lobby, reading *The Count of Monte Cristo*. Ever read it? It's a pretty good story. The reason I'm down here, instead of in the room is not entirely because of Name Withheld. Actually, I can never sleep when I'm away from home, so I'd be up in any case. Usually I try to find a Denny's or some all-night beanery near the hotel or motel we're staying in, but no dice this time. I just have to wait until the hotel restaurant opens for breakfast, which won't be for a few hours yet.

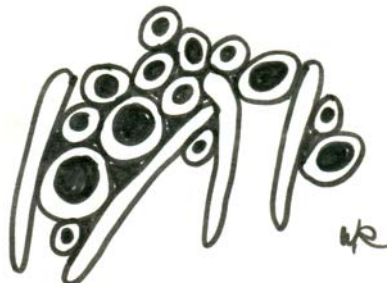
I wait until I think the folks upstairs are stirring and go back to the room. Rbt is still asleep, but Name Withheld is up, so I invite her to breakfast, and that turns out to be a lot of fun. We mostly joke about the events of the last 24 hours, how easy it is to get carried away sometimes and Rbt's never-ending pursuit of the wrong women. Then she packs up her stuff and leaves the hotel. She was actually a pretty nice woman, you know, but I never saw her again.

When we got back home, I'd thought to put all memory of the leather convention behind me, but then Rbt puts me on the spot by mentioning the spanking thing to Bess – seems he wasn't that much asleep after all. I had to quickly explain to Bess what went on and what didn't. I guess she forgave me, because it's twenty years or so later and I'm still alive. Besides, I guess the whole incident justified her warning to me to be careful.

Rbt kind of broke the Guy's Code by ratting me out, but I guess he was all pent up and had to vent his frustration on someone. We're still friends, believe it or not; we've been together too long and shared too many adventures to have a little thing like that come between us.

Looking back on it, I hope Name Withheld found someone to spank her. I'm sure she did. Rbt never had any luck with Leather Girl, of course, but he found himself a mistress, then found he couldn't afford a mistress. As for me, I tried to take good care of my latex gloves – did all the things you're supposed to do to preserve them, but they got all gummy and fell apart in less than a year.

—Gary Hubbard




I first learned of FAPA when I was in my very early teens and was an eager reader of that gaudy pulp magazine, *Amazing Stories*. That was the blessed year 1948. *Amazing* was aimed primarily at boys of my age group, featuring fast-paced tales of interplanetary adventure laced with more than a little sex, and although I had already begun to appreciate the more sophisticated sort of science fiction (by such writers as Heinlein, De Camp, Kuttner, van Vogt) that I discovered in the early Groff Conklin anthologies and the Healy-McComas *Adventures in Time and Space,* I was an unabashed admirer of pulpy old *Amazing* and gobbled it up every month.

One of the features of *Amazing*, beginning in the March 1948 issue, was a column called "The Club House," by Rog Phillips, one of A*mazing*'s most popular writers. Ray Palmer, *Amazing*'s editor, had gotten himself in trouble with fandom by his publication of Richard S. Shaver's series of stories about evil beings in underground caverns who were meddling with life at the surface, and his insistence that these tales were no fantasies but the gospel truth. Palmer's feverish promotion of what was called the Shaver Mystery was selling a lot of magazines, but it was also starting to give s-f in general a bad name, and the hard-core s-f fans were getting annoyed. By way of mollifying them, Palmer asked "Phillips" (his real name was Roger Phillip Graham) to conduct a fanzine review column, and so it was that I learned of the existence of magazines with names like *Dream Quest*, *Spacewarp*, *Loki* and *Ploor*.

How I longed to read magazines of such enticing, mysterious names! But they cost five or ten or sometimes fifteen cents an issue, and that was a lot of money for a barely teenage boy living on an eighth-grader's monthly allowance. (A good many of you can remember a time when the dollar had eight or ten times the purchasing power of today's buck, but in the era I'm talking about, nearly seventy years ago, *Amazing Stories* itself sold for only a quarter a copy, whereas *Asimov's* goes for eight dollars an issue these days, and most newspapers were a penny or two, while the miserable skimpy *San Francisco Chronicle* that is my local paper these days fetches an astounding $1.50 per day!

(The *New York Times*, a nickel back then, is now $2.50.) *Spacewarp* cost a dime, which was the equivalent of two or three dollars today, and I just couldn't afford it. But then I read, in the April 1948 issue of "The Club House," about an organization called The Fantasy Amateur Press Association, or "FAPA":

"$1.00 per year membership, but PLEASE note the following: in order to join FAPA you must fulfill membership requirements. These requirements are that you must have material written or drawn by you published in two fanzines located in different cities in the twelve months prior to your application, or you must have published a fanzine of your own in the past year. To remain a member in good standing, you must contribute to the mailings a minimum of eight pages, 8½ x 11, per year, or the equivalent of their number. The purpose of FAPA is to provide a means of expression for the fans who join it, and an audience of highly critical readers who will read and appreciate what you write and publish. Four times a year FAPA members receive a massive envelope containing the quarterly output of their fellow members."

That was exciting – particularly the part about that "massive envelope" full of members' magazines. I yearned to belong. In the months ahead, the Phillips column continued to mention FAPA magazines – *Wild Hair, Dream Quest, Plenum, Gostak, Moonshine*. Phillips had even joined FAPA himself after writing a couple of fanzine pieces to establish his eligibility. FAPA then had 58 members, and, since membership was limited to 65, there was still room for seven more. I talked my father into buying me a half-sized Speed-o-Print mimeograph machine, and in April 1949, teaming up with my best friend, Saul Diskin, produced an abominably crude little magazine called *The Spaceship*. It was a hideous thing, filled mostly with ghastly fiction of my own composition, but it was sufficient to provide me with credentials for joining FAPA. I lost no time in sending off my application.

By then, thanks to the Phillips column, FAPA had not only reached its quota of 65 members but had a waiting list of a dozen or so. That made me deeply unhappy. I had no choice but to wait it out, though, the entire spring and summer of 1949, until I received notification that I (and Saul, too) would be admitted as of the 49th mailing, which would be distributed in November 1949.

I awaited that mailing with the most intense impatience. Each day I anxiously checked my mailbox, and each day nothing came, and then, at last, it was there, a fine fat envelope with 189 pages of fanzines, including the October 1949 issue of my own *Spaceship*. (We had dropped the definite article from the name by then.) I read and re-read that mailing with keen delight. Many pages were given over to the magazines (done via a purple-inked spirit duplicator) of Walter A. Coslet, the Official Editor, who had a great collection of s-f magazines and wrote about them with the kind of obsessive detail that was right up the alley of the budding collector who was me. There was Redd Boggs' elegant *Sky Hook*, and F. Towner Laney's lively, irascible *Fan-Dango*, and Harry Warner's densely typed, erudite *Horizons*, and ever so much more. How I loved it! How I treasured those magazines! Mailing 49, that first one, came to have a glowing place in my mind that it has never relinquished.

The membership was gentle with me. They perceived right away that Saul and I were just kids, several years younger than the next younger members, and they offered kindly hints about how to make the magazine look better ("Use a little ink, fellows!") and friendly, uncondescending comments about the clumsy, hopeless stories with which I was filling the magazine. I grew up fast, *Spaceship* improved by leaps and bounds, and by the time I was fifteen or so I was one of the more important members of the organization. In the summer of 1952 I was elected vice-president of FAPA in a three-way contest, and a year later became president, defeating the long-time member Charles Burbee.

And, of course, I stayed in FAPA forever after – 68 years come November, now the longest unbroken membership in the organization's history, even serving a second term of president more than sixty years after the first one. (I was FAPA's final president, in fact; during my second term the office was abolished, and I appointed myself emperor instead for the following year.) I saw everybody come and go, all the great ones of the past, Charles Burbee and William Rotsler and Elmer Perdue and Lee Hoffman and Jack Speer and Bob Tucker and the rest. I saw the mailings swell and swell in size until they peaked at 750 pages or so in the mid-1950s. (And went on to the climax of the 100th mailing in 1962, some 1,200 pages that had to be shipped in three jiffy bags.) I saw the mailings begin to diminish, too, until they reached today's ghostly double-digit dimensions. Where once there had been a waiting list so long that impatient members started a little waiting-list APA of their own, the "Shadow FAPA," now there were twenty or thirty vacancies on the roster, and then upwards of forty. I saw it all.

I kept all those mailings, too. I spoke of myself as a budding collector a few lines back, and a collector I still am. By 1968 my FAPA file was eighteen years wide – 72 mailings – and then came catastrophe. On the night of February 12, 1968, fire broke out on the fourth floor of the huge house I was living in in the Riverdale section of New York, and spread downward from there to destroy a chunk of the third floor as well. The third floor was my office, for by now I was a successful s-f writer, and in fact was president of the Science Fiction Writers of America that year. The fire destroyed much of my s-f library, and the fourth floor, to which I had recently moved my FAPA files and a big chunk of my non-FAPA fanzine collection, was a total loss. That entire run of 72 mailings, going back to the precious first one of November 1949, was gone.

I was busy for the next year or two rebuilding the house and reconstructing my professional library. I never expected to see those FAPA mailings again, and the sense of loss was ever-present in the back of my mind. But then, in 1969, after I had moved back into the rebuilt house, the fan, editor, and writer Ted White phoned to ask a favor of me. He had been storing the enormous fanzine collection of the late Southern California fan Ron Ellik in his tiny Brooklyn apartment. (Ron, a live-wire fan publisher, was a prodigious collector and indexer of fanzines, who had died on a January night in 1968, only about thirty years old, when his car skidded on an icy road somewhere in the Midwest.) With my house back together again, I had room to store Ron's fanzines, which Ted certainly didn't, and so I provided a home for thirty or forty cartons of the Ellik collection. In it, I noticed, were several boxes of early FAPA mailings. Ron had acquired the files of Art Widner, one of FAPA's earliest members, who periodically had left the organization and sold off his collection, only to take up membership again a few years later. He had also, I think, been given the fanzine collection of Harold Palmer Piser, a non-fan bibliographer who had conceived the notion of creating an index of all the fanzines that ever were, but had not lived to get very far with it. And Ron himself had been a FAPA member from the 1950s on, so that somewhere in the Ellik cartons was a run of FAPA mailings that included a substantial fraction of those from FAPA's earliest days to the time of Ron's entry, and was virtually complete from then on. So once again I had possession of most of the FAPA mailings I had lost in the fire, and a good deal of choice early material as well. It wasn't mine, of course – it belonged to the Ellik estate – but when I asked Ron's executor, FAPA member Ed Cox, what to do with the Ellik fanzines, he told me to hang on to them, since no one else had sufficient storage space for them, and when I asked Lois Lavender, Ron's fiancee, about them, she said the same thing. So I became the custodian of the Ellik FAPA files, essentially permanently.

There had been a second bonanza as well. F.M. Busby, who had joined FAPA somewhere around 1960, had decided that he had no need to keep his mailings, and, hearing of what I had lost in the fire, sent me his entire holdings – dozens of jiffy bags, complementing and supplementing the Ellik collection,

filling in some places where Ron had somehow not maintained the completeness of his run. So the fire losses were largely undone. I didn't take an inventory to make sure that everything from 1949 to 1968 had actually come back to me again, but I knew that most of it had.

A couple of years later, somewhat to my surprise, I found myself selling the rebuilt New York house and moving to California, where I have lived ever since, and of course I took those tons of fanzines with me. The Ellik cartons were stacked up on the balcony of my new office; the Busby jiffy bags went onto shelves in the basement. I confess I rarely referred to my FAPA files, but it gave me great pleasure to know that I had them again. Ed Cox, the Ellik executor, died in the 1970s, and I asked Lois Lavender again what to do with Ron's fanzines. "Just keep them," she said. She had moved on with her life after the tragedy of Ron's death, was dating other men and hoped soon to marry one, and had no interest in burdening herself with boxes and boxes of old fanzines. From them on I regarded myself as the owner of the Ellik collection. Now and then I thought of pulling out some mailing from the great old days and reading it, but other things kept getting in the way, and somehow I never did.

