FADEAWAY 54

FADEAWAY #54 is a fanzine devoted to science fiction and related fields of interest, and is produced by **Robert Jennings, 29 Whiting Rd., Oxford, MA 01540-2035, email fabficbks@aol.com**. Copies are available for a letter of comment, or a print fanzine in trade, or by subscription at a cost of $25.00 for six issues. Letters of comment are much preferred. Any person who has not previously received a copy of this fanzine may receive a sample copy of the current issue for free by sending me your name and address. Publication is (in theory anyway) bi-monthly. This is the April-May 2018 issue

YES, THIS ISSUE IS VERY LATE Many factors are involved, only one of which is worth mentioning here. For those who are interested, I have been editing the N3F genzine *Tightbeam* for a year or so (beginning with issue #272). *Tightbeam* is an all pixel production; no print copies are turned out at all. The mag is supposed to be bi-monthly, but issues have been coming out mostly on a monthly schedule. The zine is distributed electronically to all the N3F members, and then, a few weeks later, it is posted on Bill Burns' efanzines.com site where copies are downloaded/read by an additional three to four hundred people. If you have not encountered *Tighbeam* yet, let me urge you to check it out.

What does that have to do with *Fadeaway* (besides the fact that I have been expending energy on a separate publication)? Well, I have been thinking seriously about the future of the print fanzine, and this fanzine in particular. I am concerned about postage costs and printing costs, which continue to go up on a constant and regular basis. I am also concerned because my machine only prints black and white. Fanzines offered in electronic format carry color with no additional effort or expense.

I can afford to foot the printing/postage costs of this fanzine, but I am increasingly drawn to the fact that the illos posted in the e-zine format would be rendered in color.

The other factor is the time and effort it takes to print up, staple, stuff the copies in mailing envelopes, stick stamps on the things and then, finally, haul the tubs down to the Post Office so they can be processed. This takes a lot of time and effort, whereas there is very little work involved in sending out an e-zine once it is ready to go, and a real bonus is that the electronic copies reach the recipients almost instantly.

Right now a fair number of people have already opted to receive *Fadeaway* as an e-zine. This issue will obviously go out in both print and pixel formats, but I'm not so sure I want to keep doing the print copies in the future. I would appreciate some reader feedback on the subject.

AS A LIFE LONG SCIENCE FICTION FAN I have always been a supporter of space exploration and the potential of space travel most of my life too, but in the last decade I have developed serious doubts about the feasibility of manned space travel.

I've mentioned some of these things in previous issues of *Fadeaway*, so I won't harp on a lot of the problems involved in making space travel work. There are two major problems that must be addressed if human beings are going to start traipsing around the solar system: the economic cost involved, and the horrendous dangers involved in human beings traveling in space.

In my mind the most daunting of these problems are the severe dangers traveling in space involve. Human beings are made to survive on the oxygen rich gravity environment provided by planet Earth. Going outside the boundaries of our planet leaves us pray to horrible damage from cosmic rays, loss of gravity, bodily function disorientation, circulation disorders, and plenty more. All of this has been described in considerable detail in the scientific literature before, yet solutions to these problems have not been found, and unless they are found the human race will find that even jumping to and exploring the Moon is going to be horrendously dangerous and ruthlessly damaging. Maybe there are some brave souls who are willing to sacrifice their health and dramatically shorten their life spans in order to reach and explore Luna in the name of science, but I don't think the bulk of humanity would consider that tradeoff.

And let's not forget the inevitable accidents that will occur in space exploration. If there is a major equipment failure in deep space the space travelers are doomed. There is no way any kind of rescue mission could be launched in the enormous vastness of space that would be in time to rescue the people involved in an

equipment failure, or a hull rupture, or the catastrophic loss of the ship's reserve supply of oxygen, water, or food.

And if anyone thinks that the situation would get much better once there are a lot of people and space stations and other ships zipping around, think of the situation here on planet Earth. If a ship on the oceans runs into a major problem, be it storm, damage, leakage, whatever, the chances are low that any kind of rescue can be effected unless that vessel is relatively close to land, or happens to be very close to some other ship on a well recognized trade route. Now multiply that problem a hundred thousand times for the extra volume of space just in the regions between Earth and the Moon. Then imagine how much worse it would be beyond the orbit of Luna. An accident or disaster in space will almost always be fatal for everyone on that ship.

The other major problem is that space travel as it is currently envisioned is prohibitively expensive. It costs enormous amounts of money to put satellites or machines into space, much less human beings inside a capsule on top of a gigantic explosive rocket and blast that payload out into orbit.

Either there has to be some kind of economic advantage that makes space travel worth the enormous dangers and expense, or some new way must be found to make leaving the gravitational force of Earth and then moving around in space much cheaper.

There is a bit of bright news on the first point anyway. Scientists conservatively estimate that there is enuf easily obtainable Helium-3 on the surface of the moon to make space travel to and from the moon profitable right now. Of course, we don't happen to have the technology that would get us to the moon and back with a payload right now. In addition, as I have probably mentioned before, the potential for moon souvenirs is enormous. Lots of people, including me, would be happy to buy some gimcracks and gadgets that came from or were actually made on the moon. Imagine, emery boards made with genuine Moon Dust, or a good luck key chain with a chip of genuine volcanic rock from the Moon. Special Luna canceled stamped letters and post cards, sent to the moon and back, photos of the earth rise over the surface of the moon taken right there, Moon T-shirts, why, the potential is endless, and the profit potential is enormous.

Of course, there is that nagging little problem---we don't have the technology to fly to the moon, load up on this stuff, and then return safely to planet Earth. Will we in the future? I tend to doubt it. But I could be wrong. We might be able to establish space travel to and from our moon <u>because</u> there is great profit potential in doing that. But unless somebody discovers a solid gold asteroid nearby (an idea originally suggested in an *Uncle Scrooge* comic book) or perhaps one made of pure radium, I don't think there is going to be sufficient motivation to get humans into the business of regular space travel.

LUNCH TIME REMINISCES

Sometimes perfectly ordinary things will spark odd and unusual memories. I was making lunch the other day, a Swiss cheese sandwich, and I had layered a few dill pickles onto a piece of bread. I noted idly that altho cucumbers were generally round, and cucumbers are the main ingredient in making dill pickles, that for some reason these pickle slices were not round, but instead they were mostly oval shaped. Dill ovals.

My memory immediately skipped back a few dozens years, decades actually. The Dill Ovals. I hadn't thot about them in a long, long time. Remarkable how the memories come flooding back from a chance connection. The Dill Ovals were a doo-wop singing group. They had a couple of regional hits in Philly and Macon Georgia, then incredibly, several more in Omaha, Nebraska. They had been with Burnt Onion Records, the same outfit that originally signed Shoeless Paisley before he became a big personality.

The leader of the group was Williamson "Willie" Longarm. I knew him because he was one of those fringe science fiction/comic book fans forever hovering on the edges of organized fandom. Before he got into the singing business he was the owner and operator of a popular diner located on a busy highway near the outskirts of Grass Lake, Alabama.

His eatery was popular because it happened to be located just outside the town line and was also near the state line. Truckers, and particularly travelers in pickup trucks and cars carrying illicit medicinals, bootleg hooch, pilfered live stock, and similar products, liked to stop there for some quick eats and to listen in on Willie's big police scanner radio which was always on and was perched right behind the counter near the cash register. Keeping up on local law enforcement news sometimes caused these 'special' travelers to linger awhile longer and have more than the cup of coffee and piece of pie they had originally stopped in for.

Willie is still remembered as the inventor of the Winter BLT, a profit margin builder for diners and truck stops in the south east. During the winter months, when the prices of tomatoes and lettuce jumped thru the

roof, Willie came up with the idea of buttering one side of the toasted bread with pizza sauce straight from the can, and using bright green lime Jello on the other piece of toast.

His invention initially met with quite a bit of opposition from some customers, irate long-haul truckers in particular, but by adding an extra dill pickle slice and an extra half-slice of bacon per sandwich he was able to damp down the flow of complaints to a mere trickle of good natured grumbling. Meanwhile, his profit margin on BLTs went up, as in way the hell up.

Unfortunately his initial success led him to try more profit building gimmicks. During one particular summer his efforts to continue his money saving techniques met with some solid opposition. He tried to increase his net-net profit by substituting wilted cucumbers slices from left over salads for the dill pickle slices. A touring college girl's softball team reacted very poorly to this innovation. Objections to this particular practice were immediate, and violent. Their objections quickly led to arguments and the arguments escalated.

The ladies set fire to his bistro, burning the place right down to the ground. Since he was technically over the town line, the city fire department didn't even bother to answer his frantic call for help. Willie himself was only saved from destruction because the team manager had smashed a five gallon jar of dill pickle slices over his head. The dumped contents preventing him from being roasted alive.

After the conflagration and facing economic disaster (the entire team left without paying for their meal, or the extra straws and napkins they used as fuses when they set the fires), Willie made a snap decision to take a new direction with his life

It was during that moment, drenched with brine and pickle slices, that he had his epiphany, as it were. He decided to form a singing group called the Dill Ovals. He and the remaining eatery employees (the ones that hadn't joined the softball team in their act of gleeful arson), formed a doo-wop singing group that had no local success, but did manage to attract the attention of one of Willie's former customers, an individual who preferred to remain nameless, but who apparently was a heavy investor in Burnt Onion Records, for reasons of his own. He helped finance the group, his girl friend helped design their stage costumes, and the Dill Ovals were on their way.

Big name stardom eluded them. The Dill Ovals were a flashy opening act at some tourist attractions around the southland, mostly along the Gulf Coast, in clubs which were reported to have back rooms where high rollers could try their luck at assorted games of chance. Then came their back-to-back double hit tune sensation in Omaha. Those two songs didn't even track in the rest of the country. Clearly, Omaha beckoned, and the Dill Ovals responded.

Last I heard they were regulars during August and September at the eight week long Omaha Nebraska Special Events Fair Spectacular (not affiliated with the state department of Tourism, or the Nebraska state department of agriculture, or with the city of Omaha, or with several other groups, as per the outcomes of a number of long standing legal suits). They went on just before the nightly corn shucking contests. Their enduring melodies were repeated endlessly, and afterwards they had a small booth where they sold original pressings of their singles and their two LPs. Apparently Burnt Onion sold them crates of their original material at close-out prices.

Willie got interviewed for his part in the creation of the Winter BLT by some outfit that was making a documentary on iconoclastic diner chow. It was supposed to be posted on YouTube, but I haven't seen it there. I used to get a post card from Willie now and then, asking for a copy of whatever fanzine I was publishing, but I haven't heard from him in quite a while.

Amazing, isn't it, what kind of memories chance encounters in daily life can conjure up? The Dill Ovals. I hadn't thought about them in years.

Journey Backwards: Libraries I Have Known and Loved … or Not Loved …and Ransacked for Discards

by Dale Nelson

Not only the library books that I read, but the libraries themselves – the buildings, the rows of shelves, the tucked-away storage rooms -- have shaped my imagination. One of them owned millions of volumes; another only a very few thousand. Most of them were sources for discarded magazines and books, as well as for books to check out. I'll begin with the library I use at present, say a little about its vicissitudes, and work my way back to the earliest libraries that I can remember.

Mayville (ND) State University Library (Byrnes-Quanbeck Library)

The Mayville State University library is housed within a partly new, and partly newly-remodeled, building containing classrooms, offices for the Education Division, etc. In the past few years the number of square feet devoted to the library has been reduced, I'd estimate, by about half. Very few students use it, and evidently few or none of the instructors assign research papers that require students to pick books off the shelves. A few students will usually be seen in the library, sitting at tables using their own notebook computers. The Writing Center has a presence in the library, but evidently students confer with Center assistants mostly by electronic means.

The library has discarded many thousands of items from its collection in the past few years. I was responsible, as a volunteer from the English faculty before I took my buyout, for the culling of perhaps 1,500 obsolete volumes from the sections of the library devoted to speech communication texts, composition instruction books, and fiction bestsellers. Much of this stuff was, indeed, never going to be used. While great numbers of books have been weeded, the most striking reduction is the virtually complete elimination of the periodicals archive. I am assured that the magazine and journal texts are all available online. Maybe so. If you've read Nicholson Baker's *Double Fold: Libraries and the Assault on Paper*, you might wonder about some things, including how the digital records were made that have replaced paper archives in so many libraries. Digital copies made from murky microfilms can result in gibberish. "Suibtermanean Convumision" indeed.

I will describe the MSU Library as I knew it prior to its 2010-11 and 2016-2017 remodeling and space (and materials) reduction. To begin downstairs with the cryptlike **serials storage room**: Prior to the remodeling, you could, if the door was open, see into the crypt from the main periodicals area. There was a light switch on the right-hand wall as you came into the storage area. It was actually two rooms: you entered one, and, walking forward a few steps, could enter a second room with its own light switch. The walls and the floor in both rooms were made of concrete. You really felt like you were underground, surrounded by archives.