Now we jump to January 2017. FAPA is but a faint shadow of its former self, but I am still a member, still treasure my old mailings and my warm memories of the high points of my long membership, and often discuss FAPA affairs with my friend and neighbor, Robert Lichtman, who has been the heart and soul of FAPA these many years past and who is one of the few who remembers the organization as it was in the full vigor of its days. One day Robert e-mailed me to say that four very early FAPA mailings were soon to come up for auction on eBay; and in that moment I found myself launched on a vast collecting enterprise, a desire to acquire every scrap of FAPA material that was missing from my files that I have come to think of as the FAPA Project.

There were three lots, which had come from the collection of Dan McPhail, one of FAPA's earliest members. One of them included most of the third mailing, Spring 1938. Another was a nearly complete file of Mailing 12, June 1940. But the real treasure was the third lot, made up of the very first two FAPA mailings, Fall and Winter 1937. There had been only the merest handful of members then. Very few copies of the magazines, perhaps only two or three, would still survive. No second chance to obtain these earliest FAPA publications was likely to come my way.

The auction estimates were something like $300 per lot. I put in bids of $400 or so for mailings 3 and 12, but took no chances with the third lot, and entered a bid of $750. No one else had bid on them. I doubted that anyone but me would be willing to pay any such sum for these 80-year-old fanzines; but as the auction day arrived, with my $750 still sitting as the only bid, I raised my offer to $1,250 to provide an extra cushion against last-minute competition, and then to $1,500, and then, just to be absolutely safe, $1,800 in the final minute of the auction. Sure thing, yes? No. Somebody had used a sniping program that in the final seconds to top my bid, and when the auction closed, I saw to my chagrin that the lot had gone to that sudden last bidder for $1,825. Mailings 3 and 12 went to me without a contest. But what I had really wanted was that third lot, containing the two earliest mailings.

I hadn't expected to have it snatched away at the last moment like that. I shot off an e-mail to the seller, saying that I was willing to give the unknown buyer a quick profit if he cared to flip the lot to me, but back came the reply, a day or so later, that he was unwilling to part with them. The first FAPA mailing was actually nothing notable – a dozen magazines, of which three were British magazines promoting space exploration that someone had franked in, one was the one-page text of the new organization's constitution, three were skimpy magazines from FAPA's founding father, Donald A. Wollheim, and one was a crude, juvenile little magazine of terrible fiction, *Solor*, the work of James V. Taurasi. The only really significant item was *Science Fiction Bard*, a small booklet of poems by the recently deceased H.P. Lovecraft, which Wollheim had published.

The second mailing was somewhat more impressive: 22 items, of which some were of considerable interest (a Lovecraft memorial fanzine, for example, and a Frederik Pohl FAPAzine) and some were not (three more British magazines of space propaganda, an application for FAPA membership, two campaign flyers from members running for office, and another ghastly issue of *Solor*.)

My frustration at losing that lot of rarities catapulted me into what was to become the FAPA Project – an attempt to find, first, all the magazines of Mailings 1 and 2 that had eluded me in that auction, undistinguished though most of them were, and then, very soon afterward, the wildly ambitious plan of putting together a complete run of FAPA mailings from start to finish. I had two useful reference sources to lead me on the path ahead. One was a spreadsheet, supplied to me by Robert Lichtman, that listed every one of the 10,000 FAPA publications from the first mailing through 2016. The other was *FAPA Book*, a set of six indexes that Bob Pavlat had compiled and distributed through FAPA between 1972 and 1977. Pavlat's booklets covered only mailings 1-96, through August 1961, and were based in part on the Ellik collection that eventually had descended to me. They were carefully done and the list of magazines was accompanied by considerable scholarly annotation, making the series a virtual history of FAPA's first 23 years. The spreadsheet had some flaws – magazine titles were occasionally misspelled, a few issues were omitted entirely, and the dates of some of the mailings were wrong – but by and large it was very valuable and, of course, was far more comprehensive than the Pavlat indexes. Armed with these, I set to work constructing an inventory of what I already owned and what I would need to seek out.

It turned out that Ellik's folders contained three of the small Wollheim magazines from the first mailing, and I was able to find a copy of the Lovecraftian *Science Fiction Bard*, the highlight of that mailing, on the Internet. (And paid a steep price for it, but, as I like to say these days, I'm not saving money for my old age any more.) Ellik also had had a few of the second mailing's magazines, and Internet dealers provided me with a couple more, though I suspect I am not going to see very many of the rest. Then, armed with a long want list, I began to prowl the Internet.

My chief source at the beginning of the quest was an East Coast dealer from whom I had occasionally bought s-f prozines that I needed to fill some professional need of mine. It turned out that he had a couple of thousand fanzines in stock, and many of these were FAPAzines, going back to 1940. I had hoped to find some of the very early titles that had been sniped away from me in that auction, but he had none of these. Still, he had plenty from the 1940-1955 era, where my files were thinnest. His web site was a little complicated to use, but I searched it assiduously and began to order magazines from him in batches of fifteen and twenty.

Then, searching elsewhere, I had a stroke of real luck. A bookseller in Oregon offered a FAPAzine that the first dealer had not been able to supply. I ordered it, asked him if there were more where that had come from, and was told that there were plenty, that indeed he had bought the collection of the fan and bibliographer Don Day, a member of FAPA in the 1940s and 1950s, and had a huge cupboard of stuff that he had not yet had a chance to sort out. He began now to dig through it, one box at a time, and, lo! – a multitude of FAPA mags turned up, again from the 1940-55 period. Every few days he would send me a list of his discoveries, and I would send him an order for a couple of dozen magazines.

It was the Oregon bookseller who produced the most exciting moment of the entire FAPA chase. I had been systematically making an inventory of my Ellik holdings in chronological order for the purpose of assembling a list of the magazines Ron had been missing, and one Saturday morning in early April I reached Mailing 49, the one with which my own membership had begun, and

which, as I had said, had always been the mailing I treasured most. It had never occurred to me before to see whether Ellik had had the complete 49th mailing. That morning I discovered, to my great relief, that he had – all but one item, Redd Boggs' beautifully done eighth issue of *Sky Hook*, which had been my favorite magazine in that first mailing. That was upsetting.

Off I went to the Internet to see whether I could find a copy for sale. No dice. I checked my own non-FAPA fanzine collection, where I knew I had some stray extra copies of *Sky Hook*. #7 was there, and #9 – but not #8. I e-mailed Robert Lichtman, who might have had a duplicate copy. Nope. I hated the idea that my 49th mailing would forever after be missing the key magazine of the bunch, leaving a great gaping hole. And then, after lunch, not quite five hours after I had made the unhappy discovery of the missing *Sky Hook*, in came an e-mail from Oregon with the latest offering of fanzines from that unsorted cupboard, and lo! There was *Sky Hook* #8 as the fourth item on the list! That great gaping hole had been filled in a matter of a few hours. It was a glorious Saturday morning surprise.

I have filled many a gaping hole since then, buying ancient FAPAzines as fast as I can locate them, fifteen or twenty a week. The Ellik file was surprisingly strong in the very early mailings, from 3 to 13 – not complete, of course, but close to it. But most of those from 14 to 29 were very weakly represented, half the magazines at best. From there on his files were more complete, virtually so from Mailing 40 onward. His own membership had begun with Mailing 70 of February 1955, and so was essentially complete from there until his death in 1968, minus some postmailings that I was able to fill in from the mailings Busby had given me. My own file resumes with the mailing that came out right after my February 1968 fire, and is, of course, complete from that point on. The various Internet book dealers were able to supply much of what I was lacking in that Mailing 14-29 zone, even though FAPA had had at most fifty members during that period, and most of those old mags must long since have disappeared as members moved from place to place or as their heirs simply dumped their collections. But a few long-time members must have saved their files, and these have found their way from hand to hand until reaching their current home on my bookshelves.

The FAPA spreadsheet I have lists somewhat more than 10,000 FAPAzines from the 1937 inception through 2016. I haven't yet taken time to do more than a rough count of the titles I'm still missing, but as of the spring of 2017 it looks as though I lack only about 250 for a complete run, with, as I say, more coming in every week, and many of those 250 are ephemeral things like ballot forms, which most members mailed in and thus did not save. As things stand now, my FAPA holdings must surely be the most nearly complete in existence, even with the eBay disappointment on the very rare first two mailings. Jack Speer, one of the charter members, had had a complete file from Mailing 1 on until the time of his death, but it ends there, of course. (I think the Speer file now reposes in some university library, forever beyond the reach of collectors who might want to fill in some items from the earliest mailings.) Bob Madle was another of the original members, and at last report Bob was still alive at 97 or so, and has surely kept his FAPA magazines, but he dropped out long ago. Harry Warner was one of the earliest members, though not, I think, a charter member, but his long run of mailings, which ended with his death, has passed into the hands of a collector who intends to keep them. And so on: one way or another, the files of all the old-time members were distributed while they still lived or were interrupted by their deaths. I have managed to reconstruct the contents of at least ninety percent of the early mailings, have a complete run from the beginning of my own membership nearly seventy years ago, and, as of this cool gray morning in the spring of 2017, am still here and still searching out the missing titles.

I haven't read all the old FAPAzines I've recently acquired, naturally. (I should live so long!) But I do browse through them as they come in, and I've been able to form a sense of the fluctuations in FAPA's 80-year history as I assemble each into its folder. FAPA was the idea, originally, of Don Wollheim, and the (very small) early membership centered around a group of East Coast fans: Wollheim and his friends of the Futurian Society – Robert W. Lowndes, Fred Pohl, John Michel, David Kyle, Richard Wilson, and a few others – with a secondary core in Philadelphia fandom – Bob Madle, John Baltadonis, Milton Rothman – and a couple of outliers like Jack Speer and Dan McPhail of Oklahoma. Bob Tucker and Harry Warner came in a couple of years later. The Futurians were a contentious lot, and the early mailings are full of furious battles over FAPA elections, missed mailing deadlines, and other constitutional issues. Most of the combatants dropped out within the first five years, either because they had been taken for war service or had become professional editors, though some early members, like Rothman and Speer, stayed on well into the time of my own membership.

By 1943, though, FAPA's center of gravity had moved out to Southern California, as such new members as F. Towner Laney, Al Ashley, Jim Kepner, Len Moffatt, Mike Fern, and Elmer Perdue arrived, later to be joined by Charles Burbee, Rick Sneary, and William Rotsler. About the same time, various members of an active midwest contingent – E. Everett Evans and Walt Liebscher, most notably – transplanted themselves to Los Angeles, leaving one of their number, Bob Tucker, behind. The California fans were mostly still active when I entered the scene in 1949. They feuded too, fiercely and entertainingly. Serious scholars of science fiction and fantasy could turn to H. C. Koenig's *The Reader and Collector* through much of the 1940s decade, and A. Langley Searles' equally erudite *Fantasy Commentator*, which had one incarnation among us from 1944 to 1946 and a second one, after a long absence, until very recent times.

Other important members of the late 1940s were Walter A. Coslet, the cranky, eccentric, somehow charming collector of all things science-fictional; Redd Boggs, whose elegantly mimeographed magazines reflected his discerning intellect and perfectionist tastes; D. B. Thompson, who published the long-lived *Phanteur*, and Norman F. Stanley, who gave us nineteen issues of *Fan-Tods*. Another very active group centered around the District of Columbia: Bob Pavlat (who joined with the mailing after me), Bill Evans (an early member who returned in 1950), and Richard Eney (whose first mailing was 52, August, 1950), among others. It was Eney who produced the single most spectacular FAPA publication of all, the 372-page anthology *A Sense of FAPA*, which celebrated the 100th mailing in 1962 by reprinting most of the best material of the organization's first 25 years. That vast volume sums up in a magnificent way the entity that FAPA had been, an extraordinary publishing achievement.

It is harder for me to generalize about the nature of the FAPA population after that. Things changed too quickly. A host of brilliant new people came in: Lee Hoffman, Dean A. Grennell, Terry Carr, Marion Zimmer Bradley, and many more. Some stayed around for just a couple of years, while others lingered and carved imperishable places for themselves in FAPA history.

I confess that my own interest in FAPA diminished after those exciting first fifteen years. I remained a member, of course; but my busy life as a professional writer absorbed much of the energy that someone else might have put into fanac, and the complications of moving from New York to California in the early 1970s and an almost total rearrangement of my personal life as a result of that, kept my participation in FAPA minimal for many years after that. And now the organization, which once had 65 members and an eager waiting list that reached 60 or so at one point, has a roster of less than 20 and dwindles steadily from mailing to mailing. I do read the shrunken mailings – it is easier to cope with them than the 500-page Goliaths of fifty years ago – but only a hand-

ful of the magazines offer much of interest to me these days.

And yet I have the almost infinite treasures of my FAPA files, yards and yards of magazines going back right to the beginning, augmented now by all that I have collected in the past six months so that they are virtually complete. I can pull any mailing down from the shelves and plunge myself into the furious Futurian feuds of the earliest years or the internecine Los Angeles combat of a decade later; I can enjoy once more the penetrating critical insights of Redd Boggs, the bawdy high spirits of Bill Rotsler and the far-ranging mind of Harry Warner, Jr., the wit of Bob Tucker and the more caustic wit of Charles Burbee, the scholarship of H. C. Koenig, and on and on, Speer and Rothman and Hoffman and Grennell, Walt Willis, Ed Cox, quirky Walter Coslet, a vast storehouse of fannish splendor at my fingertips. It is a great prize, and it is an immense privilege to be their current custodian.

—Bob Silverberg

## A Pome (decomposed by Cadaver Laney)

Four Horsemen of the Acolyte,
Wading through the Pulps,
One read Lovecraft,
He died with horrid gulps.

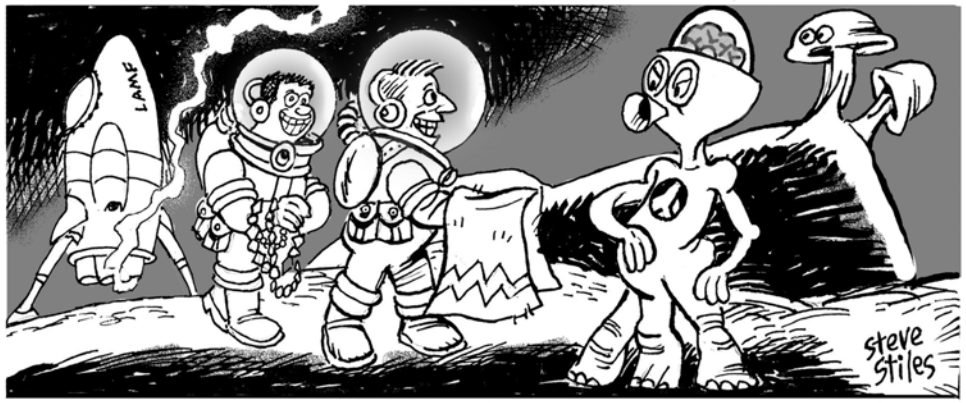
Three Horsemen of the Acolyte
Rode with might and main.
One met Cthulhu
And died in screeching pain.

Two Horsemen of the Acolyte
Rode with main and might
One found THE SMOKING LEG
THEY had an awful fight.

One Horseman of the Acolyte,
Riding like a fool,
Fell off and broke his silly neck
And was gobbled by a ghoul!

--Francis Towner Laney (1943)

# THE ETHER STILL VIBRATES




**STEVE STILES**

Like Dan Steffan I have usually read at least half of any issue of Trap Door before it actually arrives here in Baltimore County in its printed format. Unlike Dan, I'm unlikely to write a letter of comment equal to his quality and length – *mighty* fine, Dan! – partly because I'm always not quite so sure as to where to put all those tricky little commas (omission of the Oxford comma can sometimes lead to misunderstandings), not to mention my reconsideration of the necessity of two spaces after the period, and the validity of the semi colon, or part of the intestine. Length is even more of a problem since that takes more time. A large chunk of my schedule is currently spent at the drawing board where I carefully illustrate scripts to the best of my abilities so that my editors can change everything in those scripts *after* I turn in what I thought was the finished job. Ahahaha! (These days I feel like I'm running up the down escalator and not fast enough to reach that check waiting for me up there at the top.)

Anyway, doing fan art is a refreshing change of pace. It's all for free so there's no disappointed expectations save for my own standards if I don't measure up to them. I enjoyed doing all the headings for #33. In looking at the print version of my heading for Roy Kettle's, however, I suddenly realize that I've been drawing aliens with eyes on stalks for a very long time. A quick check of my records, going from 2008 to the present, reveals that I've done 536 of them during that time period. More significantly, I now recognize that these alien eyestalks are phallic as hell, with the external urinary meatus, or tip, represented by an eyeball.

What does this mean? What does the tip of a penis *see? (*Does my penis *wink?)* Aside from The Obvious, and the lavatory, it's mostly the inside of one's underwear, which is not very exciting at all (at least not to me). Even though it's very retro these days, I checked up on Freudian literature to see if I could get any answers to my penis/eyestalk probe. Unfortunately, Freud seems to have mainly dealt with the issue of women's penis envy, but an informal inquiry to most of the women I've been intimate with reveals that none of them envied my penis at all.

I suppose I'll never know the answers to this, but in the interests of gender fairness I suppose I should look into the vulva for symbolizing alien corneas, with perhaps the clitoral hood representing an eyebrow.

Gary Hubbard's article on his relationship with his brother Ron struck a more serious note with me inasmuch as the memory of my late brother Jeff has also been haunting me for years when I let it; it's something between us that I will never fully understand or accept.

I was the oldest of three brothers, with Jeff coming along three years later. We didn't get along at all during those early years and had a lot of explosive fights in the preteen years. Jeff had an explosive temper, and one of my most memorable moments was when I opened the door of our parents' apartment to be faced with a weeping Jeff in his Boy Scout uniform standing between two very large cops. He had been acting as Den Chief for a

pack of Cubs and when the kids wouldn't stop being rambunctious he took all the furniture in the Scout club room and threw it all out the sixth floor window. Fortunately it had been raining heavily that day so there were no people out on the street to get clobbered. Then there was the time that I got fed up with fighting with him, tied him to a tree in Central Park and then left him. I'm pretty sure the provocation was there but Dad didn't buy that and it was many hours before I could comfortably sit down that evening.

One of the rare moments when we grew close was when we watched the 1956 *Lust For Life* movie together, with Kirk Douglas as Vincent Van Gogh and Anthony Quinn as Paul Gauguin. Up until then Jeff had regarded art and my interest in it as effete sissy stuff; that movie, showing the hardships that Van Gogh had to go through to do his art, went a long way in changing his opinion. The biggest breakthrough, though, was in the countercultural sixties when we were both in the armed services, Jeff in the navy, me in the army. Up until then, contrary to our parents' upbringing, Jeff had been a bigot; that all changed when he had to live in close quarters aboard an aircraft carrier with Latinos and blacks: he learned that they were human beings sharing a lot in common with him, not the stereotypical "niggers" and "spics."

He also got into the counterculture and began reading the Beat poets, books on Zen Buddhism, Maslow, and like that – all the things that I was interested in as well; suddenly we had a lot in common! Hurray! We smoked a lot of pot and dropped acid together when on leave and, after a lot of heavy conversations, in general buried the hatchet.

I thought the burial was for good and that we were now friends as well as blood relations. After Jeff moved to Sonoma, I made it a point to try and visit him every five years or so, whenever I could afford to do so. Each visit was very friendly and brotherly, but on each visit I also noticed that Jeff was nursing a deep grudge against someone – a former friend, a neighbor, a coworker or boss – and would bitterly hold forth on whoever had offended him at the time. It was as if the mellow Jeff would suddenly evaporate to be replaced by the Clint Eastwood Dirty Harry persona – tight-lipped, angry, and unforgiving.

In 2004, ten days before she was going to visit us, our niece was killed in a traffic accident when coming from her prom. Her driver, her best friend, made a stupid mistake. Later Jeff called Jessica's best friend and told her he would never forgive her. We theorize that that was when the Dirty Harry persona took over. In 2006, after L.A. Con IV, we visited Jeff and his wife Liz for two and a half days. We washed our dishes, made our bed, took them out to a restaurant, and when it was time to leave Jeff informed me that our visit had been a great imposition and that he bitterly resented it. That took me completely by surprise and I apologized profusely. When we got back to Baltimore County a similar e-mailed message from Jeff was waiting for me. I apologized again. To this day I still can't understand what we could have said or done to provoke such a reaction.

From then on Jeff cut off all contact with us, never answering letters, e-mails, Christmas and birthday cards, refusing to take phone calls from me. I kept on telling myself this would eventually heal over somehow, but one evening in 2012 I got a call from our brother Randy; Jeff had died of cancer. In his last days he had demanded that Randy not inform me of his impending death, swearing him to secrecy.

I can't understand that either. Sometimes I think that Jeff was suffering from a mental illness, which, while sad, takes a little sting (and anger) out of the bizarreness of what happened. I suppose I used to believe in the "blood is thicker than water" maxim, but I notice that quite a lot of the letters in the advice columns are about falling-outs between siblings. I'm guessing that Gary's article may provoke similar narratives from *Trap Door* readers.

**ANDY HOOPER**

I wanted to thank you for dedicating so much of the issue to my research on John W. Campbell Jr. I know it won't have quite the same warm associations that the previous chapter on Art Widner clearly inspired in your readers, but I hope some of the information will be new to them. Of course, I've found additional details to put in a further revision, including the apparently well-known fact that Campbell left MIT because he was unable to pass the German language class required in the program there. While this might have been a source of some mortification to Campbell, Duke University is a pretty impressive "Safety School."

John Baxter's "Stare With Your Ears" was a delightful read, and I found it interesting that Willis Conover Jr. had been an inspiration to both of us. I was aware of his work for the Voice of America, and his standing in the jazz community, of course, but it was his adolescent correspondence with H. P. Lovecraft that had the most effect on me. As a bored 13-year-old in the security-unconscious 1970s, my dad's status as a professor at the University of Wisconsin was a sufficient credential to permit me entrance to the stacks of the Memorial Library. There, tucked among the endless rows of dissertations on sundry literary figures, I found a copy of the first edition of Conover's *Lovecraft at Last*, which reproduced his correspondence with the writer during the last year of the latter's life. Although the exchange took place in 1936, when fandom was still inventing itself, Lovecraft's courteous and honest answers to the young Conover told me that it was a place where intellectual curiosity was respected, and youth was no impediment to participation. Despite the fact that Conover described a world some forty years in the past, I recognized immediately that I wanted to be a part of its contemporary analog.

At about the same time, I wrote a book report on L. Sprague de Camp's 1975 biography *Lovecraft*, for Ms. Twyla Rude's 10th grade English Class, which was West High School's first ever science fiction elective course. De Camp's biography is reasonably accurate in detail, but his editorial conclusions about Lovecraft's "immaturity" as a writer and as a person tell us more about the cult of competence and profitability to which de Camp and his Depression-surviving contemporaries belonged than it does about Lovecraft's life. (Lovecraft, of course, did not survive the Depression, and thus did not have to see the demise of the British Empire, pulp fantasy magazines, or simple human decency.) Conover's correspondence was an antidote to this indictment, and I recall I cited him in my defense of Ajays and Fanac, without ever having undertaken any myself. This was a critical building block in my evolution toward fandom, one which I doubt I've really thought of in many, many years. So thanks again to John for helping me bring it to the surface.

Gary Hubbard's "Cracked Eye" column has always impressed me, but this installment on his life with his late brother Ron had additional personal resonance for me; we apparently share the same "hometown." But I was actually born in Lincoln Park, Michigan, a defiantly "down-river" suburb of Detroit. My father Frank was born there in 1937; he was there because his father, also called Frank, had come there to work for the Ford Motor Company in 1923. The elder Frank was born in Plymouth, England, but the contraction of the wooden shipbuilding industry had driven him first to Canada, and then to Detroit. I recently discovered that he (my grandfather) had an uncle named George Hooper who had ultimately settled in Grosse Pointe, and who had a significant degree of seniority at Ford. This relation died in 1922, less than a year before my grandfather arrived, leaving one to wonder if some inheritance or legacy might have been involved.

I was born when Gary was sixteen years old, looking to shake Lincoln Park off his shoes, and willing to join the service to do it. In my very early adolescence I lived in the hope of a college deferment, but happily the draft ended before I turned eighteen. But for a lot of kids in Lincoln Park, joining up and choosing your service was better than waiting for your number to be called. My recollection is that my older girl cousins had many classmates who served, and certainly some did not come back.