In the first room, to your right was a wall with solid, sturdily-bound old books of some sort—legal code volumes, perhaps. Had they ever been used? Who knows? If you were to walk past these books, you would come in a few paces to face a wall in front of which were shelves that held *The New York Times Book Review, The Herald Tribune Book Review,* and *The New York Review of Books*. When the library was purging its serials archives in early May 2010, I took some of these issues with Tolkien reviews, etc. If you then made a second turn, so that to your right was the third wall of the room, you would pass shelves with old *National Geographic* volumes. By 2010 some of these had been discarded due to damage from moisture that had seeped through the wall. As you neared the end of this wall, you'd come to shelves with the more recent issues of *Life* magazine. You came now to the fourth wall of the first room, in which was the opening to the second room. On the right-hand side of the entrance were further shelves of *Life*; I think these were largely issues from the 1950s or so. To the left of the entrance were shelves with boxes of *The New York Times* on microfilm.

While we remain in this first room, we should consider what was on the free-standing shelves therein. Here were bound volumes of *Time* – I took around ten, including the one with the issue having a C. S. Lewis cover story. The stylish cover picture was by Boris Artzybasheff. Unfortunately I didn't get the one with Artzybasheff's famous near-end-of-war picture of Hitler.

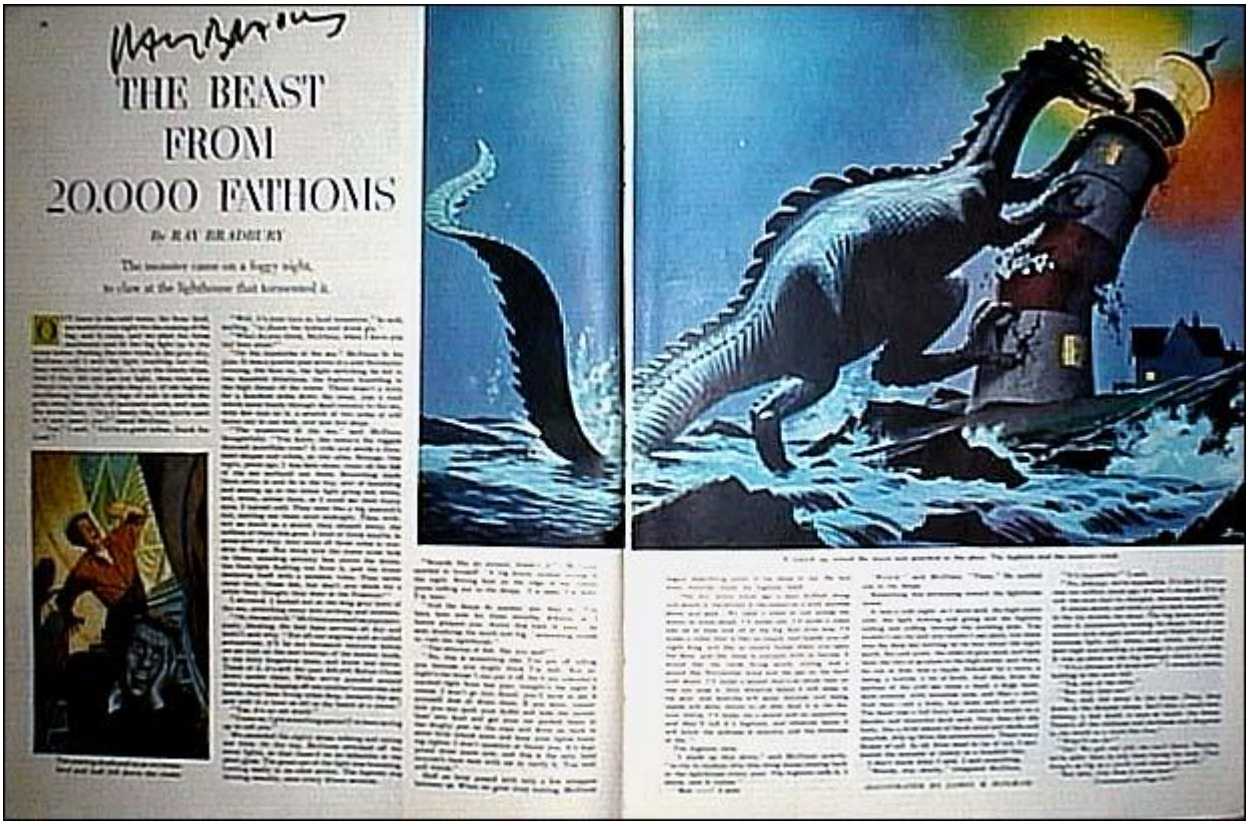
The New York Times Magazine issues were piled one on top of the other; I made sure of getting the issue with the Phillip Norman profile of Tolkien – a major contribution to fan knowledge of The Professor's biography and personality during the late-1960s days of the "Hobbit Craze" on college campuses. Issues of *The Saturday Evening Post* were piled here. On another shelf were a few years' worth of *The New Statesman*, almost the only British periodical in the library. (Contributors included Paul Johnson, who has gone on to being a highly readable historian, and sometime science fictionist Kingsley Amis.) Other magazines and journals were also stored in this room.

Stepping into the second room, immediately to one's right was a wall with shelves of World War II-era *Life* magazines. My keenest regret, as regards what I *didn't* salvage, has related to not having grabbed more of these, which I could have sent to my parents. On later reflection, though, I don't think they necessarily would have enjoyed them. I know one issue I happened to look at contained a very gruesome artist's conception of an American soldier running, with his face a mass of raw flesh, the victim of shrapnel, I suppose. As it is, I think I saved around 15 issues of *Life* for them. The earliest issues, were from around 1937.

To one's left, once one had stepped into the second room, were issues of *American Heritage*, which was published in hardcover for many years. In 2017, when the library completed its purging of paper issues, I rescued the lot for my son. I haven't examined the hoard, but it seems that he'll have every issue of *American Heritage*. This room contained old issues of *Atlantic*; I got the bound volume with the issue containing C. S. Lewis's "Screwtape Proposes a Toast." A number of freestanding shelves in this room held various other magazines and journals.]

The *New Yorker* issues had to go. The first item I made sure of taking was the 15 Jan. 1966 issue (in a bound volume with others), containing a piece mentioning W. H. Auden's comments, to a group of New York fans, about how the "rather thin" (!) Tolkien lives in a "hideous" house with hideous pictures. This was, I believe, almost the first thing to appear in American media about Tolkien the man, other than things in reference books. (To be sure, one or two of those would have given more than a mere summary of his career.) Almost certainly Auden would have been the only person whom any of the fans had ever encountered who'd known Tolkien in the flesh. What an impression Auden must have made on them, then. Fortunately, in just a matter of weeks *The New York Times Magazine* would run Philip Norman's profile, and Henry Resnick's long article would appear in *The Saturday Evening Post*—not to say that these would have presented the man exactly as he would have wanted to be seen by his young readers. (Yes, Tolkien did eventually learn about Auden's "hideous" remark, and it puzzled and hurt him. They patched things up somehow.)

I remembered George Steiner's "Cleric of Treason" article in the 8 Dec. 1980 issue and got that one. It was published around the time that the superb TV miniseries *Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Spy* was appearing on PBS (don't waste your time on the movie version). Other issues serialized Laurie Lee's *As I Walked Out One Midsummer Morning,* Peter Matthiessen's *The Cloud Forest*, and Alan



Moorhead on exploration of the Nile, and there was Mary McCarthy on Florence and Venice. Also ending up at my house were the ones with *Silent Spring, Eichmann in Jerusalem,* and *Joe Gould's Secret.*

I saved also some magazines with obvious science fiction interest. There were *Saturday Evening Post* issues with stories by Robert Heinlein ("The Black Pits of Luna," "The Green Hills of Earth," etc.) and Ray Bradbury ("The Beast from 20,000 Fathoms," etc.); and the complete serialization of *No Blade of Grass* by John Christopher -- a postapocalyptic contestant for the 1957 World Fantasy Award, and a strange thing to be appearing with cheery advertisements for a long-finned Chrysler Imperial, a double-page ad for the new '57 Philco Super Marketer fridge, and a Jacobsen Turbo-Cut *lawn mower*. Editor Ben Hibbs preceded the first of seven installments (27 April 1957) with a full-page announcement: "The Story That Shocked The Editors," thus:

"On the evening of January 3, 1957, I sat in the living room of my home pondering the manuscript of a frightening book.

It was a book that, despite its length, I had read at a single sitting – compelled, often horrified, by the picture of human degradation that it painted.

This, as my colleagues had warned me, was no mere adventure story, no epic with a happy ending, not pleasant escape to the world of let's pretend. This was a book unlike any The Saturday Evening Post had ever published – a story that for violence of deed, for horrible fascination, was unknown to our columns.

That story begins on the following page.

I will not tell you its plot – or even what it is about. I will hint that it reveals some terrible truths about the possible behavior of quite normal men and women when they learn – all of them – that they have not long to live. I can say that these supposedly genteel beings take to murder, pillage and rape, behaving more like savages than the flower of civilization.

And I can predict that this is a book which, once you've started it, you will have to finish. For I think you will ask yourself, as I did: Am I like this? Put to this horrible test, how would I behave?"

In the 8 June 1957, along with the final installment of Christopher's novel, the *SEP* published a few letters on *No Blade of Grass*, or at least on Hibbs' warning: "On the strength of your notice, I couldn't be lured at any price into reading the tale itself"… "For the first time in forty years of reading the Post I am heartsick over an ugly story"… "Thank you …for your warning. I know enough of human depravity not to want to read

about it"… "I never want the magazine in my house again"… "I want to protest your publishing the kind of trash you describe as being in NO BLADE OF GRASS" … "this is more than I can take"– However, Robert P. Hoskins of Lyons Falls, New York, wrote, "I would like to congratulate you on your current experimentation with science fiction….As a long-time devotee of the genre, I would greatly appreciate seeing much more." Hoskins went on to write several sf novels and to edit several anthologies.

I copped a *Life* magazine from 1947 with a several-page feature illustrated by the great Chesley Bonestell, on manned travel to the moon (but I was sorry to find that a 1944 issue that should have had the wonderful Saturn-as-seen-from-Titan image had been gutted!) and *Life* issues with art from Zallinger's prehistoric animals mural at the Peabody Museum in Harvard. The dinosaur pictures probably changed my life when, as a young boy, I saw this work in one of those Golden books. Really captivating stuff at that age! I'll mention also the issue with lavishly illustrated feature on *2001: A Space Odyssey*.

I caught two issues of Look magazine that serialize Asimov's Fantastic Voyage novelization. Not that that is the good doctor at his best!

In 2010, I rescued approximately 30 years' worth of (London*) Times Literary Supplement* issues. The earliest issue I have seen is date 1 Jan. 1970, and the latest was from 1998. (Later, I copped even more.) I began to read the *TLS* in the early 1970s as an undergrad, being impressed by its hospitality to authors, artists and topics that interested me--such as Gormenghastly Mervyn Peake. Browsing in my *TLS* archive, I noted such items as a feature article on Olaf Stapledon by Brian Aldiss, two issues with Evelyn Waugh on the cover, Ursula Le Guin on Lovecraft (she's not a fan-girl), a full-page article on John Dickson Carr by Kingsley Amis, a review (favorable) of Le Guin's *A Wizard of Earthsea*, the commemorative "advertisement" placed by Tolkien's

publishers, Allen and Unwin, in the 14 Sept. 1973 issue (Tolkien had died a week and a half before), something about John Buchan, and a cover with a Peake drawing. "As good as a fanzine," I said to myself. "Here's richness!" as Wackford Squeers said in a different context.

I took some bound *Time* issues, including the 8 Sept. 1947 one with CSL on the cover. "His Heresy? Christianity." A later couple of issues had brief coverage of the 1950s Congressional hearings about gruesome horror comic books. Publisher William Gaines was asked about a cover on which a man holds an axe in one hand and a woman's head in the other. Didn't he think that that was in bad taste? Gaines replied that it would have been in bad taste if the artist had shown the neck as well as the head.

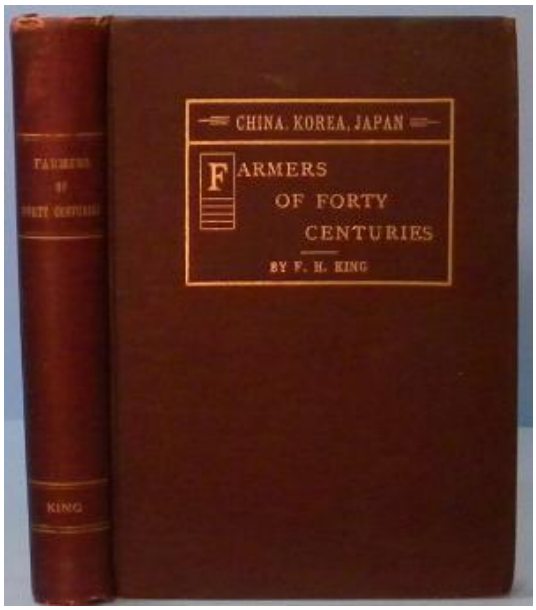
Most of these things were certainly not in "highly collectible condition." I was happy to get so many interesting issues, but troubled by the fate of so much more. The city of Mayville used to have massive recycling bins in a parking lot downtown near the quilt store, funeral home, Congregational church, public library, and grocery store. One was for paper goods. I discovered that that was where discarded magazines were going when I opened one of the doors in the side of the bin and discovered the bin was packed to the roof with bound volumes of *Time* magazine, etc. It's as if the crypt emptied into the recycling bin…

The periodicals reading room was a pretty stark, utilitarian room when I first arrived at MSU. In time, it was attractively remodeled as the Emil Seim Room, with a lavish use of wood shelving, comfortable chairs and tables, etc. It was not changed during the first phase of library changes, but in the past few months it has been repurposed a play room for preschoolers (connected with the university's Head Start) and storage place for educational toys and kits. Whether Emil Seim is spinning in his grave, I couldn't say.

Now for the **upstairs area**, including reference books, circulating books, interlibrary loan office, etc.

I typically entered the library from a west-facing side of the Classroom Building. One pushed open one of the two glass doors and entered a lobby. To one's left was the library; to one's right was a wooden door that led beyond into the part of the building containing science classrooms, offices, hallway bulletin boards and some displays.

A bulletin board just on the lobby side of the library was a place where I almost always stapled publicity posters for the campus-community reading group that I hosted for eleven years. One could see through windows and the glass door into the library. When one entered, men's and women's restrooms were to one's right. These are gone now. There are now no restrooms inside the library. Call it progress! To the left was the circulation counter.



The library discarded thousands of books before and during the remodeling. From what I saw, a great many of them deserved this fate, e.g. useless old volumes of *Books in Print*. Discards were put on tables and were free for the taking. The finds that come to mind as particularly notable: an original edition of Franklin William King's *Farmers of Forty Centuries: or, Permanent Agriculture in China, Korea and Japan* (Madison, Wis.: Mrs. F. H. King, 1911), a classic of organic farming, and a copy of Roy Gallant's *Exploring the Planets* in the edition that so fascinated me when I was around ten years old, with that wonderful painting of a crescent Saturn as seen from Titan. Even if it was cribbed from Bonestell, it's a great example of the visual traps that lay in wait for kids back in the day, turning them into sf fans in an instant.

I took a bunch of British *Who's Who* volumes, I think the oldest being pre-World War I and the most recent being from the 1980s; they included entries for many of my favorite authors – Arthur Machen, Algernon Blackwood, Evelyn Waugh, John Buchan, Lewis, Tolkien and more. A few years before this, by the way, I bought at MSU, for 25c each, the most impressive library discards I have found: the five elephant folios of the Mid-Century edition of the *Times Atlas*. These sizeable books (about 11 x 18), bound in bright red cloth, include beautiful tipped-in maps in four- or five-color print.

After the remodeling was over, the library discarded its vinyl records. I sent fifty or so of these to a guy in Ohio–old jazz, folksongs, etc.

Over the years I have made thousands of free interlibrary loan requests, and am thankful, for their execution of these requests, to the ILL librarians. Rarely, something I've requested has not been available, or could be obtained only with a fee that was steeper than I was prepared to pay. Eleven novels by Phyllis Paul were published. The eerie *Twice Lost* is easy to get, and the ILL department secured several from the Library of Congress for me, but it looks like I'll never get hold of *The Children Triumphant* and one or two others. Occasionally things I had little hope would be available have showed up, such as Christopher Walton's enormous, privately published 1854 compendium, *Notes and Materials for an Adequate Biography of the Celebrated Divine and Theosopher, William Law, Comprising an Elucidation of the Scope and Content of the Writings of Jacob Böhme, and of His Great Commentator, Dionysius Andreas Freher; With a Notice of the Mystical Divinity and Most Curious and Solid Science of All Ages of the World. Also an Indication of the True Means for the Induction of the Intellectual "Heathen," Jewish, and Mahomedan Nations into the Christian Faith.* Shrewdly, I thought: I'll photocopy this book, since who knows if I'll ever have access to it again. Stupidly, when I did copy it I did so at 100% of the size of the original – which features many pages of tiny print; if I were going to copy the book at all, I should made enlarged prints, as I easily could have for no extra cost, on 11" x 17" sheets. A copy of this book of about 700 densely-printed pages is offered, as of the time of writing of the present article, for $1,770 from an abebooks.com seller. I stood, in 1990, at a machine in Mayville, North Dakota, photocopying one from the University of San Francisco. Library directors have almost always purchased the books I requested as additions to the library's collection, such that we have outstanding holdings for Tolkien, C. S. Lewis, Charles Williams, et al.; books of sfnal criticism by Algis Budrys, etc.

The late MSU economics professor, Doc Neilson (no relation), author of a history of Mayville State, said that the library used to be on the second floor of the Main Building, in an area that is now a Business classroom. Although the library has contracted so much in the past few years, it is still bigger than *that* would have been.

The Mayville Public Library downtown is, architecturally, a charming little building. In my 26 years here, my total time in the town library probably wouldn't come to more than six hours. Its books for grown-ups can number no more than a few thousand. The only books that I seem to remember checking out from it are Walter van Tilburg Clark's *The Ox-Bow Incident*, Michael Crichton's *The Lost World*, and Robertson Davies's *Fifth Business*. This local landmark is a very rare example of a surviving public library in which the adult collection is in closed stacks; i.e. access to the shelves is possible only through a door opening past the checkout counter, which is behind a grille.

Library of the University of Wisconsin—Parkside Campus (Kenosha)

Two fabulously-stocked library discard sales were held on 7 & 8 Oct. 1987 and 15 & 16 March 1988. At these sales I acquired dozens of books, including Nevill Coghill's translation of selected passages from *Piers Plowman*, with art by William Blake and Samuel Palmer; Tillyard's *The English Epic*; a first edition (I think) of Buchan's *Power House*; Hirsch's *Validity in Interpretation*; the two-volume Harvard edition of Keats's letters; books on Blake, Coleridge, Yeats, Wordsworth, etc. Galt's *Annals of the Parish*, Vinaver's *Rise of Romance*, some Basil Willey literary-historical studies; the very useful *Shakespeare's Imagery* by Caroline Spurgeon; Dabney's *Love and Property* study of Dickens , etc. I bought books that I gave to one of my fellow English

teachers, and a number of books ended up in the hands of the Rector of the St. Sophia Theological Seminary of Ternopil', Ukraine.

I don't remember much about the Parkside library itself. A somber memory: a woman named Nazaly worked there, who opened my eyes about the Armenian genocide. The university buildings, as I recall, were designed such that one could stay inside from one end of campus to the other, and so the library was under the same roof as the classrooms, dining area, etc. The library had that rather characterless "spacious" look typical of the well-funded architecture of the time.

Racine (Wisc.) Public Library 75 7th St.

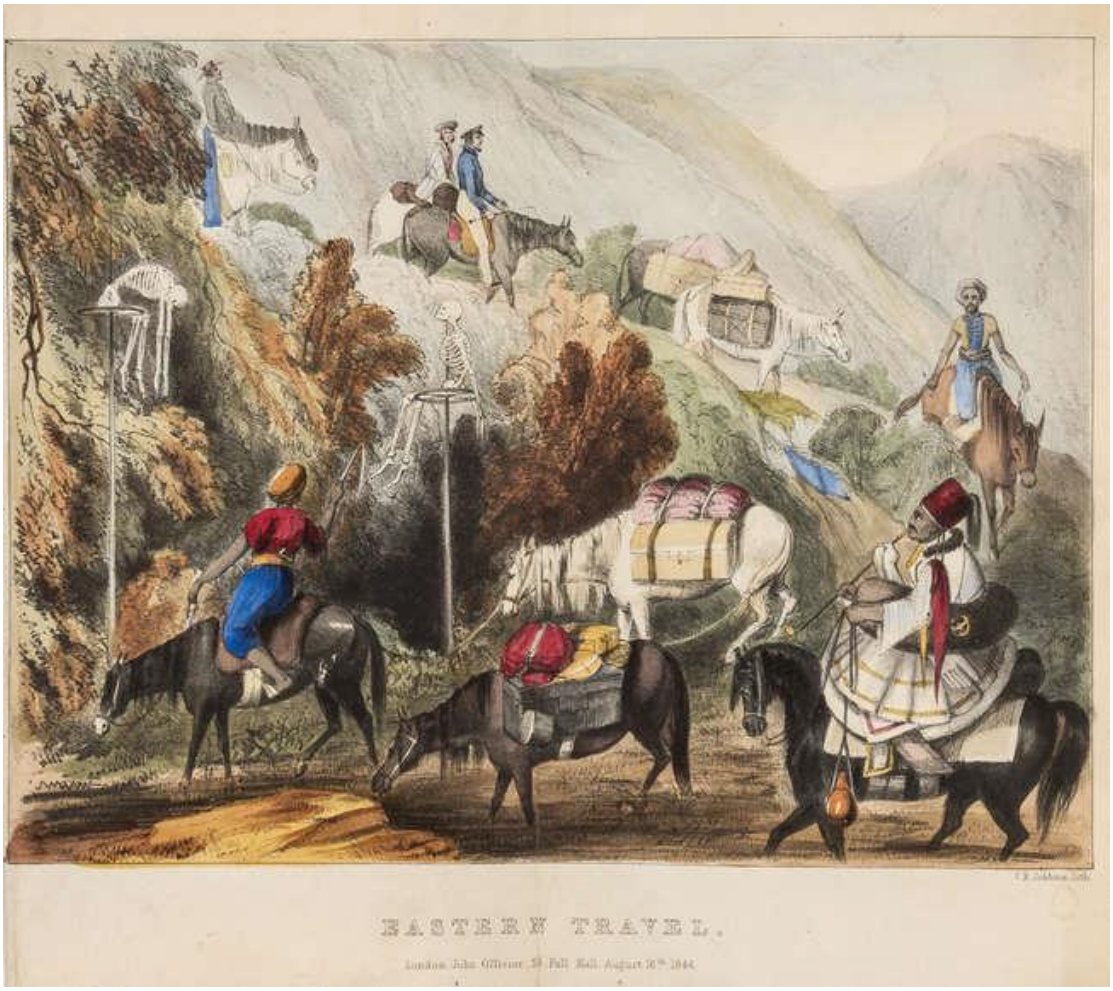
That photo looks about right, but I'm not sure about the curving window overlooking Lake Michigan. Was that there when I and my family lived there (1987-1988)? My little boy and I visited here a few times. I seem to remember checking children's books out here, including a *Beauty and the Beast* with interesting illustrations, a copy of which I tracked down again many years later. It's the 1986 Potter edition illustrated by Binette Schroeder. Her artwork reminds me just a little of Fred Banbery's for *Alfred Hitchcock's Ghostly Gallery* and *Haunted Houseful* if you happen to remember those. I am not sure that I ever checked out books for my own use.

University of Illinois Libraries!

Graduate Library stacks at the University of Illinois, which I was able to prowl during 1983-1987. I had access to the main (faculty and graduate student) library stacks. Reportedly the University of Illinois library owns six million books. Exploring the stacks was an oft-indulged pleasure. I seem to remember finding at least one book by Algernon Blackwood that was autographed by the author.

The most impressive book that I ran across here was Alexander Kinglake's travel book *Eothen* in a Victorian edition with delicately hand-colored engravings and that (from its bookplate) I figured had been in the personal library, at Clouds Hill, of Lawrence of Arabia himself. Around this time I got interested in literary travel books (not tourist guides), and was able to read things like Peter Fleming's *News from Tartary* and *Brazilian Adventure*.

I ordered numerous interlibrary loan books, too. I learned that there was an M. R. James antiquarian ghost story tradition from Michael Cox's biography, and set about exploring, several times photocopying the complete contents of books that I might never again be able to lay my hands on: Munby's *Alabaster Hand,* Malden's *Nine Ghosts*, and Gray's *Tedious Brief Tales of Granta and Gramarye*. I felt a flurry of revived interest in Arkham House books and successfully requested a few -- one of Henry S. Whitehead's books, for example – *Jumbee* or *West India Lights*. Many bogey-books that I asked for came, as I recall, from the state university at Carbondale, suggesting that someone had donated a collection to it.