My parents bundled me away to Mt. Clemens, on the north side of Detroit, where my mom's dad was Chief of Police. But we were frequent visitors at my grandmother's and aunt's homes in Lincoln Park, flying south on the Fisher Freeway for Thanksgiving dinners, Christmas celebrations, and the Fourth of July. One of the remaining green patches that Gary remembered was less than a block from my aunt's house on Lejeune Street, and I joined neighborhood kids in poking around in the muddy little creek that flowed through it.

Years later, in 2001, when my aunt was dying of pancreatic cancer, I stumbled away from her door with my weed in pocket, and sat on that same creek side, staring into the hollow dark. When I was young, laying in the guest bedroom at night, a bright orange light sometimes crossed the ceiling from the window – it was the light of the open forge at the nearby River Rouge steel plant in Dearborn, escaping as the doors were opened. But when my aunt was near her end, it stayed dark; River Rouge had long since curtailed night-time operations, although the original production line continued to run until 2004. I'm pretty sure that the brand-new asbestos-insulated elementary

school that Gary attended has long been torn down as well.

His assertion that all movies made in the 1960s were "shit" doesn't really require refutation, but I might offer a little counterpoint in favor of Clyde Barrow and Bonnie Parker, whose motives seem less than completely "psychotic" to me. Barrow's people were impoverished farmers who migrated to the slums of West Dallas, Texas, in the wake of World War I; once there, the family had to sleep under their wagon, and when Henry Barrow was able to buy a tent, it was a huge improvement in their quality of life.

Clyde Chestnut Barrow was first arrested age seventeen when he ran from police who came for him when he failed to return a rental car on time. He and his brother Buck were also pinched for possessing stolen property (several turkeys). They kept regular jobs from 1925 to 1929, but also began to commit more serious crimes, including robbery, safe-cracking and car theft. After being arrested in both 1928 and 1929, Clyde was sent to the Texas Prison Farm at Eastham. While at Eastham, Barrow was repeatedly raped by one of his cellmates, a much larger man named Ed Crowder. Barrow eventually got possession of a length of lead pipe, and used it crush Barrow's skull. Another inmate already serving a life sentence took responsibility, and Barrow soon enlisted another to sever two toes of his foot with an ax in order to avoid work details that required him to mix with men who knew of his history as Crowder's victim.

While he was clearly a chronic thief and grifter, it was this prison experience which seemed to take Clyde to another level of depravity and indifference to human life. His desire for revenge against the men who ran Eastham was so great that he and his gang conducted a raid on the prison during his terminal "run" in 1934. Clyde met Bonnie Parker in January of 1930, four months before beginning his sentence at Eastham in April. When he was released in February of 1932, Clyde immediately began living with Bonnie, and collected a gang with fellow inmate Ralph Fultts to conduct robberies of gas stations and general stores. The intention was always to amass enough money to buy the firepower needed to attack the prison farm at Eastham.

The source of Bonnie's sociopathy is harder to identify, but she and Clyde both had a streak of fatalism that they clearly reinforced in one another. Had they wanted to actually escape from law enforcement, opportunities to leave the midwest, and possibly the country, were presented on several occasions. Every time, their desire to remain close to family, and Clyde's vendetta against the Texas Department of Corrections, made such a flight unthinkable.

Roy Kettle's account of his long-evolving relationship with the Queen of England is something that could probably only appear in a fanzine. While he promises a bit of meditation on Honors and the institutions of Royalty, he ends up sketching some of the ways that British society has changed since the Queen's Coronation began Roy's TV-watching career in 1953. Early on, I found myself imagining a survey asking a question like: How Close do you Consider your Relationship with HM the Queen? A) Mostly know her from postage stamps; B) We both patronize Mayfair's finest purveyor of Corgi lineament; C) I can now play all of Prince Phillip's favorite bouzouki tunes on the ocarina; or D) I keep a spare ghillie suit on a hook at Balmoral.

All knowledge is contained in fanzines – Elvis Costello, one of my lifelong faves, wrote a song called "Secondary Modern" for his "Get Happy" album in the early 1980s, and I somehow avoided understanding what the title actually referred to until reading Roy's explanation of the difference between Grammar, Secondary Modern and Technical schools. Britain's examination system is not as draconian as that in many nations, but I can recall British cousins sweating out O and A levels, and finding the idea of determining my life's path before the age of seventeen to be quite terrifying. I delighted in seeing that one of Roy's schools began operation in 1512 CE – my elementary school began holding classes in 1914, and is on the National Register of Historic Places.

Americans may now be more prone to patriotic self-congratulation than the British, but the idea of making us all stand for the national anthem at the end of a cinema program apparently never occurred to us. The fact that Roy and so many of his countrymen tried to escape the onus of even listening to Britain's remarkably brief and vocally-approachable anthem probably says something, but not all changes are a sign of decline. I found the article a remarkable companion to the letter which John Nielsen Hall wrote to *Banana Wings* #65, describing his memories of life in Britain in the 1950s. Slag and coal soot played prominent roles in each writer's recollections.

As a modern practitioner of the arcane art of Derogation, Boyd Raeburn's long-delayed memoir on the history of *Á Bas* was of particular interest to me. Happily, I think things have evolved such that derogations need no longer be strictly derogatory in intention. But I have also found that people respond to the reuse of their words in a variety of ways. It is interesting that Boyd attracted writers like Willis, Warner, Tucker and Shaw to contribute to a fanzine with what many would call a "snarky" editorial persona. Clearly, fandom always has a soft spot in its heart for bad boys and their mischief.

Fanzine fandom has some strong ideas about how writers and editors should interact, but they don't seem to agree very much. At Corflu, Lee Gold went on an extended critique of H. L. Gold for his occasional practice of editing manuscripts and publishing them without seeking authorial approval for his changes, and she made a blanket condemnation of such; but I could see others in the room swallow nervously as Lee looked for all the world like Dickens' Madame DeFarge. There are writers I wouldn't expect to enjoy being played with in such a way – I wouldn't do it to Taral or Rob Jackson, for example. But after one pounds a manuscript by James Bacon into working order, James can't really tell you what you've changed – if you let him make the points he wants, the rest is of little matter. I like to think that Boyd also knew who he could beard, and who he should leave alone.

Dan Steffan's remarkable letter fills in much of the last years of Art Widner's story that I could not include in my piece for *Trap Door* #32. It made me quietly thankful that only a few readers replied to #32 so you had room to publish all of Dan's letter. His art at the beginning of the letter column seemed to match the somewhat solemn tone of his epistle.

And last, but far, far from least, all praise and honor for the HUGO-WINNING Steve Stiles, almost certainly the last fanzine artist who will ever win the award. His starship-spangled caricature of John Delano Campbell Jr. at the opening of my piece was all any writer could want – but I'm intrigued by this "R. Paul Franks" character, who seems like he might cut the mustard, too. Actually, my favorite piece by Steve in #33 was the art at the beginning of Roy Kettle's "The Queen and I" – the space-helmeted aliens waving Union Jacks make me smile every time I look at them.

**JIM BENFORD**

Andy Hooper's "Waiting for the Golden Age," which spent some time on the first Worldcon, was fun to read. At the same time *Trap Door 33* came out, I happened to be reading an SF novel which in its beginning covers the same material. In Allen Steele's *Arkwright*, a fictional prominent SF writer, Nathan Arkwright, is a contemporary of Heinlein and Clarke. He and his comrades meet at the Worldcon. Several early SF and fannish figures appear, including John Campbell, Ray Bradbury, Don Wollheim and Fred Pohl. Because of fan politics, they form a splinter group, the Legion of Tomorrow, with their hail "Forward the Legion!"

Arkwright is phenomenally successful in creating a Galactic League series, which goes on to radio and TV. He and his comrades set up the Arkwright Foundation, which works in secret to advance interstellar travel.

In the second part of the book, which takes place in the 21st Century, the Foundation launches a starship propelled by a beam-driven sail. It's called *Galactique*.

Allen asked me to design it for him and it was a lot of fun making a colony starship, not an unmanned probe, to meet his specifications. There's a very nice diagram of it in the book.

Allen says that it has become his best-selling book. That means a lot, considering he has written about twenty books and that his *Coyote* series (seven novels) has been extremely popular.

This is very parallel to the secret organization, the Long Range Foundation, that does the same thing in Heinlein's *Time For The Stars*. And it's parallel to what actually happened just last year when a private entrepreneur, Yuri Milner, started Breakthrough Star Shot, where we're trying to figure out how to build beam-driven sail probes to go to the nearby stars. So SF said it first! It's a real SF kind of thing to do and fits right into my previous history.

Forty years ago I was fortunate to know Bob Forward and become intrigued by his ideas on beam-driven sails. After I left Physics International in 1996 to found Microwave Sciences,

Inc., I started trying to do experiments on beam-driven sails. I came upon the carbon-carbon microtruss, a then-new carbon fiber lattice that is so incredibly lightweight that you can actually see right through it. I proposed to NASA to try to lift and fly sails in the laboratory, which had never been done (or even attempted) before. After a lot of work we – a JPL team and brother Greg – succeeded in flying carbon microtruss sails at accelerations up to thirteen gees! In 2000 we went on to look at using microwaves to spin sails and to study the question of whether a beam can ride stably on the sail and not fall off. For a good account of our experiments, I recommend the excellent book on interstellar: *Centauri Dreams – Imagining and Planning Interstellar Exploration* by Paul Gilster, Springer Science, 2004. You can find later developments in our *Starship Century* (edited by James Benford and Gregory Benford, Lucky Bat Books, 2013).

Since those experiments ended thirteen years ago, I've been figuring out what an optimal beam-driven sail system would be like. Because of that history, when the Breakthrough Foundation – and in particular an old friend of mine, Pete Worden – came to be interested in figuring out how to reach the stars, they turned to me and Greg to talk about how to do it. The result was the announcement last April of Star Shot. The effort is divided into three parts: the sail, which I'm in charge of, the laser to drive it and the overall system engineering, which must figure out how it all works together as well as how to transmit data back from Alpha Centauri.

The project has a notional budget of $100 million to be spent somewhere in the next five to ten years. We've not gotten fully underway yet, but I have hopes that we will soon be requesting proposals for serious experiments and theory on the many issues that we face. If you're interested in what those are, go to…

http://breakthroughinitiatives.org/Challenges/3

…where you can see quite a list of formidable issues. For the near-term we're going to focus on the question of how to generate a coherent laser beam at ultrahigh power over a mile-scale aperture (maybe impossible!) and how a sail can ride on a beam with very high powers incident on it (likely possible). That means the sail material must have be able to take high accelerations and have an extraordinarily high reflectivity.

So my interest in science and science fiction, which started way back from reading Robert Heinlein juveniles, is coming to fruition. Now that a rocky planet has been discovered in the habitable zone of Proxima Centauri, the nearest star, sending probes to the stars starts to feel more real. Note that we talk about "probes" and we refer to "sails" or "sailships" – the payload is electronics on a chip. But we don't use the term "starships." I guess that's because it seems a bit audacious.

**FRED SMITH**

Front cover another "interesting" door that Steve has drawn but on the bacover Bill Rotsler "and friends" have missed "Feminist SF" and "Gay SF Stories." I suppose that at the time it was done those branches of SF didn't exist or, at least, weren't even considered! It's disturbing, by the way, to read in Dan Steffan's letter about his "artist's block" (which at least doesn't affect his way with words)! Hope to see more of his superlative artwork in the near future (?).

What a very full and obviously greatly researched article on John Campbell, his life and early days at *Astounding*. While much is familiar, there's a lot of detail Andy has included that is new to me, and it was nice that he includes (as a kind of bonus) a portrait of Leo Margulies and the early days of *Thrilling Wonder Stories* – a better than average pulp that improved steadily (especially post war). Much enjoyed, but I have to correct Andy regarding Malcolm Jameson's "Doubled And Redoubled," which in fact appeared in the February 1941 *Unknown.* His first published story was probably "Eviction By Isotherm" in the August 1938 *Astounding Science Fiction*. It's intriguing that the July 1939 *ASF* is considered by many critics as "one of the finest single issues of any SF magazine ever published." I especially liked Andy's review of each of the stories it contained since that issue was the very one that I missed, mainly due to the onset of WW2. I don't know whether the import of pulps had just stopped or if it was the impending publication of the BRE (August '39), but for whatever reason I couldn't find that July issue. Although, since then, I've read some of the stories, particularly "Black Destroyer" which, of course, created a sensation! Other than that, I doubt that it was the "finest issue ever published." There's the April '42 *ASF*, for example, that contained Heinlein's "Beyond This Horizon" and van Vogt's "Cooperate, Or Else," two reasons making it one of the best.