There was also, downtown, the Urbana Free Library (below) with excellent discards! I've become a fan of the old Everyman's Library books from the early 20th century, and some of those turned up here: Johnson's *Lives of the English Poets* (2 vols.) and Borrow's *The Bible in Spain*, etc. Borrow used to be an author whom everyone knew, thanks especially to his "gypsy" books *Lavengro* and *The Romany Rye*; lots of people would have know who Isopel Berners was and what she meant when she urged her companion to resort to "Long Melford."

The **Champaign (Ill.) Public Library** was another of those architecturally uninteresting open-plan buildings of the Sixties or so. Lots of glass, very little coziness. I had a 20-hour-a-week reference desk internship there in the summer of 1984 but bailed out. One would step out of the air-conditioned library into the steamy Midwestern night.

From my journal, dated 10 August 1984 (Friday): I must keep notes here of some of the more remarkable questions – and questioners – I encounter at CPL. This afternoon a regular who usually phones in called and then came over in person, one Blanche H., a lady, it is not uncharitable, only accurate, to describe as old and shabby. She wanted copies of some legal papers. She seemed suspicious of her lawyer, but assured me that she had the FBI on her side. In fact, the FBI had given her the seeds from which the bouquet she presented me with had grown. She counted out the coins, $2.30 worth eventually, from a battered old black coin purse. I ran her copies for her and afterwards, at her suggestion, called a taxi for her. Before leaving, she showed me one of our new books, *Mafia Princess*, and told me that Giancana had once brought in his dog, which was "in a very bad way," to the vet clinic at the UI that her grandfather had started.

From the journal 11 August 1984: [The library director] at CPL told me that once Joan X's father, who lives in the "tower" by the library, was scanning the street with his binoculars, as is his wont, and he saw Blanche get in her car in the library parking lot and head down Randolph Street the wrong way. Then she stopped and backed up and went back in the lot. Blanche said that "the Orientals" had put a hex on her car. [One of the librarians] told me later yesterday evening that once Blanche drove her car up some cement structure

or other and said that the gypsies had hexed her car. This was at the old library, I believe. She left her car there for a few days till she judged it safe again.

There's a man named Knox who is given to phoning up with questions either of a Biblical nature or about sex. One of the librarians told me he called up to ask about implants (penile, presumably) and impotency and alcoholism. I had a call from him soon after I started. He wanted to know where in the Bible it says that Christ was crucified on a cross. I called him back with one reference each from the Gospels and from Acts. But he was suspicious – what version of the Bible was I referring from?

Journal, 22 Aug. 1984: Sunday was my last day at CPL. It was uneventful. The previous day, however, I was the recipient of a harangue on the morals of white women by a middle-aged skinny black lady who asserted Champaign County was the most racially-prejudiced county in the U.S.; her remarks made it clear that she thought only of whites as prejudiced against blacks and did not see her own wild generalizations about wanton white women as such.

Klamath County Library, Klamath Falls, Oregon

A library I didn't love was the Klamath County Library. I bought most of the books I read, at this time (1981-1983), although I read Frederic Buechner's revisionist hagiographic fiction *Godric* and Pamela Hansford Johnson's discussion of the 1966 Moors Murders, *On Iniquity,* in copies borrowed from there. The men's room was permeated by a foul odor that I don't recall having encountered anywhere else. It may have been due in part to use by vagrants.

In my boyhood, libraries weren't places where street people, with no interest in books, found warmth and a place to nap. I don't remember ever seeing a presumably homeless human being taking refuge in a library until the early 1980s. But here at the Klamath County Library was, for example, a woman left to herself at a library table, empty chairs around her: an impression of stringy hair and resentful mumbling. There must have been a time in most city libraries when staff people would have told such people to leave: the library wasn't a place to sleep but to read; and then there must have been a time when staff accepted the presence of people for whom a library was a safe place to pass the tedious hours till it was time for a meal somewhere or to spend the night in a mission or shelter. Some clinically psychotic people may have been put onto the streets around this time as part of well-intentioned reforms, but the presence of men and women suffering from mental disorders has changed the library experience for users. However, my impression is that new medications have made it possible for more afflicted people to manage life "outside."

Learning Resource Center of Oregon Institute of Technology (Klamath Falls)

Here's one of the places where I courted the woman whom I married. Of the library itself I don't have much to say. As an instructor at OIT, I built up its collection a little with requests for purchases; eventually the library director questioned some of them. "Who is Nelson? What does he teach?" When, in a memo, I reminded him of the institution's mission as including liberal arts and *copied the dean of humanities* (not sure of the exact title), there was no further difficulty. It was from this library that I filed what may have been my first interlibrary loan request, for a study of Alan Garner (*The Weirdstone of Brisingamen, The Owl Service,* etc.) called *A Fine Anger*. The book came from the University of Illinois; months later, I believe, I held the same copy in hand again, as a student at the University of Illinois.

On one occasion, the story goes, OIT faced a visit from a regional accrediting agency. The accreditation visitors would inspect the library. The American Library Association had a formula for how many books a

library ought to have, relative to its student body (perhaps other factors were also taken into account, such as degree programs). To his alarm, the library director realized that the collection was seriously short; so he and one of the library staffers barreled up to Powell's Books in Portland to buy a massive quantity of books to hurry up and get on the shelves.

Southern Oregon University Library in Ashland – This is now called the Hannon Library, and it is much remodeled, so that the front exterior is strikingly different from what I remember. The rear is more as I remember it, and is the side from which I entered the media center where I was a work-study student circa 1980.

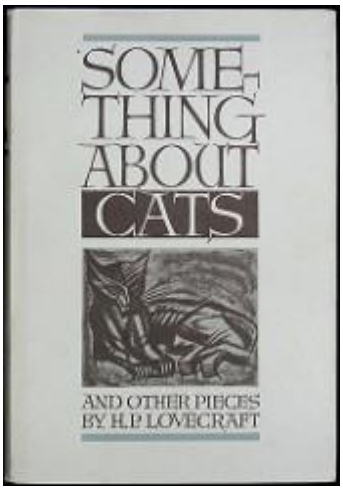
When I first arrived at Southern Oregon College (as it was then called) in 1973, I was put off by the unfamiliar Library of Congress cataloging (rather than Dewey). I wised up soon, though, and began to explore. Not so wise, either -- quite a lot of my exploring took place while I skipped classes in which I was enrolled. I found *Fifty Poems* by the famous fantasist Lord Dunsany. Determined to add to my Dunsany collection, but too poor to photocopy the book, I checked it out and transcribed the poems on a manual typewriter. That "limited edition" is still shelved with my other Dunsany books. Here too was Dunsany's *Plays of Gods and Men* * ("The Tents of the Arabs," "The Laughter of the Gods," "The Queen's Enemies," and "A Night at an Inn"). A copy of the Arthur Machen bibliography by Goldstone and Sweetser was in the Zs. I could check it out and daydream over it. *She* and *King Solomon's Mines* weren't hard to come by, but here was one I'd never seen, *Queen Sheba's Ring*, and also Morton Cohen's biography of Haggard. I photocopied photos of Haggard from this book.

Later, as my interests broadened, there were the beautiful Nathaniel Hawthorne Centenary volumes; and I found the standard Ante-Nicene, Nicene, and Post-Nicene Fathers edition of St. Athanasius's *On the Incarnation*, and the Penguin Classics translation of hermit Richard Rolle's *Fire of Love,* and one of Alexander Schmemann's books when I became interested in learning about ancient, medieval, and Eastern Orthodox Christianity.

But earlier, I was paying attention to the London *Times Literary Supplement*. A notebook I kept mentions a short piece on LOTR (new paperback edition) and an article on the "editting" [sic] of Adams' *Watership Down* and *Shardik* – all of these things in the 6 Dec. 1974 issue. Many years later, a discarded copy of the issue of this date was among the periodicals that I saved when Mayville State discarded much of its periodical collection.

I also started looking at the British humor magazine *Punch*. Alan Coren's "bulletins from Idi Amin" wouldn't be published now, as the satirist's Twainesque method of expressing scorn for the murderous Ugandan tyrant was to impersonate him as a blustering minstrel-show "coon" hankering after England's Princess Anne. "De Cabinet comin' back from de holidays dis week, and about time too, de dishes pilin' up in de sink somethin' terrible," etc.

Medford (OR) Public Library



When I was a youngster, my dad took me along to the Medford library a number of times, when he wanted to check stock market publications like *Barron's* and the *Value Line Investment Survey* there. When we visited downtown Medford and I went off to explore my places, this Carnegie library was a convenient place to meet back up. I would have visited it mostly during the early and/or mid-1970s.

Downstairs, to one's right, was a periodicals room, where I remember hunting down Prince Valiant comic strips in microfilmed newspapers. When I used to draw, Hal Foster was a major influence on my "serious" art.

Going into the main part of the library, to one's left was the fiction area. I seem to remember the Derleth-Lovecraft *Survivor* book from Arkham House. Didn't they also have Lovecraft's *Something About Cats*?

Grants Pass, Oregon Public Library

My Nelson grandparents retired from the Los Angeles area to Grants Pass around 1970. I visited Grants Pass Public Library several times. The correct title of the institution may have been the Josephine County Library. The GP library contained a copy of the Gnome Press edition of *The Coming of Conan*. It's my memory that I didn't try to check it out, but visited the library often enough that I was able to read all of it on the spot, or at least all of it that I didn't have in some paperbacks. This library also seems to have owned a copy of *Beyond the Wall of Sleep*, reprinting Lovecraft's notebook for story ideas. I jotted down some of those. Wasn't there an idea for a story about unexplained deaths occurring in the vicinity of a gnarled old tree? At last someone cuts it down and finds the sap runs red.

Ashland (OR) Public Library

The Ashland Public Library as I remember it, 1969-1981, prior to extensive remodeling around 2000 or so, had two, later three, entrances: from the west side, facing Gresham Street; from the east side; and from the north side, the main entrance, facing Siskiyou Blvd and near E. Main St. When I first used the library, as a kid about to start 9th grade, there was no east side entrance, so far as I remember. A small area with shrubs, etc. and a parking lot was put in, with a glass door opening onto a small lobby and steps going down. That was not the original arrangement.

If one entered from the Gresham Street side, one was in a room with the nonfiction books shelved to one's right. Perhaps three wooden study tables, with wooden chairs, were there. The biography section included Hazel Littlefield's memoir of Lord Dunsany. In the poetry section, which in this Dewey library was also in this room, there was a hardcover edition of Tolkien's *Adventures of Tom Bombadil,* with the lovely Pauline Baynes illustrations. I had the poems and art in the Ballantine *Tolkien Reader* paperback that was bought on my first day in Ashland, but of course the hardcover edition reproduced the art better. I believe freestanding "bins" of vinyl records stood in front of one, and here I discovered the medieval Carmina Burana (not the Orff version) and checked it out. Probably some popular music was available, but I don't remember

exploring it. It seems the library must have stopped offering records after a while. To one's left must have been an entrance into the children's section, or did one have to walk around to get to it, at one time?

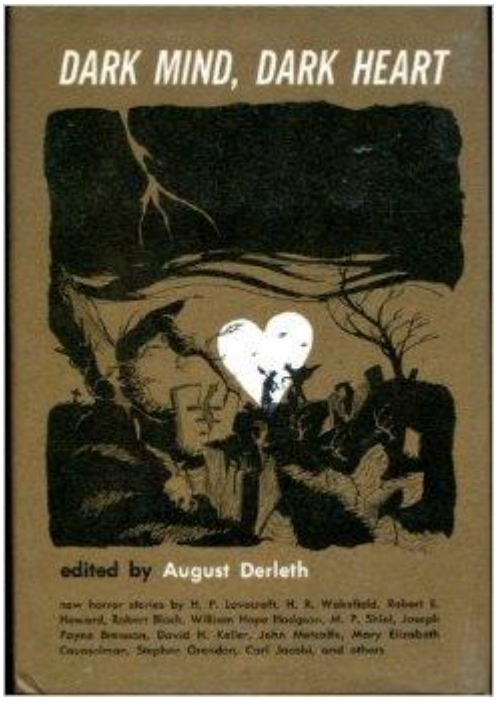
There was no addition to the left of the building when I lived in Ashland. If one approached the library from East Main, one climbed two flights of concrete steps, passing, to one's right, the Mickelson Chapman statue of a mournful figure. Opening the door, one could turn to one's right and go into the basement.

I remember a room down there in which back issues of magazines and newspapers were stored. That reminds me of a story. Before my family lived in Ashland (where we could get two television channels), we'd lived on the Oregon coast, where we had only one TV channel, an NBC affiliate. (Yes, cable was available, but that would've been a costly luxury and we didn't subscribe.) In Ashland, we could view programs of a CBS affiliate and well as NBC shows. CBS was finishing out its broadcast of Patrick McGoohan's series *The Prisoner*. The other viewers in the family sometimes preferred to watch *Ironside* on NBC, so I was able to view only a few of the bizarre British series. I was fascinated. To eke out my thin knowledge, I rooted through stacks of back issues of the *Oregon Journal*, which provided very brief episode summaries. These I copied by hand on notebook paper.