Very good article by Boyd Raeburn on *Á Bas*, which raises the question once again as to whether he was one of the Toronto New Jazz Society members responsible for the "Jazz At Massey Hall" concert that took place on 15th May 1953.You will no doubt remember that I wrote to you a while back about a book I had come across called *Quintet of the Year* by Geoffrey Haydon, English writer and producer of music programmes for BBC radio and TV. Published in 2002 it is all about this New Jazz Society, a group of "inexperienced and impecunious" young men who had decided to bring together the five top modern jazzmen – Charlie Parker, Dizzy Gillespie, Bud Powell, Charles Mingus and Max Roach – and present them in concert in Massey Hall, Toronto. The result was, musically, great but financially a failure. The "Quintet of the Year" was recorded, however, and the records have been reissued several times since. You can hear them online and also find lots of information about what actually happened on the night. The whole point is that one member of the New Jazz Society is Boyd Raeburn (!) and I immediately thought that this must be "our" Boyd Raeburn because of Modern Jazz, Toronto, age, etc. No mention of the Massey Hall concert in copies of *Á Bas* or *Le Moindre* that I had seen and you dug deeper but also didn't find anything. I compared a photo in Haydon's book (not very clear) with the photo of Boyd in *A Wealth Of Fable* but can't tell if they are the same, except both young and wearing glasses. Neither looks like Pat's cartoon in *TD*! If it is the same Boyd, maybe he just didn't like to remember the financial disaster that was the gig! *{According to a Wikipedia article, "Jazz at Massey Hall," Boyd* was *part of that group.}*

Highly amusing (and interesting) reminiscence John Baxter has supplied to give an insight into the practice of radio commentary. Obviously an art form in itself! And it's nice to read more about Willis Conover and how Ron Smith revealed Conover's fan life and his long correspondence with H. P. Lovecraft. You might have mentioned the book *Lovecraft At Last* (that you induced me to buy) that prints, beautifully, all those letters but maybe you didn't want to butt into John Baxter's article (?). Willis Conover was loved by everyone he met and, of course, was well known in Russia and other Soviet bloc countries from his 42 broadcasts for Voice of America. At the same time he was little known in the USDA unless you had shortwave. Some think that VOA was a front for the CIA but others have conjectured that it was more likely that the CIA (and possibly the FBI) kept files on Conover because of his friendship and reputation in Russia and the rest. This might be why he was refused (twice) the Medal of Freedom in spite of letters sent by musicians and other friends to the first President Bush and then to Clinton. It's said that Willis Conover did more to win the Cold War and break up the Soviet Union that all the presidents put together. Sadly, at the last he died in 1996, a shrunken, skeletal figure following his battle with cancer.

Not much I can say about the other two articles except that Gary Hubbard's is affecting and interesting while Roy Kettle's surprises! I didn't know that he had an OBE or such a close relationship with Her Majesty. Hidden depths in some of these SF people! My nearest connection to Royalty was once when I played (in a band) for Princess Anne at a factory opening. Oh, and a girl singer I once had was (later) awarded an OBE, I suppose for services to jazz.

In the lettercol Dan reveals that although he may have "artist's block" it hasn't hampered his writing. I mean – five pages!

**GARY HUBBARD**

A lot has been said, both good and bad, about JWC's profound influence on the field of science fiction, not to mention on me. I was just a neophyte in 1960, graduating from *Space Cat* and those Winston juveniles, when I discovered that there were sf magazines on the news stand at the Rexall and a few of the other drug stores around town. I had a regular circuit that I made every Saturday to pick up my copies of *Amazing*, *Galaxy*, *If*, *Analog* and *F&SF*. I was never too keen on that last one, but I loved *Analog*. More to the point, I loved Campbell's editorials. To my still-unformed intellect they were the Fount of Truth, and I wondered how he could get away with saying what he did. I was a Campbell fan for a long, long time, but eventually I started to have my doubts. Someone once asked me if I was such a big fan of his, how I managed to avoid turning into a parrot. Well, I'm not sure, but fortunately, there were other voices in and outside of sf to

guide me along. That might give you the impression that I'm not much of an original thinker, and you'd be right.

There were two things that helped drive a wedge between me and Campbell: his interest in ESP (or sometimes, PSI) and his attitude about race. At first, I was a bit excited about PSI. I won't say I believed in it, but I believed in the possibility of it; I even made myself a dousing rod following instructions I found in an issue of *Analog*. Results: nada. But maybe that was just me. I read a few other books on the subject by Rhine and others I found in the local library, but they were all pretty unconvincing. Rhine, in particular, seemed to be operating on the basis of wish fulfillment. I remember one day reading H .L. Gold over in *Galaxy* that he was "Psick of PSI' and saying to myself "Yeah, me, too."

But PSI was pretty inconsequential compared to the things he started saying about race in reaction to the Civil Rights Movement, which were hurtful. I grew up in the midst of a really, really racist family, and how I managed to avoid swallowing their attitudes (if I have – knock on wood) I attribute to Rock n' Roll and the fact that I didn't like any of them anyway. So when I started reading Campbell saying things that were essentially (although more articulate) the same as what my Old Man said, that did bring him down off the pedestal for me. But still, I admire him for so many other things.

I'm really charmed by Steve Stiles's illustration for my story. It captures a brief moment of innocence in our lives, and it's something to see Sammy the Silly Sapsucker illustrated at long last. But I never imagined him with glasses.

**PAUL SKELTON**

Andy Hooper's "Waiting for the Golden Age" is obviously the 'biggie' this time, but I cannot but feel that Andy's recent attempts to redefine the wide sweep of human history as either leading inevitably to, or being entirely dependent upon, the 1939 Worldcon is, quite frankly, a bit of a stretch. It also seems to me that the piece gets bogged down in far too tedious a level of detail. We learn for instance that a certain category of US citizen buries its surname within a layer of other names, possibly in order to better preserve their genetic purity. At least that's what sticks in my mind from a long list of names that don't seem all that significant or pertinent, and one which I am certainly not going to re-read in order to verify that impression.

John W. Campbell Jr. virtually single-handedly changed SF; we know that, but then we already did. Excellently researched though Andy's article may have been, much of the detail seems not only irrelevant but positively obfuscatory. What's more though, some of the detail is simply spurious. Take for instance this paragraph:

"After the program, John and Dona Campbell probably went somewhere to eat with one or more writers he wanted to talk to, and then almost surely caught a train back to their home in Newark. With the Independence Day holiday falling on Tuesday, and having given up a Sunday for what was unquestionably work, its likely he didn't return to the office until Wednesday the 5th."

This entire paragraph is pure supposition, and what's more totally irrelevant. I mean, who gives a flying fuck whether he went back to work on the Monday, the Tuesday, or the Wednesday? Nobody really knows and what's more nobody really cares. Well, I certainly don't anyway. OK, I accept that it's probably just me and the rest of fandom is possibly hanging on every word (even unto the earlier plot summary of Ross Rocklynne's "The Moth"). I, however, can only speak as I feel.

I can though certainly support your contention that the response to your previous issue was surprisingly scant, the surprise being generated by the fact that I thought it was your best issue in years. The reason I can support that contention is because I always read the letter column first, before moving on to the new stuff. Well, when I stuck my finger into this issue to open it somewhere in, but near the beginning of, the vibrating ether; I discovered I was still only actually at the beginning of Roy Kettle's article, and that the letter column was yet several pages down the line. Needless to say this was the only occasion or reason I can recall that finding myself at the beginning of a Roy Kettle article was a major disappointment.

Your leading off "Ether" with Dan Steffan's letter proves that you don't follow Bill Bowers's principle (use your second best LoC first), but prefer to lead with your biggest guns blazing. Of course you would have had to lead with Dan's letter anyway as it wasn't so much a LoC but rather a finely crafted article of comment and, as such, it had every bit as much in common with the articles at the front as with the LoCs at the back. That remark should not be taken as in any way disparaging of LoCs. I happen to think LoCs are terribly important in that they are one of the defining factors of fanzines and particularly the one that makes fanzines different from anything else you can read. Then again, I would think that, wouldn't I, given that they're my only way of getting fanzines these days? Oh, it's true that some mundane periodicals publish letters, but they never cohere into the sort of gestalt that you get in the better edited fanzines.

Dan's piece was also full of fine detail but in his case, and particularly in the section relating to Art Widner; it was the affectionate detail which drove the narrative. I never spoke with Art, even though I sat across a dinner table from him at Corflu Cobalt. I have this great problem, in that I can never initiate conversations with people with whom I'm unfamiliar. I've just explained to Graham Charnock, in response to a recent *Vibrator*, that I also never exchanged a single word or fanzine with Peter Weston. I saw Walt Willis at a couple of conventions, but could not summon up the gumption to approach him. There's a whole string of people, now dead, who I never got to know beyond their writings in old fanzines. I think Eric Bentcliffe and Terry Jeeves were the only 'old timers' with whom I ever established any sort of rapport.

I have to admit to a sort of type-casting blind spot in regard to Dan Steffan. I've always thought of him as a fan artist. A shithot, absolutely brilliant fan artist it's true, but basically a fan artist for all that. It was only with the publication of his *Mota Reader* that I really appreciated how well he bloody well writes. Obviously since then both his fanzine *Fugghead* and occasional LoCs like this one have acted as a serious wake-up call to my preconceptions. Actually this ability of fan-artists to write like shit off a shiny shovel should not surprise anyone. There was after all the example of Grant Canfield in your previous issue. Rotsler could write too, as could many others, but I am at the moment particularly reminded of Ivor Latto. His cover art has been reprinted lately on issues of *Banana Wings*. Lately though I have been reading old fanzines and have noticed, both from his LoCs and from his writings in his own fanzine, *Fankle*, that he was significantly more adept than the average fan-writer of his time.

**GARY MATTINGLY**

Nice front cover by Steve Stiles. Interesting bacover by Rotsler. And I definitely like the Dan Steffan "Doorway" illustration.

In the editorial I found the history of Boyd's article particularly interesting. Funny how things come around sometimes. I am glad there have been no glitches in Carol's "speedy and full recovery." I'm also glad that your myeloma treatment is working. May it or an appropriate new and yet to be discovered treatment continue to keep you alive, well and active for some time.

Andy Hooper's article on John W. Campbell Jr. at the 1939 Worldcon starts out quite nicely with the artwork by R. Frank Pauls – er uh, Steve Stiles, that is. The article is fascinating – it must have taken a great deal of time to research the material contained therein. Some of the information – possibly in a more generalized format – I have read before, but Andy definitely goes into great detail. It is indeed quite sercon and I must admit to skimming parts of it. I will hopefully read it more closely in the not too distant future. Fascinating nevertheless and well-written.

Steve Stiles's heading for "Stare with Your Ears: a Radio Reminiscence" by John Baxter was very good, and made more sense after I read the article, which I found quite entertaining. I occasionally listen to old radio programs on Sirius XM which has one channel devoted to them. I have been known to buy CDs of old programs and also obtained tapes (I wonder where they are now) from Joanne Burger while she was in the N3F. Some were from radio and some were speeches from SF conventions. We corresponded for a number of years and Lake Jackson, Texas, never seems to leave my brain. I just went searching for her name and found a page with her obituary (1999) which had photos of her. I don't think I'd ever seen her picture before this very moment. I listen to a lot more jazz than I do old radio programs. I was familiar with both the old radio programs he mentioned and the jazz – well the radio programs from the United States and Britain.