However, usually I continued up some linoleum-covered steps, past a bench on which some discard magazines might be lying and, I think, a bulletin board for local events and business cards, to pass through another door into the library itself.

As I came inside, to my left was the circulation desk, and to my right was the children's section. Beyond the desk was the grown-up fiction area. Lin Carter's 1969 book *Tolkien: A Look Behind "The Lord of the Rings"* had tipped me off to Tolkien's admission of influence from Rider Haggard's *She.* The Ashland library owned a rebound copy of the Macdonald reprint. I checked it out. The frontispiece drawing showed the scene in which Ayesha, her bosom bare, calls down curses on poor Ustane. Perhaps to deflect possible parental comment, I carefully added a few thin India ink lines to give Ayesha a top. Now it looked like she was wearing a t-shirt.

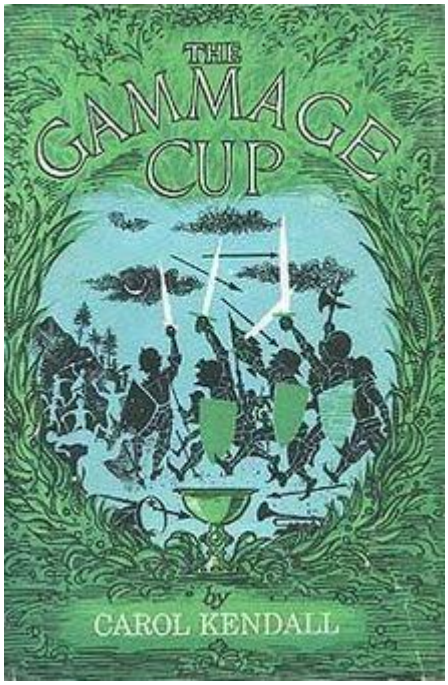
Here too were the Fraser and Wise *Great Tales of Terror and the Supernatural,* a thick Modern Library volume that probably introduced me to Lovecraft's horror fiction in the form of "The Dunwich Horror" and "The Rats in the Walls." I found a rebound copy of Wollheim's early anthology *The Portable Novels of Science* with a major Lovecraft story, "The Shadow Out of Time." Basil Davenport's *Famous Monster Tales* included "The Outsider."



It seems another Basil Davenport anthology, *Tales to Be Told in the Dark*, was here, with Machen's "Black Seal." Eventually I tried Machen's *The Secret Glory*, his peculiar combination of public school satire and Grail mysticism; what I made of it on that first reading, I don't know, other than picking up some atmosphere. Derleth's *Dark Mind, Dark Heart* anthology contained a Robert E. Howard story, "The Grey God Passes." The anthology is hardly worth mentioning except that this was one of the first Arkham House books to be encountered by me, and for a while I was interested in them. In a pocket notebook that I used in 1974, I have recorded, as in the 809 section of the Ashland library, Fuller's *Books with Men Behind Them* for "Long essay(s) on Tolkien, Lewis, & Williams – a MUST," and also "805.3876 Clareson *SF: Other Side of Realism* essay on Lewis."

I think that the Ashland library always shelved science

fiction separately from general fiction. Perhaps I read Asimov's Foundation trilogy in a copy borrowed from the library soon after we moved to Ashland. I did browse the children's section too, finding here, I think, Garner's *Owl Service*, but I guess I was oriented towards the adult section from the beginning. I remember small, high windows. It seems to me that one could have stood on top of the shelves in the children's section and these windows would still have been out of reach. I read Carol Kendall's *The Gammage Cup* and *The Whisper of Glocken*.



Other books from the adult section that I read included Rosenberg's *Naked Is the Best Disguise*, a study of Sherlock Holmes; some or all of C. L. Moore's *Northwest of Earth*; and either from this library or the school library Mary Stewart's *The Crystal Cave* and T. H. White's *Once and Future King*. As I review my reading list to look for books that I remember borrowing from Ashland Public or other libraries, I'm struck by the fact that, by the time I was a freshman and college (and I suspect for several years before) the majority of the books I read were ones that I had bought.

When one entered the Ashland library, having ascended from the Siskiyou Boulevard side, one saw opposite oneself the fireplace, which really was used as such in chillier months – coziness indeed. Here would be a cart or two of new books. This was the magazine area. A drinking fountain was nearby. Here too might sometimes be a table or two of weeded books for sale. On 25 Oct. 1980, now the possessor of a bachelor's degree, I picked up Walter Allen's appealing *English Novel* survey here, prompting my interest in many books, and also Dorothy van Ghent's *The English Novel: Form and Function, Twentieth Century Interpretations of Pride and Prejudice,* Andrew Wright's *Jane Austen's Novels: A Study in Structure,* Tillotson's *Novels of the Eighteen-Forties,* and Paul Johnson's *Enemies of Society*. Science fiction and fantasy don't seem to have showed up in the discards often, but I did find a beat-up copy of L. Ron Hubbard's *Final Blackout*, in the collectible Hadley edition. Getting on towards 40 years later, it's still not been read by me. Of greater interest was J. O. Bailey's pioneering study *Pilgrims through Space and Time: Trends and Patterns in Scientific and Utopian Fiction* (1947), the 1972 Greenwood reprint.

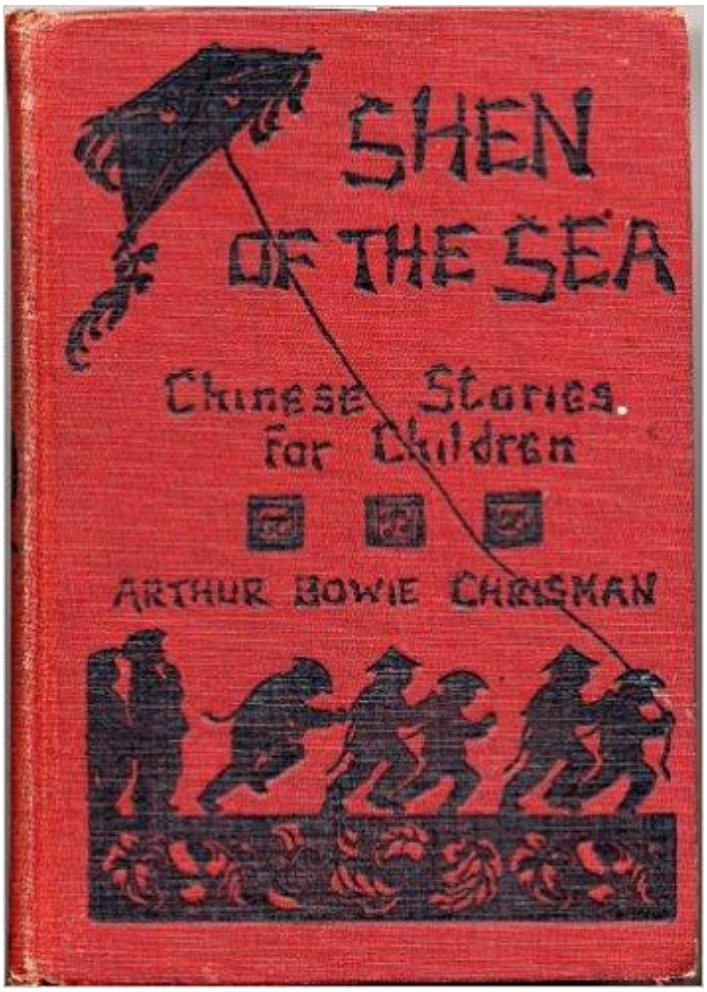
A few hundred long-play records were available for checkout. I borrowed *Camelot* (because of the T. H. White *Once and Future King*), *Sgt. Pepper*, and *Carmina Burana* – not the Carl Orff work, but the medieval music.

Now it doesn't seem that I checked out books from the Ashland library all that often, over the years. Used and new books of interest to me were more readily available than in Coos Bay, and most of the books I wanted to read—i.e. fantasy—were not owned by the library. However, I loved the place. I was in charge of picking up the mail from our post office box. I often stopped at the library on my way home from the post office, McCarley's Books, Rare Earth (records and art books), and the Pioneer Market (comic book source), and looked over my latest fanzines, catalogues, and apa mailings. A review of the new library books and I was on my way up the hill.

The libraries at the Ashland junior high school and then the high school were pleasant places, but I don't think I borrowed books from them very often. I did run across Tolkien's "Goblin Feet" poem in a book owned by one of them. Tolkien came to despise this youthful effort about "little pretty flittermice" (bats) and diminutive fairy-folk. You can read it here: http://oxfordinklings.blogspot.com/2009/02/goblin-feet.html

My ninth-grade English teacher's classroom had wire racks of paperback books on the rear wall, and I think I found Doyle's *Poison Belt* in Mr. Paulson's room.

Coos Bay (OR) Public Library



When we moved from Salt Lake City to Coos Bay around the beginning of 1965, the public library was on Telegraph Hill, part way up, and therefore a bit away from downtown. I don't remember it very well. It apparently was a Carnegie library dedicated in Jan. 1915. This building was later turned into a museum, and now it may be used for some other purpose – if it's still standing.

I think I found *Shen of the Sea* there. I don't believe I ever read much of it, but it contained a few eerie silhouette illustrations that appealed to me. "We are the shen, demons of the sea."

One of the first books to captivate me was Roy Gallant's *Exploring the Planets*, as I mentioned above -- not for the text but for John Polgreen's paintings, notably the double-page depictions of looming Mars as seen from Deimos with Phobos hanging in the black distance, and a crescent Saturn in the blue sky of Titan. The latter was, surely, cribbed from one or other of Chesley Bonestell's versions of Saturn. Even so, talk about sense of wonder! It's possible that I discovered this book – a landmark in the development of my imagination -- at the old Coos Bay library. Chronologically, that is the earliest library I recall – but not well enough to give it a place of prominence in these reminiscences.

The downtown **public library** opened in 1966, according to http://bay.cooslibraries.org/foundation/ which says it was remodeled in 1999. My mom worked there for some time in a clerical job in a back room. She was troubled by the library's display of *Ramparts* magazine. This was the New Left magazine that, reportedly, devoted a cover to explaining how to make a Molotov cocktail. I haven't been able to verify this, however. I've asked Snopes.com to look into it.

But never mind that….

I wrote this for *Mythprint* in August 2012:

When the door of the Coos Bay, Oregon, public library closed behind me that day in (probably) the second half of 1966, my pre-Tolkien world had just moments of existence left.

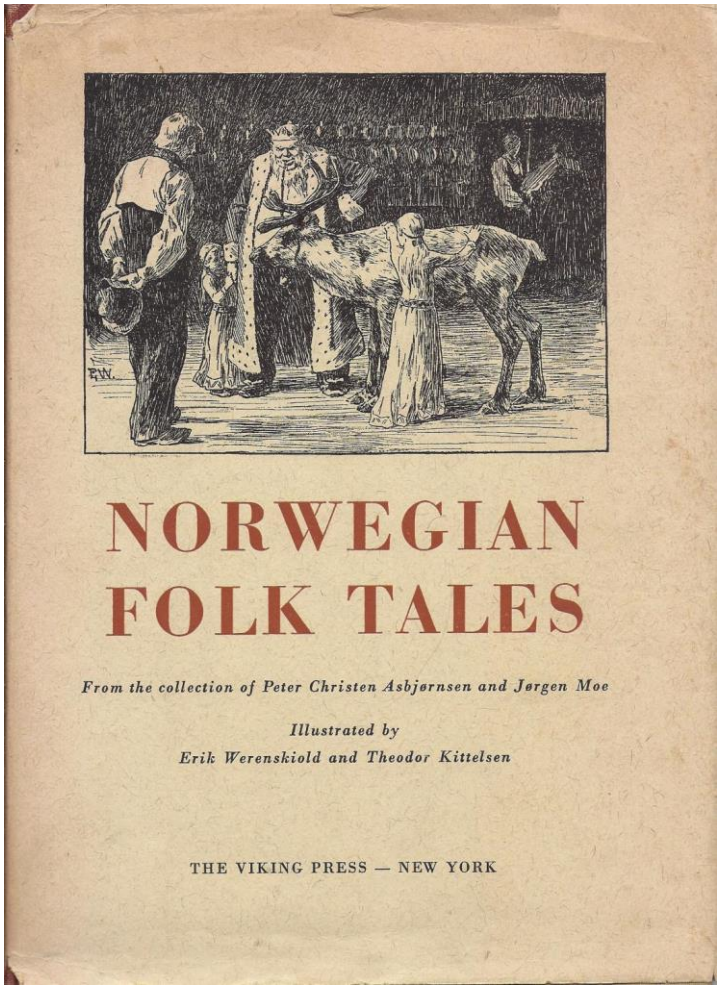
Once through the doorway, one turned right, to the children's section, or left to the adult section. If, aged 11, I poked around the children's section first, then the moment that day when I crossed over to the adult section (not for the first time) was a turning point in my life.

A memory: the Ballantine Tolkien paperbacks displayed with the Barbara Remington Middle-earth map and/or the "Come to Middle-earth!" poster. The artwork caught my eye. I liked it (still do). It looked science-fictiony.

So I read The Hobbit. It connected with my existing love of Scandinavian mythology and folklore. As a boy, Tolkien desired dragons with a great desire. I desired trolls. (Look at the troll-drawings by Werenskiold and Kittelsen, in the Asbjornsen and Moe collection of Norwegian Folk Tales.) True, Tolkien's trolls talk like Cockneys. But they have the authentic troll-qualities of ill-gotten wealth, largeness, stupidity, coarseness, and dangerous appetite. Yes, I relished the hobbit, the dwarves, the wizard, the dragon-talk. It seems people usually don't say much about Bert, William, and Tom, though; but I was delighted: something new for me about trolls.

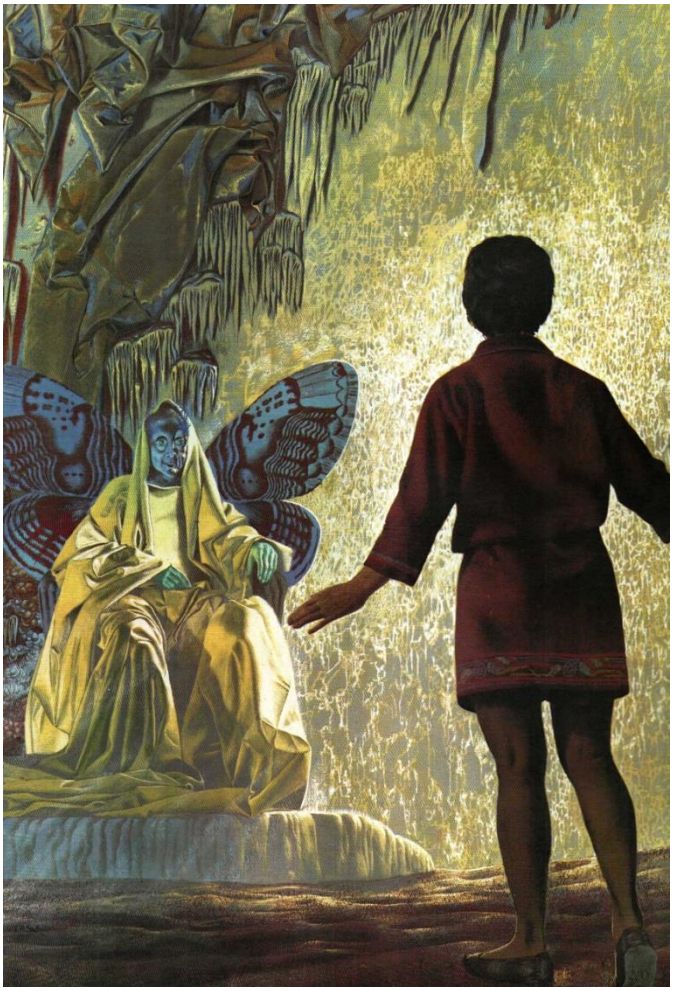
And in a book displayed in the adult section! Who could have expected such a thing?

At this library I discovered Tolkien's *Hobbit* and *LOTR* – I was 11 years old; and, in the children's section, there awaited me the C. S. Lewis Narnian books. At about the same time, perhaps earlier, I found several works of the Scandinavian imagination. A book for my lifetime was *Norwegian Folk Tales* – Pat Shaw Iversen's translation of stories from Asbjørnsen and Moe, with unforgettable drawings by Kittelsen and Werenskiold. They took up residence in my soul. Many years later, the collection appeared in paperback in the Pantheon Fairy Tale and Folklore Library, and I ordered a copy from the F&SF Book Co. Once online bookselling appeared on my horizon, I bought a used copy of the hardcover edition. I'll put it this way: I have over 4,000 books. If I had to move into a nursing home and could keep only 200, this would be one I'd keep. In fact if I had to cull my library down to 50 volumes, this would probably be one of them.



Further Scandinavian wonder-stuff: Not to be confused with the famous expatriate author, an older James Baldwin wrote *The Story of Siegfried*. Dorothy Hosford wrote *Thunder of the Gods.* Babette Deutsch introduced me to the *Heroes of the Kalevala.* These books imparted to me a lasting fascination with the North, even if I did not read them all from cover to cover. I have to mention Peter Hurd's paintings in the Siegfried book. He was of the N. C. Wyeth school (and married one of Wyeth's daughters).

The Golden Press issued an oversize collection, *Scandinavian Fairy Tales* as told by Giordano Pitt and illustrated by Federico Santin. Some of the pictures fascinated me. Today, Santin's painting seems stiff – that cloak looks like it is made of molded black plastic.



The Little Grey Men by Denys Watkins-Pitchford worked in my imagination; the idea of tiny people with their own concerns and perils, living out of sight of human beings, helped me to pay attention to fern-fans, holes in the ground, exposed roots, and shorelines of lakes and sea. The book deepened my enjoyment of my toys as I assimilated some of its atmosphere into my play, which, I now see, was an early form of storytelling, before I was proficient with words and drawings of my own. Watkins-Pitchford's book was thus a stimulus to observation and to imagination. I've written elsewhere about the Bartlett Street Book Store, where I found a copy on when I was 20 years old. I snapped it up.

Most of the first science fiction books I read came from the Coos Bay library; I won't be the only person who remembers Silverberg's *Time of the Great Freeze* and *Conquerors from the Darkness* from a long time ago. Lester del Rey's *Outpost of Jupiter* and *Rocket from Infinity* were, probably, other gleanings from the children's section. Into it, I believe, had found its way a dustjacketless copy of *The John Wyndham Omnibus*, containing *The Day of the Triffids, The Kraken Wakes*, and *The Chrysalids*. After all these years I'm not sure if I read any of these three novels – but I remembered the name at least.

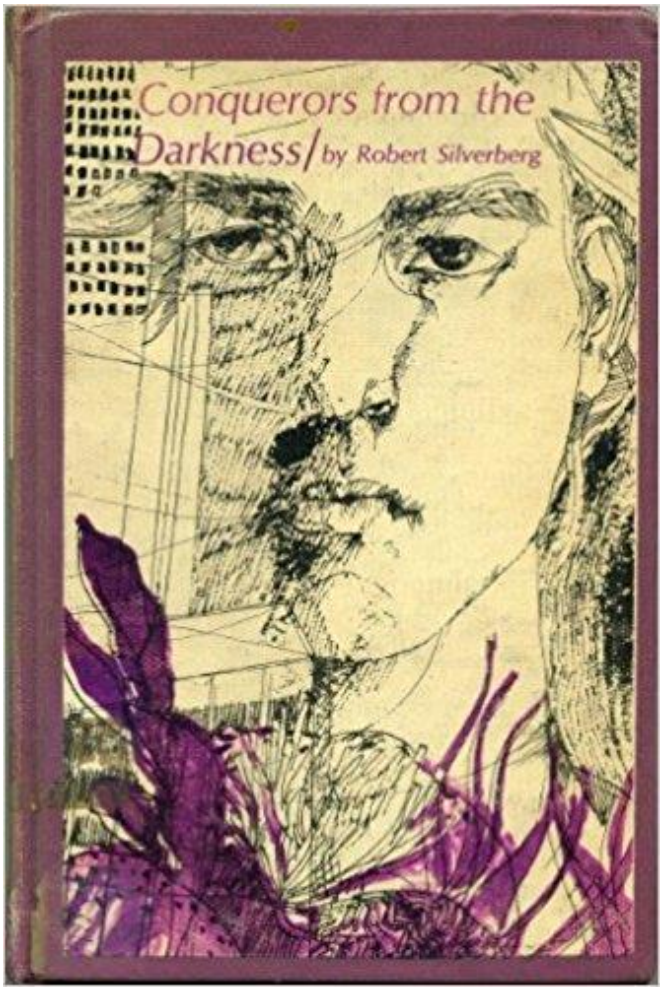
I take it that the library photo shows the entrance – there was just one for the public. One would turn right for the children's section. Coming inside, the circulation desk was directly opposite the entrance. There was a small room used for exhibiting art where I saw a large abstract piece called *The Lord of the Rings*. I wish I'd taken a picture of it. Years later, I emailed the library to see if they had any record of it. Nope!

Adult books and the magazine section were to one's left when one came into the library. Science fiction wasn't shelved separately. I assume that one could look up "science fiction" in the card catalog, but I don't think I ever did that. Instead I browsed from shelf to shelf, looking for a yellow sticker on the book's spine. There weren't very many such books. I recall Poul Anderson's *Three Hearts and Three Lions*. I liked that. But when you're a 12-year-old looking for sense-of-wonder science fiction, the contents of those old *Galaxy Readers* are really not that enticing even if they have dramatic cover designs. The final story in *The Seventh Galaxy Reader* was Damon Knight's "The Big Pat Boom." It had nothing to do with the world being destroyed by a solar flare, such as the book's cover art depicted. It seems I did, however, manage to read this satire, which was about aliens who buy cowpats. In general I was not interested in (what were intended as) clever, funny, sophisticated, ironic stories. But this one was about poop, so, it seems, I did read it, as a kid of that age might be expected to do.

At that age, I relied a lot on titles to trigger my imagination. Unfortunately authors such as Simak and Asimov routinely gave their short stories extremely drab titles: "Worrywart," "Carbon Copy," "Green Thumb," "Immigrant," "Neighbor," "Good Night, Mr. James," "The Sitters," "The Fence," "The Answers," "Installment Plan," "Conditions of Employment," (Simak), "Trends," "History," " Reason," "Evidence," "Satisfaction Guaranteed," "Hostess," "Youth," " Kid Stuff," "Question," "Franchise," "Someday," "Profession," "Anniversary" (Asimov). I was seeing titles like these at a time when my eyes were well and truly caught at the drugstore by paperbacks with titles such as *Terror on Planet Ionus*.

The Coos Bay library, as I said a moment ago, introduced me to Tolkien. I was so interested in Tolkien that I got a copy of William Ready's *Understanding Tolkien and The Lord of the Rings* (75c in paper). On a couple of pages, Ready, a librarian at Marquette University, used *Ibid* in a footnote. To me, this appeared to be the title of a magazine. Well, what did I know? So I went looking for *Ibid* on the back issue shelves, but I never found it.

The public library was located on my homeward walk back from the Harding School building where I attended classes for 7th and 8th grade (1967-8, 1968-9). The little school library was on the second floor (building pictured below). Here it seems that I happened across George MacDonald's *The Princess and the Goblin* and read it with much enjoyment -- *in the library*, since I was ashamed to check out a book with that title. I probably *would* have been hassled if I'd been caught with a "princess" book. A bookmark advertising *A Dictionary of Chivalry,* illustrated by Pauline Baynes, which I still own, seems to have come from this library, where I also encountered Brian Stone's translation of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* as a Penguin Classic. I wonder if I really did read it. At any rate it seems to have made an impression. I certainly read Stone's translation in my first year of college, and, years later, my own students read it. Mrs. Sanders, thank you for getting *Sir Gawain* for the library. My eye had been caught by a canonical work of British literature. I *took to it*. I was on my way, though I didn't realize it.



So – honk if you got started in a library – started, or propelled well on your way, as a fan, as a lifelong reader, as a writer.

All images in this article are from the Internet except the illustration from *The Little Grey Men* and the photograph of the interior of the Mayville, North Dakota, Public Library, which were prepared by the author.

##

BACK ISSUES OF FADEAWAY FOR SALE

Print copies of most issues from #18 thru this current number are still available. The price is $6.50 each, post paid within the United States. Issues before number 28 are not posted on the efanzines.com site and never will be. Quantities on all these issues are very limited. Send check, cash, or money order made out to Robert Jennings at the address on the indicia on page 2 of this number. If an issue is sold out a prompt refund will be made. Also for sale, back issues of The Comic World at $9.99 each, post paid within the United States. Numbers 8 thru 21 are available. Numbers 14 thru 21 have rusty staples. These are the ONLY issues I have left of either zine, so please do not ask for numbers I do not have.

Sinister Madonna

by

Robert Jennings

Female masterminds of crime are a subject of continuous interest to male readers, but not so much for women. Generally speaking most women consider the whole idea of a female mastermind heading a criminal empire to be ridiculous. The police in real life pretty much scoff at the idea as well, and in real life long lasting or fanatically cohesive criminal organizations involving more than a relatively small group or related family members are not common.

In the realm of fantastic fiction however, female masterminds of crime are not rare. The world of comic strips and comic books has more than its fair share. There are also female criminal masterminds in the world of detective fiction, and science fiction.