Another nice piece of art by Steve Stiles leading into "The Cracked Eye" by Gary Hubbard. Reading about Ron's life was fascinating and obviously brought up innumerable memories of my own life. It is too bad that he had so many problems though, definite peaks and valleys. Oh my, "Our sister Pam, for example, once said he made a lot of ugly girls happy." Oh my. I don't know how to acceptably comment on that. Continuing on…Gary has quite a memory. I would never have remembered asbestos ceiling tiles. Of course maybe they were mentioned in the news years later, with respect to certain dilatory effects which arose unpleasantly after time had passed. Interesting comments on the woods. I just must have been odd. I didn't hang out with other kids in the woods near our various houses. I just hung out with myself. I didn't go out there to smoke cigarettes nor page through copies of *Playboy* or similar entertaining, uh, reading material. I just went out to the woods to be in the woods and also to be away from other people. I liked and still do like the quieter environment – less noise from technology and more birds, insects and the wind running through the grass and trees. I frequently felt this urge to take off all my clothes and run naked through the woods or sit or lay on the warm ground. Fortunately or unfortunately I didn't. I was certain someone would see me and I would get into terrible trouble. I was less worried about the law and more worried about what my father would do to me. You know, I have yet to go to a nudist camp and there's even one nearby in Castro Valley. Why, I even know a few people who go there. Well, maybe one day. I guess I do indulge myself occasionally while circling under the full moon.

Ah, sorry, my mind is wandering. I was never stung or at least I never recall ever being stung. Even now I rarely get bitten by crawling or flying things, oh once in a while a tick may jump on for a ride but it is really quite rare. I remember a friend in a small town where I first went to grade school getting bitten by a spider (um, I think it was a spider) on a certain private part. I guess he must have had similar urges and was rolling certain body parts on the ground. How odd, I thought to myself. I wasn't with him at the time. Fate obviously bit him for his evil ways. See, fate must not think my ways are evil. Well, who knows. I was always too shy to actually ask girls out into the woods so none of those types of situations arose. I didn't play doctor either. I didn't really watch Soupy Sales either. I only had a sister and neither of us hung around thugs, at least not to my knowledge. One place we lived a neighbor who was my age did hang out with the school hoods but as far as I know he never did anything other than smoke cigarettes and get bad grades. He even invited me to one of his parties at his house with his friends. I must say my behavior was way too nerdy. I never went to another one of those. They did have a kissing game where they sent couples into the closet. Strangely enough they sent me into the closet with a girl I thought was really quite lovely, not particularly bright, but lovely. I think they knew this. I did absolutely nothing but feel awkward. Um, the loss, the stupidity. As the evening progressed I timed people making out with a new watch I'd received for Christmas. Oh, wasn't I a classy type of guy. I heard later he worked in construction. Something from the construction site fell on his head and although he lived he was unable to care for himself. His sister took care of him for a while but he died in a few years. Nevertheless he was nice to me and hung out with me when I was making small bombs from powder from firecrackers, M-80s and cherry bombs. I will never forget filling up a glass bottle with powder and setting it off electronically with my model rocketry ignition system. The sounds of the glass tinkling against his house were beautiful. Fortunately we broke no windows. Okay, I didn't break any windows. Later, by myself I did get a nice scar from shrapnel from a metal lipstick case I'd filled with powder. Who knows where that entertaining hobby might have led me. I actually thought about applying to the University of West Virginia or some similar school out there and getting a degree in mining engineering. I didn't want to mine. I just wanted to blow up things.

I never got into the military. I was in the Corps of Cadets at Texas A&M for about 24 hours. My first night I heard a drunk sophomore roaming the residence halls ordering fish (freshmen) to come out and hit the wall or the floor and do push ups and similar manly deeds. Nope, no way. I was out of there the next day. Hm, I never robbed anyplace either. I didn't even steal things from stores as small kids occasionally do. My father made quite sure I knew about honesty and I am to this day, disgustingly honest, at least with respect to material items and money, and well, even in myriad other ways. I will admit to occasionally either telling small white lies or simply keeping my mouth shut, lying by omission, or something to that effect. I actually never drank alcohol or did other things until I was maybe twenty years old. I did try to cram a fair amount of missed time into a year or two while in college however. I guess I was quite an entertaining speech maker while I was drunk but I rarely remembered anything afterwards. I never had a problem with addiction. I experimented but felt no need to continue on into a possibly unpleasant place. I don't recall seeing many or even any pornographic movies in college. Maybe once while I was at Texas A&M. There was a theater that had such movies on the weekend and the Aggies were a wild, wild audience. Once was more than enough for me with that audience. Anyway, this was a very good and enjoyable article by Gary Hubbard, except maybe for his negative comment about '60s movies.

Wow, another nice Steve Stiles illustration for "The Queen and I" by Roy Kettle. This was an interesting, enjoyable and educational article. I think our first TV was a Philco but I wouldn't swear to that. It had no metal badge, at least none that I can recall. The town in which we lived at the time, Bronson, had no movie theater, so I can't talk about going to the theater. Actually there was a building that used to be a movie theater on the one block of the downtown area. Someone lived there. I think I was in this person's home once. It was interesting. I think it might be quite entertaining living in a former movie theater. We later moved to a nearby town which was larger. That was Ft. Scott. It had a movie theater. I had actually been to it once when we lived in Bronson. I think I went with some church youth group. I think we went to see "Darby O'Gill and the Little People." That came out in 1959 so that is quite possibly correct. I wonder if that is the first movie I went to. It is the earliest one I remember. Not a great beginning but it was entertaining for someone who was seven or eight years old.

When we moved to Ft. Scott, I did not regularly go to the theater. They didn't play the national anthem at the theater or at least I have no recollection of the national anthem being played. Actually I don't recall going at all. Money was tight, if I remember correctly. When we first moved there we were in a really nice two-story house that rented for $75. It was lovely. We weren't there long. We then moved to a much smaller house on the "poor" side of town. Its rent may have been around $45. I have no idea if this is correct or why I might possibly remember how much the rent was. Heat was provided by a coal furnace. My father had to go down to the cellar to shovel in coal. There was no automatic coal loader. My grandmother later lived in the same town and worked in a donut shop. We got fresh donuts. I wonder why I started gaining more weight around that time. Anyway, we had no pubs in Kansas. There were bars. Bronson had a good bar. A bunch of old guys hung out there. It was a few doors down from the meat locker. The meat locker was great to visit in the summer. A couple doors down the opposite direction was the drug store. They had comics and a fountain. I liked it.

I have never met royalty, and first through twelfth grade was at public and not private or special schools. I was totally unaware of private schools in Kansas until I was in high school. We then lived in a suburb of Kansas City. I don't recall much cheering at schools other than at athletic events which I usually avoided. Now if we had stayed in the town where I went to first through third grade I might have made the team. Admittedly, with two grades in every room and grades 1 through 12 in the same building and a graduating high school class of about twelve people, I think every male might have made the team. I also dislike fancy dress. Patty and I went to London once. I think we saw the guards at the palace but we never saw the Queen or any royalty, at least not to our knowledge. Anyway, Roy's description of the whole OBE process was interesting and I was glad I read it. The rest of the article was also entertaining. I would have liked to have seen the gardens, too.

**MILT STEVENS**

After reading Andy Hooper's lead article in *Trap Door* #33, I felt like I knew more about John Campbell's family than I knew about my own. Of course, my extended family isn't very extended. My father and mother were both only children. Logic says I must have some cousins somewhere, but I have no idea who they might be. Extended families aren't really very important in large modern cities. I don't know what I would do with

cousins if I knew of any.

The first worldcon: those officially were the good old days. I think most of us would like to have attended the event. Where else could we have met so many legendary people. I hadn't known that A. Merritt had attended the first worldcon. In the first half of the 20th century, Merritt was considered a fantasy writer of the first order. Today, he is almost totally forgotten. That contradicts the common assumption that SF can become outdated but fantasy lasts pretty much forever.

If that was the golden age, we are left with the suspicion that we are now living in an era that is far less than golden. That might be true, but it might also be the result of tired blood. Let's review the situation. There hadn't been many SF or fantasy movies made by 1939. There are many such movies made today, and some are of quite high quality. The same comment can be made for television, which barely existed in 1939. Comics have also evolved and improved since 1939.

So what about published fiction? Fantasy has outstripped SF by a wide margin. Most of it is utterly routine stuff, but it seems to keep some people happy. The magazines are pretty much dead, but you couldn't complain about any lack of genre novels. There are always a few superior items published every year, but you may have to root around to find them.

Then there is fandom. I think the era of fragmentation is at hand. The term "fandom" means anything and nothing. We have apples, oranges and cumquats all in the same bin. Have you ever tried talking to a cumquat? There is also a limit to the size of any social group, and current so-called fandom is way beyond it. I think the time has come for print oriented fans to move on.

**LEIGH EDMONDS**

I thought Andy Hooper's article was finely written and very interesting, giving, as you say, a different perspective to the first Worldcon and throwing John W. Campbell into high relief. I quite enjoy reading sercon articles like this. At the moment I'm thinking about the effect that the science fiction available in Australia had on its fandom, and at various points in this article I found myself gazing blankly out of the window of the train musing on something Andy had just written in the context of how that affected what was happening at that time in Australia. I've been reading a lot of old Australian fanzines but I've been skipping over the magazine reviews – mostly reviews of British Reprint Editions since there was the embargo on importing magazines from the US – and I'm wondering how much of an effect John W. Campbell Jr. had on what stf was written here, or whether Ted Carnell was the greater influence because his British magazines were freely available here. Something for me to ponder on.

Less for me to ponder on, but to enjoy greatly, was John Baxter's entertaining article on his radio experiences. Like him, I am a child of radio and much prefer it to television. I think our earlier experiences of radio might have been different since where I grew up we only had two stations, the 'A' Class 3WV and the 'B' Class 3LK. 3LK was basically a relay station for the Melbourne 3DB with local ads thrown in from time to time. 3WV (Western Victoria) was also a relay station – for the two Melbourne ABC stations the highbrow 3AR and the lower brow 3LO. It took bits and pieces of each of those stations – to my mind the least interesting programs they could pick. John's recounting of the sports broadcasts on Saturdays with the horse racing brought back the same tedious memories he has. On the other hand, I still relish the cricket and football broadcasts, perhaps more for the sound of them than their content. The slow laconic drawl of cricket test matches is, as the ABC now likes to advertise, "The sound of summer," while the fast pace of the football commentary is something I still like listening to in winter – almost as music rather than commentary. The difference between what John heard and what I heard might have come from him living in New South Wales where he would have heard rugby league broadcasts, which are usually a dull monotone, and the football in Victoria, which is Australian Rules and required two commentators who tag team each other – doing turns of about twenty seconds each – to keep up with the action. This gives the broadcast a different texture and it is that which I enjoy as much as learning who is winning or losing.

I take my little transistor radio with me where ever I go and like to listen to what is on the local airwaves. In Australia most places sound pretty much the same though there are a couple of stations in Sydney which seem more radically right than anything you can hear in Melbourne. Radio in Australia's other cities is not very stimulating. Valma and I spent two or three months living in Hobart and the radio there is almost as though the presenters have had half their brains removed, Radio in Perth (where we lived for the best part of a decade) is a bit better, but when we got back to Ballarat and I could listen to Melbourne radio it was as though the presenters had been shot full of adrenalin and I had to ween myself off it.

I've had my little radio with me when I've traveled abroad. In Paris, Uppsala, Budapest and other non-English speaking countries, I may not have understood a word being spoken but there is a sound and a texture to the sound quality of the radio in those places. I thought a lot of Paris radio sounded very African, which probably has to do with France's imperial past. I don't know what would have shaped the quality of Swedish or Hungarian radio, but they had distinctive qualities which might have come from the sounds of their language. There is, of course, everywhere, that American pop music sound, which is just the same as I hear here on Ballarat's Power FM, just with different sounding words which are probably just as banal but don't sound that way because I don't know what they mean.

British radio is probably less interesting to me because I understand what they are saying, most of the time, and radio in the US is fascinating and very educational. I could not believe some of the stuff I heard on the radio in Alabama, and when I was in Washington DC for a couple of weeks I found the ultra-right wing presenter there so outrageous and so 'electric' that I couldn't stop listening to him. There's nothing like him here, which might be just as well for us. Radio in Seattle (locally produced radio that is) seemed very sedate and civilized by comparison.