In the world of fantastic adventure, one of the most interesting of this breed is Sumuru, a female criminal and leader of a secret society bent on world domination. Sumuru came into existence first as an eight part weekly radio play broadcast over BBC Radio in 1945-1946, created by Sax Rohmer. As the saying goes, there's a story that goes with it.

Sax Rohmer, pen name of Arthur Henry Ward, had built a successful career writing fantastic detective adventures and fast moving thrillers set in exotic locations, but his primary claim to fame was his creation of Doctor Fu Manchu, a ruthless Chinese super genius who wanted to rule the entire planet. Fu Manchu was convinced it was his destiny to rule the human race. He also believed that he knew what was best for humanity. Under his rule, firm, harsh even, but fair, all the petty wars and jealousies between nations and racial factions would be eliminated. Chinese culture, alloyed with the best elements of both western civilization and the traditional character strengths of primitive tribalism, would unify the world in a peaceful empire ruled more or less benevolently by Fu Manchu himself. Vested in both ancient and modern science, a life-long student of the supernatural, Fu Manchu was virtually immortal, and as cold and vicious as any fairy tale monster in his determination to eliminate all opposition in his way and become ruler of the earth.

Unfortunately for him, many other people, particularly the governments of the western world, and most particularly the people running the British Empire, didn't want to live under the rule of Fu Manchu, benevolent or otherwise.

In the very first novel, "The Mystery of Dr. Fu-Manchu" (later retitled "The Insidious Dr. Fu Manchu") written in 1912, Fu's goals were somewhat less grandiose. He wanted to expel all foreigners from China, particularly the British, who had been brutally exploiting and carving up mainland China for the past seventy-five years. His goal beyond the expulsion of all foreigners was to recreate Chinese culture along traditional lines, including a strong government with a powerful army, able to wage its own trade wars against the despised foreigners.

In 1839 and again in 1856 Britain had gone to war to insure its right of free trade with China. It might be argued that the problem was really the result of the Chinese imperial government's refusal to face reality and deal with the outside world in modern terms. China had tea, silk, beautiful porcelain pottery, and thousands of other products that the western nations eagerly sought. The Chinese government was willing to allow its products to be exported, but only if foreign buyers paid for the goods in silver or gold. Silver and gold were relatively scarce metals, used primarily as coinage.

China restricted foreign trade to the port of Canton, placed in the hands of local Chinese merchants who established a monopoly. Even tho the prices for most items were set in advance, the officials were corrupt and relied primarily on bribery before allowing foreigners to purchase Chinese goods at all. The flow of British silver into China created an enormous imbalance of trade that was considered unacceptable by the British East India Company and the British government.

Enterprising British merchants hit on an easier solution. Sell products to Chinese merchants, get paid in silver, use the silver to buy tea, pottery, silk or other products, and then return to Europe and sell the Chinese products at a huge profit. The Chinese government did not appreciate that idea, and placed very high restrictive tariffs on most foreign goods.

The British East Indian Company found a product that could be turned over rapidly and at great profit---opium. Grown and bought in British India, the opium was sold to independent merchants who sold it to Chinese dealers who paid for the narcotic with Chinese silver, which was used to buy tea and all the other products Europe was so hungry for.

Needless to say it did not take long for the Chinese government to discover the problems associated with the free sale of an addictive narcotic like opium. In 1839 the Imperial government banned the import and sale of opium, and destroyed 1210 tons of the merchandise sitting in dockside warehouses, without bothering to reimburse the merchants who owned the material. They also ordered a blockade of all foreign trade in Canton.

The British government went to war to preserve its free trade policies. The ensuring Opium War was short and brutal. In 1842 China was forced to sign a harsh one-sided trade deal that allowed British merchants to freely import opium, conceded territory to the British, and opened up five other ports to foreign trade. The problem of addiction and death caused by overdose became much worse, and in 1856 China went to war again to keep the poison out of its country. The defeat this time by a combine of British and French forces was even more humiliating.

The other product China exported was people. An influx of Chinese immigrants into Europe, particularly into England and Scotland had not been greeted with enthusiasm by the native British population. It has been said that the British people are the most xenophobic in the world. They hate and despise anybody who isn't exactly like them, and Orientals rapidly rose to the top of the list of people it was fashionable to loathe.

This bigotry led to an ongoing period of anti-oriental violence, and created the entire Yellow Peril genre of literature. "The Mystery Of Dr. Fu-Manchu" fit right into the national anti-Chinese mania that was sweeping the British Isles. Then, WWI intervened, and it was clear that insidious Orientals were not even a minor blip on the national scale of Britain's problems.

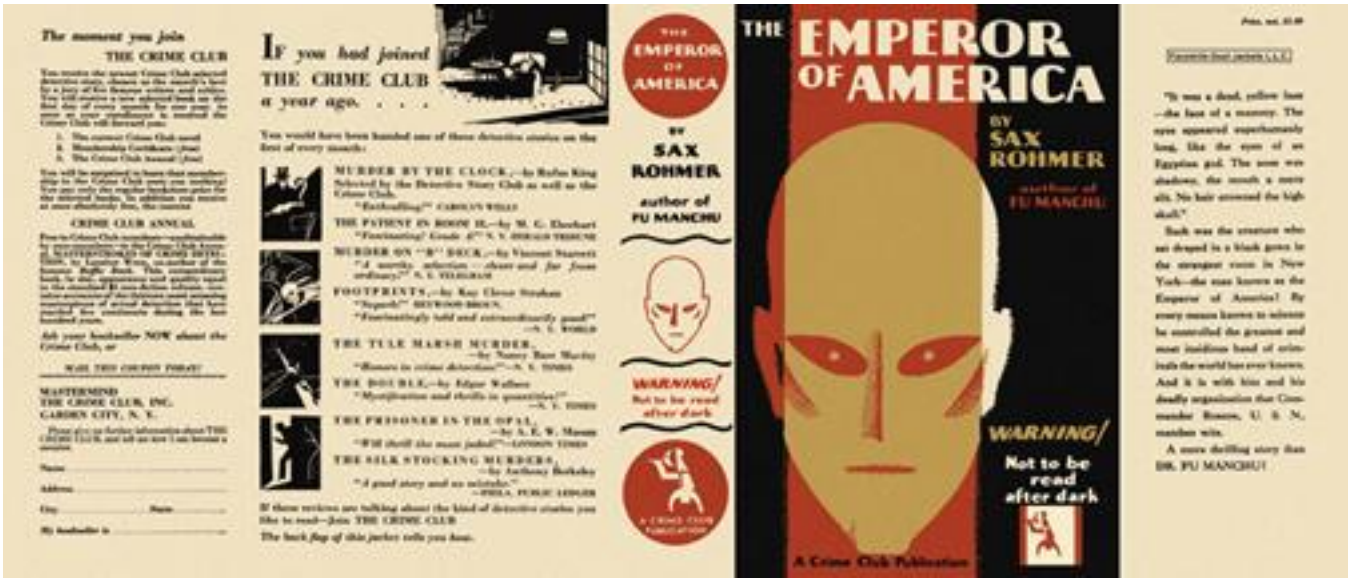
Rohmer was turning out short stories and other novels built around his fascination with Egypt and the middle east, but the sales of the Fu Manchu novel continued to be very strong. Rohmer followed the first novel with "The Return of Dr. Fu-Manchu" in 1916 (original title "The Devil Doctor"), and a third one "The Hand of Fu-Manchu" (originally "The Si-Fan Mystery") in 1917. So far as Rohmer was concerned that third novel wrapped up the series nicely and he moved on to other projects.

The 1920s saw anti-Oriental prejudice sweep east from California to cover the entire United States. In the US the Fu Manchu novels were strong sellers in both quality publisher editions and cheap variety store hardback printings.

In 1927 Rohmer was visiting the United States and having a wonderful time, despite Prohibition that made drinking liquor expensive, when the editors of *Collier's Magazine* contacted him about writing a novel, preferably another Fu Manchu novel that they could serialize in their magazine. At first Rohmer wasn't interested at all. He had sold material to *Collier's* before, ("Fire Tongue" was serialized in 12 chapters back in 1920-21), but he was sick and tired of his oriental master criminal. However the amount of money the magazine was willing to pay for any new Rohmer material was generous, and it came with the assurance that the author would retail the full hardback reprint rights.

Despite being on vacation, he began writing a series of short stories that interlinked. They were not exactly a serial, because he was afraid there might be weeks when he couldn't complete a story on schedule. The first "chapters" of what became "The Emperor of America" began appearing with the December 5, 1927 issue before he had even finished the rest of the series.

Rohmer was not happy with the novel that finally emerged and felt he had been pressured into turning out inferior material. The story deals with the ruthless leader of a massive organized crime combine who wants to conquer the United States from his hidden base under the streets of New York City using an arsenal of fantastic inventions. High camp plotting with over the top purple prose would be too kind a description of this story. Nonetheless, the Crime Club brought the adventure out as one of their hardback selections in 1929.



The editors at *Collier's* were so pleased with the public response that they pressed Rohmer to write more, preferably a serial length adventure, and preferably a Fu Manchu thriller this time. Meanwhile Paramount Pictures was prepared to produce a series of Fu Manchu movies starring Warner Oland, and a Fu Manchu daily comic strip was in the offing.

From this point onward, over the course of the next twenty years, most of Rohmer's stories appeared first in the pages of *Collier's*. In 1931 he caved in to editorial pressure and produced "Fu Manchu's Daughter" which was serialized in *Collier's* beginning March 8, 1931 and running thru the May 24th issue (the hardback title became "The Daughter of Fu-Manchu"). In this story he clearly stated that Fu Manchu was dead. His daughter was carrying on Fu's world conquest ambitions using her father's brutal methods.

The reading audience would have none of that. Six more Fu Manchu novels followed in the 1930s thru 1941. In 1940 Republic made an excellent fifteen chapter serial based on the character titled "The Drums of Fu Manchu"

However the tides of time were changing. The Japanese had invaded China beginning in 1937, and increasingly world sympathies were with the Chinese. Then, in 1939 World War II broke out. The western Allies were fighting the Axis Nations. China was one the side of Allies. Japan was one of the bad guys, in league with the Axis Powers. Sales of the Fu Manchu books fell sharply.

Rohmer was not especially disappointed. He missed the royalties coming in, but he had become fed up with the whole Fu Manchu concept, and had only kept turning the books out because the money had been so good. Rohmer and his wife lived well, and almost constantly their living expenses exceeded their income, which kept the pressure on Rohmer to turn out new works of fiction to supplement his income.

After the end of WWII BBC Radio contacted Rohmer about doing a radio serial in the style of his popular Fu Manchu stories. Clearly Fu himself was a dead issue. China had been a loyal ally during the war, and anti-Oriental feeling in the UK had subsided considerably. The story would be serialized as a radio play (and might be rerun at later dates, if it proved to be popular with the listening audience), but Rohmer would have the rights to the character, including the right to turn the radio play into a novel if he wanted.

It happened that Rohmer needed money very badly at that point in time. The market for magazine fiction in the UK was almost dead, with few magazines left due to wartime shortages and production problems. This offer, if not exactly a life-saver, was a sure inducement for him to come up with something rapidly. What he came up with was Sumuru, a female master villain intend on world domination.

Except this super villain, in addition to being a beautiful temptress, would espouse a philosophy that was so reasonable, so alluring, that many people of good will and with the most honest of intentions might easily be snared in her web of deceit.

The eight chapter radio play titled "The Shadow of Sumuru" ran during the winter of 1945-1946 and proved to be quite popular. Actress Ann Burden played the lead role, while her antagonist in this adventure was a young American journalist living in England named Mark Donavan, played in the radio

serial by Robert Beatty. His British co-hero Dr. Maitland was played by Ralph Truman.

Unfortunately, so far as is known no transcription copies of this radio production have survived. It is also not known for certain whether the serial was rebroadcast later, altho it seems very likely that it was, especially considering that Rohmer didn't get around to turning the radio play into a novel until 1950.

Rohmer's constant need for money to maintain his family's life style forced him to bring back Fu Manchu in a 1948 *Collier's* serial. In 1950 he decided to turn the BBC radio play into a novel, even tho he had not been that enthusiastic about the radio concept to begin with. He decided to sell it to a new American paperback company run by Fawcett Publications.

It might be worthwhile to mention a few facts about Fawcett Books. The Fawcett Publishing Company had been around a long time. Founded in 1919 by Wilford Hamilton "Captain Billy" Fawcett, it had published pulp magazines, humor books, popular science magazines, photography magazines, self help books, and later on a very successful line of comic books, headed by Captain Marvel and his assorted family members. During the 1920s its primary title had been the humor digest *Captain Billy's Whiz-Bang*. During the 1930's *True Confessions* sold over three million copies an issue. The flagship title was *Mechanix Illustrated*, begun in 1926, which regularly sold close to eight million copies an issue, mostly to subscribers.