There were some parts of John's article that I particularly enjoyed. For example, his mentions of Ron Smith. Ron lived in Melbourne for a time and Valma worked for him after she'd given up on working for Merv Binns because he was so disorganized. Ron held weekly parties at his place just off the StKilda Junction which were always interesting and very noisy affairs. I usually spent my time there outside by what might have been the pool because music inside was too loud to hear anyone talk, though it was often instructive to wander past the bedroom to see what was happening or enjoyable to ingest some substance or other in the kitchen. I think Valma stopped working for Ron when she found he was almost as disorganzied as Merv, and went off to run an accountant's office. Or the time she mistook his stash for old tea leaves when she was cleaning up his kitchen and threw them out, that might have put a strain on their relationship.

I do remember John's time running "Books and Writing" on Radio National rather fondly. Partly because he was good at it and also because it was somebody on the radio that I actually had met. He also had nifty theme music which was better than most of the other RN programs, a bit from Glass's 'The Photographer' as I recall. I also recall the program they did on Slash Fiction which he mentioned. I listened to with the overwhelming urge to put my fingers in my ears and hum loudly so I didn't have to listen to some of the things that some people had to say, though I kept on listening with what I can only call morbid curiosity to see what would happen next. I was almost as relieved as John when that session came to an end.

I have had my own meager experience in being on the radio. At one stage during my time at Murdoch University the local ABC station wanted a historian to do a weekly slot about the history of current events and, after one person had done it for a year, I took over and did it for the next two or three years, eventually week about with someone else. It was simple enough, someone would ring me before lunch on Tuesday and tell me what they wanted me to talk about, I'd go to the library (university libraries are very useful that way), read up on it for a couple of hours, fax the studio some questions, and then turn up at the studio, usually for a pre-record, though there were occasions when we did the slot live. The presenter I did this with was a very relaxed kind of fellow and we'd sort of amble through the questions I'd sent in in a session which was supposed to run for ten minutes but ran to over twenty on occasions. (I got a shock the first time I did the slot with another presenter who marched through the questions with military precision in almost precisely ten minutes.) I recorded a few of the slots off the radio for my father who then sent the cassette around all the members of our family so I suppose that somewhere out there some of my broadcasts still exist.

I didn't listen to many of the slots because there

was something on the television at the same time but I do recall listening to the one about the Russian Revolution and thinking that my recounting of the execution of the Romanov family was probably a little too jolly. I kept all the notes I made for those slots with the thought of perhaps one day making them into a book, but eventually threw them out. I don't recall much about all that except that the only time I was nervous was the time I had to talk about the atomic bombs dropped on Japan, knowing that there was a big debate about the restoration of the Enola Gay at the time. There was another time when I talked about the history of Rottnest Island and a big book on the history of the place turned up in the mail a week later (no indication of who it came from, not even a note saying 'You Idiot!') and then there was the strange telephone call I got after I'd talked about the history of Australia's secret service agencies from somebody who said his name 'wasn't important' and who quizzed me for twenty minutes about how I knew all the stuff I'd talked about. I told him that I got it from freely available books which, for some reason, he didn't believe was possible.

Enough on that article. I enjoyed the other articles in this issue but I'll zip across them. I didn't know that Roy Kettle had got a royal gong. He should have at least put 'Roy Kettle, OBE' in the heading so I would have known to tug my forelock appropriately. His association with the Queen is much more extensive than mine. I've only seen her in the flesh twice. On the first occasion I was still in primary school and most of us were shunted onto a train which rattled its way down to Melbourne, taking four hours or so. We were then herded out onto the street where we stood for a long time, a car drove past with the Royal Personage on board, she waved, we waved and then we were shunted back on the train and taken back home. More recently the Queen was in Ballarat and we heard that she was going to be driving up the main street which was perhaps a hundred yards from our place. So we wandered down, waited a while, an important looking car drove past with somebody in it waving, I took a photo, and we walked home. Not too exciting, eh?

I enjoyed Dan Steffan's memories of Art Widner, a person I knew mainly through SAPS over the years. The only time I really remember meeting Art was the last time he was in Melbourne and I arranged with him to go to his hotel and meet him. But he waited for me in the bar and I waited for him in the lobby for half an hour before we sorted that out.

**GORDON EKLUND**

Herewith a quick and a somewhat brief letter of comment on *Trap Door #33* largely inspired by your remark therein that you hadn't received the usual level of response on the previous issue, which would include, um, me among the non-responsive. And a fanzine as good as this one should not be ignored. In fact, it hit me while reading #33 over several long evenings that compared to the declining handful of print magazines I still subscribe to – *The New Yorker, The Atlantic, Film Comment*, a couple of SF mags – I devote far more of my precious time to reading *Trap Door* than I do with any of the others. The ones I actually pay real money for, that is. Since with *Trap Door* I generally read all of it while with the rest, most of the time, I skim. With the practiced dexterity of a hog on ice. (Wanted to slip that one in here someplace to get it out of my system, sorry about that.)

And the current issue is another fine one. From the blood chilling front cover by the Hugo Award winning artist and man about town Steve Stiles to the wry back cover from the multi-Hugo winning William Rotsler, whose work continues to outlive him in more ways than one, a splendid piece of work. (Always wanted to write a sentence like that.)

Andy Hooper's long piece on John W. Campbell Jr. and the First New York WorldCon is, as you note, not your typical *Trap Door* piece, but as a longtime SF history buff I'm glad to see it. Lots here that I didn't know. I could quibble over this or that minor point – for instance, it's a bit hard based on its less than impressive table of contents to see the July 1939 *Astounding* (no, I wasn't there to see it when it came out) as the best SF magazine ever – the best up until then maybe. Personally, I'd take any of the first couple years of *Galaxy* stacked up against it any day – but, like I said, that's mere quibbling. And I never quibble.

John Baxter's piece is another keen delight. I was born just a tad too late (not by choice, of course) to fully enjoy American radio's Golden Age. Contrariwise, among my very earliest memories are my daily trek down the street to the kindly neighbor lady Mrs. Anderson's house with the only TV on the block so that I could take over her living room for an hour (or two?) and watch "my" shows on her 9" inch Philco with the circular screen – *Beanie & Cecil, Howdy Doody, Kukla Fran & Ollie*. There was a radio back home, I know – a big fat console with a record player for 78's only – when rock 'n' roll came in a few years later, that's where I first heard Elvis, Chuck Berry, Little Richard and the rest. But if anybody in the family ever sat around listening to radio drama in the evenings – and somebody must have, right? – I mean, among other things there was my twelve-year-old big brother – and we didn't have a TV – what else was there to do? – any memory of same has long since vanished into the mists of time.

Oh, and I probably shouldn't let it pass without noting that the so-called "Sheriff" Dillon on the radio (and later TV) show *Gunsmoke* wasn't no simple country bumpkin sheriff. No, siree. He was, in point of fact, a *Marshal* Dillon – a United States Marshal Dillon no less – but as I said earlier I never quibble.

Gary Hubbard's sensitive portrait of his brother is another high point, as is Roy Kettle's excellent piece on himself and Queen Whatzerface II. Raeburn on *Á Bas* also notable. As with *Oopsla* and *Grue* and a few other notable titles, *Á Bas* died just as I got into active fanzine fandom in late 1960 and I thus missed it. (A helpful friend named Robert Lichtman later shared a couple of spare issues from his vast collection with me, much to my delight.) I gotta admit I still don't quite get derogations despite the example provided here but suspect the fault for that may lie with me. I'll keep trying though. Quantum mechanics continues to befuddle me, too, as do song stylings of Billy Joel.

**GREG BENFORD**

Andy Hooper is good at refreshing memories of our vast past. On JWC: overheard discussion of Cartmill's story led Army intelligence to him. I used their reports to depict how their months-long shadowing of JWC, Cartmill and others ran. I used this in my alternative history of the Manhattan Project as *The Berlin Project*. The investigation into the *Astounding* stories now seems odd, because the writers had no classified information at all, just good guesses. Still, this possibility was viewed as very important by the security agencies, including the FBI. As Bob Silverberg has wryly remarked, "Turning war secrets into second-rate SF stories might seem, to the dispassionate eye, a very odd way indeed of betraying one's country."

JWC also wrote articles on radioactive dust weapons in pop magazines, primed by Heinlein's "Solution Unsatisfactory" – which paralleled a dust program study of the USA's. In 1943 several American scientists proposed use of radioactive dust against Germany – Fermi, Oppenheimer, Teller and others. They reasoned that the Germans could well be ahead in using the idea already. Strontium 90 seemed the best choice. Oppenheimer thought it was worth trying if it could poison the food of at least half a million.

They thought German battlefield use was possible. The USA Operation Pineapple to detect use of radiological weapons was widely dispersed among troops in the Normandy invasion. (My own father, who appears in this novel, was among such troops as a forward observer in artillery.) The Army sent teams with Geiger counters and film to be fogged, to see if the Germans were using radiological dust as a weapon.

I depicted Campbell using his own words and those of the agents who interviewed him. He was well aware of the many possible uses of radioactive elements and encouraged his writers to explore them. I also used the articles he wrote on the subject. He did say after the war that the strategic situation foreseen by Robert Heinlein in the death dust story was like "a duel in a vestibule with flame-throwers," anticipating Mutual Assured Destruction and its acronym quite nicely.

Gary Hubbard's sobering memoir of his brother is sad. He does this well. Oddly, he thinks that thieves/murderers like Bonnie and Clyde, or simple merchants, are "capitalists." Can't simplify economics this way. Wonder why/how his brother went off the rails so inevitably.

Lovely Stiles/Patterson illo for Raeburn's *Á Bas* piece. Never been a more sly, funny fanzine.

Roy Kettle is amusing about the Queen. Jim and I went on the tour of Buckingham this summer during his 50th wedding anniversary: quaintly lovely. For us of course the Royals are nostalgia, like cowboys and indians, with pomp too. We, too, went to Rules, London's oldest restaurant,

after, and I had lobster risotto, as did Roy. I dine there every London trip, usually for the venison or quail.

Milt Stevens mistakes my describing the debate on evolution I hosted: this wasn't an academic contest, but a church vs. biologist show which reaped about $20,000 for UCI – and the clear defeat of the Creationist side.

**JACQUELINE MONAHAN**

I was immediately sucked into Roy Kettle's account of his several brushes (and one direct audience) with the Queen of England. The only hope I realistically have of ever having a brush with QEII, or EIIR (as seen on her goblets) would be to find some kind of literal brush with her picture on it (hairbrush? lint brush?) I was fascinated by the singing in Latin, the grammar school celebrating its 450th anniversary in 1962, Kensington Palace and the field of flowers after Diana's death, royal garden parties, and the Queen on a "slightly raised bit of the ballroom" for added height during the OBE/MBE/CBE presentation. Roy's "voice" is a delightful mix of the straightforward and the wry, the humorous and the ironic. I think he could make a technical manual seem compelling if he were the author.

Gary Hubbard's account of his younger brother Ron was poignant without being sentimental, and I felt his ambivalence. It brought back memories of my (slightly) younger brother and how we used to torment each other, one time getting into an all-out brawl while helping my mother bring in grocery bags. It did not matter that we both were toting a full bag of food at the time. Nothing sacred between siblings. These days, we don't know each other well enough to write anything but youthful reminisces if asked, so Gary at least had contact through the years that I do not, and it's no one's fault but my own.

**RANDY BYERS**

I was most intrigued by Boyd Raeburn's "The *À Bas* Story," partly because I knew very little of the story before. I especially appreciated the detail about how the Derelicts managed pretty quickly to splinter into the Derelict Insurgents. Fans all seem to be Marxists of the Groucho tendency: "I refuse to belong to any club that would have me as a member." The other thing that caught my eye is that Walt Willis wrote an article called "As Others See Us" for the zine. Reminded me of the ongoing column in *Ansible* chronicling the slings and arrows that outsiders throw at the science fiction world. I can't imagine that there's any connection, however, as Willis was apparently looking at the fanziner/conrunner schism within fandom (see Groucho Marxism above), not at the outside view of the field.

I had already read the longer version of Andy Hooper's piece about John Campbell at the first Worldcon. Andy has a real skill for creating sense of wonder moments out of fanhistorical details. The sensawunda moment for me in this piece was the fact that Abraham Merritt was there. As Andy says, Merritt was one of the titans of the pre-Gernsback era, and it hadn't even occurred to me that he might have survived into the Campbellian era and hobnobbed with the fandom of that time. I wonder if he attended any conventions other than Worldcon. I know his name was featured in the titles of a series of pulp magazines, such was his popularity. Were there Merrittcons as well?

Gary Hubbard's reminiscence about his brother was the most bizarre article in this issue, full of striking details, some of them almost painfully intimate, and hitting a sour but compelling tone of mixed love and loathing. I admired how Gary refused to resolve the tension in his feelings about his brother and thus ended the piece on an appropriately ambivalent note. And quoting Shakespeare, no less! I can only applaud.

Roy Kettle's piece about brushes with royalty provides a strong dose of his reliable charm and humor. Lots of fascinating details, both historical and material, in this one too, and he pulled at least one guffaw out of me with the idea of the homeopathic Duke. Sounds like a wonderful character in an ongoing series from the estimable Harry Adam Knight. I actually wasn't sure at the beginning whether I wanted to read such a long article about the bloody Queen, but Roy's humor and eye for the telling detail kept me hooked through the whole very nearly interminable thing.

As for the headings, Steve Stiles is a hero (as I'm sure you gratefully agree) for doing all of them, but I was particularly fond of the one with jazz and sports cars for Boyd Raeburn's piece. Dan's heading for the lettercol was gorgeous, and I was glad to see Dan get some of his Art Widner stories down in writing. He has been regaling me with them in person the past few years when I've visited him and Lynn in Portland.

**JOSEPH NICHOLAS**

I enjoyed Roy Kettle's "The Queen and I" for a number of reasons, not least because I too have been to Liz and the Greek's house to see some gongs handed out. ("Liz and the Greek" = Her Maj and Prince Philip. "House" = Buckingham Palace. "Gong" = British military slang for medal.) Not to me, but to my late father, way back in 1980 – shortly before he retired from the civil service – for the work he'd done in the early 1970s as a team leader in NAMMA, NATO's MRCA (Multi-Role Combat Aircraft) Management Agency in Munich. (The MRCA was the plane that became the swing-wing Tornado fighter-bomber.) The interesting thing about this was that although he worked all his life in what was then called the "home" civil service – i.e., civil servants who were not ordinarily and very rarely posted abroad – he received the Cross of St. Michael and St. George, which is usually awarded to those who serve in the "foreign" civil service, i.e, those who are posted overseas to work in various capacities in UK embassies around the world.

My mother, myself and the elder of my two sisters went along to the Palace to see my late father receive his gong. Because we were merely spectating, we were separated from him after entering, and while he was led off to wherever those who were to receive awards had to wait until their turn was called – presumably in the same fashion that Roy describes – we were ushered into the audience room, where rows of chairs were lined up twenty or so deep and a military band was tootling away (on a balcony above and behind the serried ranks of spectators) on a selection of light classics and film themes. (633 Squadron and The Dam Busters were noticeably recognizable amongst the film themes.) My mother being my mother, she rushed to the front so she could have the best possible view, so we ended up alongside her. (I don't recall what ID or other paperwork we had to show to get in – presumably a copy of the letter of invitation to my late father. Although the IRA was then still active in London, and would be until the mid- 1990s, security measures in general were more relaxed than they are now.)

After many minutes of waiting, the military band suddenly switched to the national anthem, and Her Maj strode in. The spectators rose to their feet, as the usual mark of respect. But what I remember about Her Maj at that moment is (a) how short she seemed, and (b) the expression on her face, which could almost be read as wondering who all these people were and what were they doing in her house. (Obviously, Her Maj has to do these award ceremonies over and over, two or three times a year, and doubtless has a special "face" which she wears for them. But just once in a while, perhaps, it slips.)

We then had to sit through the whole of the rest of the morning while every person who was to receive an award that day went up and duly received it. No slipping out once your relative had received theirs, nothing to read because you'd had to surrender your bags and other accouterments before entering the audience room, nothing to do except sit there…and sit there…and sit there…and wonder whether your bum would ever recover from three hours or so of sitting on a gilt chair that might have had a red velvet-covered cushion but was nevertheless not particularly suited to lengthy occupation.

Eventually, it was all over, and we could leave. We met the photographer outside, had our pictures taken for circulation to (among others) our local weekly newspaper (this was a time when there still were local weekly newspapers – most are now available only online or are essentially sheaves of property adverts with a few news stories on the outside) and went off for a slap-up lunch at some central London eatery (I no longer remember which).

As a civil servant myself, who retired in March 2014 after 38 years of loyal toil in various government departments, I would also, like Roy, have been eligible for an award – probably a BEM (British Empire Medal) rather than the OBE he received. But I had made it abundantly clear to my line managers, at all stages of my career, that I regarded the New Year Honors, the Queen's Birthday Honors, the Parliamentary Dissolution Honors, and the rest of the honors system as a tedious and irrelevant feudal hangover of which I wanted no part – and that if my name ever were put forward for the receipt of an award, it would be instantly and peremptorily refused. The result was that I was able to walk away at the end of my civil service career without having any letters

attached to the end of my name, as I wanted. (Although I found out some months after I'd retired that my rejection of the honors system had not percolated all the way up the line, and that the person who'd taken over at the head of the Food Standards Agency less than a year previously had made "the usual enquiries" when learning that I was within three months of retirement, and been advised that I'd give any such approach extremely short shrift (to put my likely response at its most bland). As you may gather from this, anyone to be put forward for an award is "sounded out" well beforehand to ascertain that they are ready, willing and able to be so decorated, to avoid potential embarrassments. There are no surprises left anywhere in the process.)

**JOHN BAXTER**

I'm duly honored to have shared pages with Roy Kettle OBE, with whom I've spent some time over the years, generally in company with his collaborator and our mutual friend John Brosnan, another Australian who fetched up on the beach in London. Though always good company, John was not a happy man, and frequently hors de combat from the booze that killed him too young. We should have written something together, being old friends, and sharing – more or less – a common heritage, but our very similarity probably militated against it. The one book on which we did collaborate came about because of drink. John had signed a contract to do a horror novel – his metier – about spontaneous human combustion. When he couldn't complete it, I stepped in. As we shared the same initials, finding a pseudonym was easy, so *Torched* appeared under the name "James Blackstone" – nowhere near as evocative as the names he and Roy confected for their collaborations: Harry Adam Knight and Simon Ian Childer (HAK and SIC for short).

**PASCAL THOMAS**

All through my childhood, there was no TV set in our home, a deliberate (and wise) choice by my parents. So I ended up fascinated by radio, and listened to it a lot. John Baxter's piece on radio was good, but didn't have the impact it could have had on me for reasons of generation and location, I guess. But I like radio enough to take part in a weekly broadcast on a nonprofit station here in Toulouse – this has been going on for 25 years, in fact. Our topic is '70s rock'n'roll, narrowly bracketed between the Summer of Love and the Advent of Punk. One of us had been having us listening to Frijid Pink again, a band I thought justly forgotten in spite of their one hit. This made me dig out my copies of the original LPs, one of which I'd bought in NYC in 1977, I see from the price tag. I found it quite serendipitous to discover a mention of that band in Gary Hubbard's article. Some member of the band probably had to put the gold disc in hock in order to buy drugs, or some similar essential purchase. Since serendipity always rings twice, I came across another (misspelled) mention of Frijid Pink in Iain Banks 1992 rock novel, *Espedair Street*, which I got around to read a few days ago. I guess they aren't that forgotten, then.

Gary Hubbard's piece was strangely fascinating. Why spend so much time badmouthing one's deceased brother, you might ask. And at the same time, it showed his real love and deep interest in his sibling, and made for riveting reading.

Roy Kettle was a lot of fun, too. Part of the job of many famous people is to interact with many other people, if only fleetingly. Therefore many of us could, I suppose, tell tales of their encounter with the famous, though not as well as Roy did, of course. Or Greg Benford, who has written a number of such pieces for *Trap Door* and is always fun to read. I wish I'd met so many luminaries. But then, I did meet Greg Benford more than once, so there! Should be enough to impress the youngsters. Actually, they're more impressed by my half-minute interaction with Philip Dick in Metz: "Are you German?" he asked. "Well, er, no" I must have retorted, as a young fan in colossal awe of The Genius. "Entformen Sie sich, sofort!" [Transform yourself at once!]. Always the joker, he was. This was in the hotel lobby where he went on to have his famous banter battle with Harlan Ellison, which he was happy about winning – my English wasn't good enough at the time to allow me to follow that exchange.

**JEANNE BOWMAN**

Thanks for keeping me on the *Trap Door* mailing list. I do read, and often enjoy the articles. It is the quintessential fanzine. I will admit, though, that my first impulse is to scan and count for gender. Honestly, I don't know why I do, the bottom line being I don't submit anything, so why should I expect anyone else to, let alone sort along gender lines. But I do.

I received a copy of Wm. Breiding's collected fanzine/other works and realized that it captured something for me about my fannish identity – that *Outworlds* cohort. I always have appreciated being introduced to fandom and seeing it through your eyes and experiences as a neo. Being published was, and remains, an odd thrill (even in these days of instant gratification on-line, etc.) and I believe *Trap Door* was first, for me. You have sought and achieved your vision, as I understood it way back, for *Trap Door* as a zine with gravitas, weight, trufaanisheness, timebinding and the like – well drawn and connected to content illustrations. Craftsmanship. Engagement with your people. Good to great writing. You've done it. I sincerely hope the effort to pub your ish continues to nourish you, and the fandom it is embedded in (pun intended), however much I quibble with gender representation. *{Yes, your earliest fanwriting was published here, in the first issue and some others. There used to be more "gender representation" here, but there still is some – and I would welcome more. Including, of course, you.}*

**ALSO HEARD FROM:**

**SHERYL BIRKHEAD** ("Thank you for running the Campbell piece. In one of my file cabinets I have stashed the books I feel are fan history related or classics *about* fandom. While *Trap Door* ends up, ultimately, in a fanzine file cabinet, this could just as well go into the history cabinet solely on the strength of that one piece."), **WILLIAM BREIDING** ("*Trap Door* is an extraordinary fanzine. Should you ever cease publishing (a great loss!) you should consider doing a nice fat compilation of 'The Best of *Trap Door*' – it would be a best seller." If someone undertake turning the first eight issue's content, which was done on Paul Williams's correcting Selectric, into Word files, that *could* happen.), **KEN FAIG**, **MARLIN FRENZEL**, **JOHN HERTZ** ("It was a pleasure to see John Baxter's nod to Ken Nordine's *Word Jazz*. I'll leave to others whether a guilty conscience is inevitable for a man who describes as he did Rotser. And then Boyd Raeburn, just ahead of putting Descartes before Horace waves to Nabakov's *Pale Fire*!"), **STEVE JEFFERY** ("Still trying to puzzle Rotsler's back cover to this issue and I'm not sure Silverbob would be entirely amused by the implication that a complete stack of his works could be reduced to a single 'The Essential Silverberg' volume. As for 'Groupie Science Fiction Stories' – do sf writers have groupies? Certainly I don't recall reading anything about an equivalent of the notorious Plastercasters in a sf fanzine article. Maybe that's for another issue."), **JERRY KAUFMAN** ("Gary Hubbard makes a sweeping generalization about movies in the 1960s all being bad. We apparently have widely differing tastes, but I will remind him and the readers that *A Hard Day's Night* was made during the '60s. 'Nuf said? I hope so."), **HOPE LEIBOWITZ**, **MURRAY MOORE** ("I did not know that Bill Rotsler had been in the U.S. Army until I read Baxter's knowing Rotsler while he was supplementing his veteran's pension with writing sex-line voices' biographies. Rotsler can't have had much of a military pension, in uniform 1944 and 1945. But I learned on-line, the Army was his source of training as a photographer."), **LLOYD PENNEY**, **BILL PLOTT**, **DAVID REDD** ("Delighted with vivid glimpses of life from all, especially to be a fly on the wall at Roy Kettle meeting Her Majesty, and also to listen in on John Brosnan's radio days – would have loved to hear his book-valuing on air."), **PHILIP TURNER** ("The piece about J. W. Campbell suggests we need to coin a new word for people like him, maybe going beyond extrovert to psychovert?") and **HOWARD WALDROP**.