When paperback books exploded on the American media scene in 1944, the executives at Fawcett were immediately interested, but reluctant to become immediately involved. After the War ended and paper rationing was abolished they became a lot more interested.

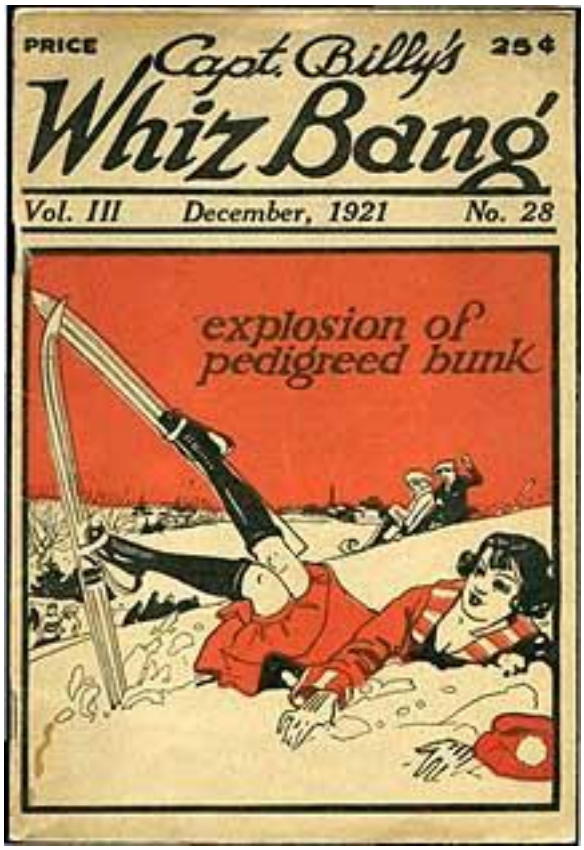
Like many other very large magazine publishing companies, Fawcett had its own national distribution system servicing the regional and local magazine distributors. In 1945 they signed a contract with New American Library to handle American Library's Mentor and Signet paperback book line. This contract prohibited Fawcett from negotiating for or publishing their own paperback reprints which might compete with the New American line.

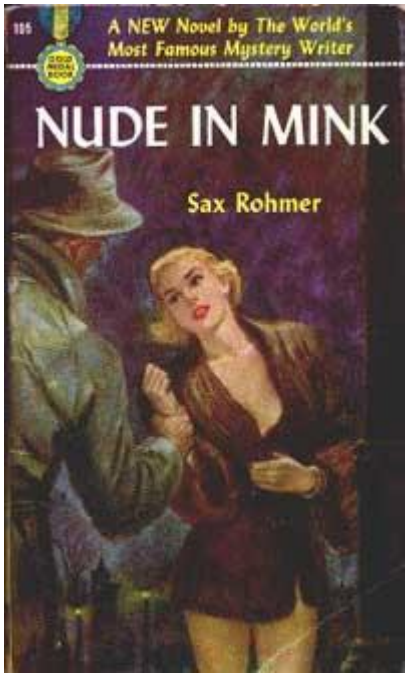
In 1949 Roscoe Fawcett wanted to get into the booming paperback market, and decided that the contract did not forbid Fawcett from publishing a line of original novels in paperback format. Two collections of articles reprinted from two Fawcett magazines that not been anthologized before were published, and sold well. More importantly, New American Library couldn't find any legal objections. Fawcett was in the paperback business, and pursued their policy of buying original novels aggressively.

Most paperback publishers concentrated on reprint material that could be obtained cheaply, or paid for new material based almost entirely on a one-time upfront payment and royalty rights that never seemed to materialize. Fawcett paid respectable up-front rates to its writers, but they also kept an accurate record of what sold, and paid residual royalties on a regular basis. As a result of these author friendly policies Fawcett rapidly built up an inventory of top-notch detective, westerns, and crime-noir stories.

The best pulp magazine writers fleeing a dying industry either went to television, or wrote for the paperback market, and Fawcett was know as a top tier house that not only paid its writers well, but also dealt with them fairly when it came to long-term royalties, something that could not always be said of other paperback publishers. So it was not too surprising that Rohmer's literary agent would decide on Fawcett to publish this new series in the United States.

A situation that further linked Rohmer with the new paperback company was his decision to leave





England and move to the United States. After the end of World War II his financial condition was not good. Taxes in Britain were very heavy, and the publishing business there had contracted dramatically during the conflict. His family home was sold, then he along with his wife and daughter moved to Jamaica until they could meet the US immigration quota. They lived first at a furnished apartment in New York City, then moved to Greenwich, Connecticut, which just happened to be the home of Fawcett Books.

Rohmer was initially not too happy about writing for the paperback market. In the UK the so-called yellow-cover paperback book had always been looked down on in literary circles as lower-class trash. His agent soothed his mixed emotions by not only explaining how popular the format was in the States, but also assured him any that material originally published in paperback form in the United States would still appear as hardback titles in the UK.

The first Fawcett Sumuru novel was titled "Nude In Mink" because of a pivotal scene in the first chapters of the story where a beautiful girl wearing nothing but a luxurious mink coat winds up at the apartment of Mark Donavan, one of the novel's two heroes. The original print run for "Nude In Mink" probably ran about fifty thousand copies. Sales were spectacular. The company went back and reprinted the title within a month after the first release, and went back for three addition reprints thru the end of the year. The American reading public was clearly taken by Sumuru.

The first adventure was titled "The Sins of Sumuru" in the UK. Released as a hardback, it sold well, particularly to public and rental libraries where it was very popular. The hardback went into a second printing, but those copies did not sell thru for several years.

Considering the sales success of "Nude In Mink" the editors at Fawcett pressed Rohmer to do a follow up novel. This led Rohmer to immediately begin writing the second Sumuru adventure simply titled "Sumuru" which came out from Fawcett in 1951. All of the Sumuru novels appeared first as Fawcett Gold Medal original novels, followed up by reprint editions in the UK.

Who was this Sumuru person? The first novel provides the core of information that was only expanded on slightly in all subsequent adventures. Sumuru is described as being incredibly beautiful, not oriental, but Eurasian with perhaps a hint of the orient in her striking features. Her face is dominated by her soldering eyes that could hold a person's attention with almost hypnotic power. Her hair was described as being full and in a hairstyle that changed, but one that always set off her facial features well. Interestingly enuf, nobody, certainly no male, could remember the color of her hair or the exact color of her eyes. Her voice could be quiet and musical, or strong and commanding. Her personality was entirely feminine but demanded immediate attention and commanded easy acquiescence to her wishes.

In the opening story it is implied that she has a direct connect with the orient, especially with Imperial Japan. It is revealed in the course of the story that she is the widow of one Marquis Sumuru, a very wealthy, powerful Japanese noble who married the young woman who later became known as simply Sumuru. The Baron committed hara-kiri after the first bombings of Tokyo, leaving his wealth and the knowledge of his world wide political connections to his young wife. Since Japanese royalty marry within their class, it was assumed, at least initially in the first book, that she was also from an aristocratic Japanese family.

In the third novel "The Fire Goddess" (published in 1952), it is revealed that Sumuru has had several other husbands, all wealthy, often older men in powerful positions, men who died suddenly, but whose deaths were never suspected of being anything but natural. Her age is never revealed, altho she appears to be in her early to mid twenties. It is strongly implied that she uses some sort of scientific method of perpetually renewing her youth. Her figure

is classically beautiful, maintained by daily exercises, particularly swimming.

She is at ease in all kinds of social situations, and can mix with everyone from the most snobbish elite society, down to and including its most miserable minions with equal ease. Indeed her ability to empathize with workers, exploited minorities, or those who are down trodden, particularly women, is one of the sources of her power. These people seem to provide the very core of the support for a world-wide organization of which she is the undisputed leader.

The organization she heads had no formal name in the first three adventures. With book four it was officially named The Order Of Our Lady. It is a super secret society determined to remake the world in a newer, better, and certainly more beautiful image. Parts of the goals and arguments for supporting this new world order can be found in a book titled "Tears of Our Lady", purportedly written by Sumuru herself, but with no author listed. Sometimes sold in book stores, this feminist tract is often passed from one member of the group to a prospective member to sound out their interest in becoming one of the fold.

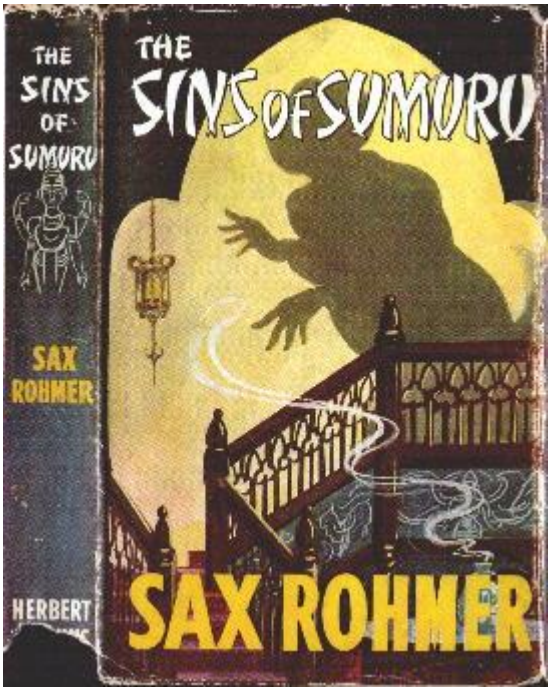
The contention of the new order is simply that human civilization has become a mess. National conflicts have led to the current condition of near perpetual warfare, except now the weapons of war have reached the super destruction stage where the next world war could wipe the human race off the earth, or shatter civilization so completely that humanity would be reduced to savagery.

Most of these problems can be laid to the feet of greedy, egotistical men; men who put their personal ambitious ahead of the common good, men who exploit their fellow creatures purely for their own selfish benefit. In the coming new order that Sumuru will lead, women will rule the world. Women who are part of her order will insure that wars are a thing of the past, that cooperation for the mutual benefit of all levels of society becomes a reality. Exploitation, particularly exploitation of vulnerable women will stop, and human society will enter a new golden age based on love and understanding, and the veneration of beauty.

Naturally, the forces of greed and hatred will resist the new world order. In order to create the international political entity necessary to ensure peace, prosperity, and happiness, it is necessary to eliminate certain individuals who stand in the way. Society may view such actions as wanton murder, but as Sumuru patiently explains to a series of characters in the novels, these actions are simply a regrettable necessary. Just as a surgeon cuts away the cancerous cells to save a patient's life, so the elimination of key individuals capable of malicious evil must be done to ensure the survival and betterment of human civilization. One of her recurring examples is to ask whether it would not have been better to have assassinated Adolph Hitler in the 1930s before he launched World War II and established his mass extermination camps.

This is an interesting argument that has great emotional appeal. It certainly appeals to a lot of characters in the books, particularly the female members of Sumuru's cult. The concept, however, has plenty of flaws. It may be true, as many historians believe, that Great Men dominate and change history, but the reality is that the times, particularly the economic and political conditions must be right before a Great Man or Great Woman can rise to become a political leader.

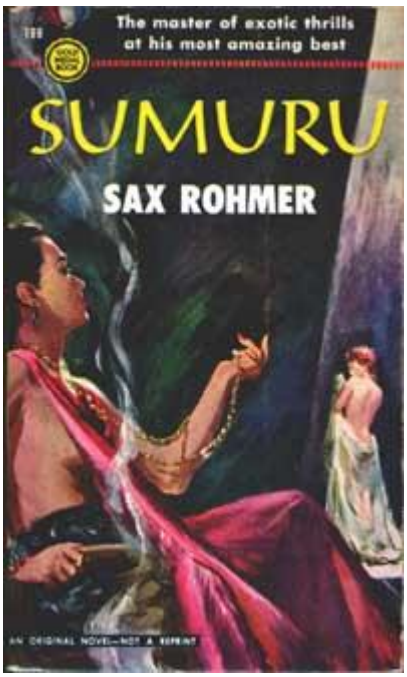
Hitler was swept into power during a time of



world wide political and economic upheaval. He was hardly the first dictator, or the first fascist, or neo-fascist to gain power in Europe. The same forces that produced ruthless dictators in Europe and Asia also produced a crop in South America as well. If Hitler had been assassinated it seems more likely to me that some other members of the Nazi party would have simply taken over as the leader. That new leader would still have turned Germany into a fascist dictatorship, but very likely this new leader would not have made the colossal mistake Hitler made of starting a two front war by invading Russia.

Some other parts of Sumuru's philosophy are less savory. She worships the ideal of beauty Eliminating ugliness from the world is one of her stated goals, and that includes eliminating ugliness in the human form. She has her agents constantly seek out beautiful women of all kinds that she can induct into her cult. Some of these young women can be recruited into her group by someone who is already a member thru befriending the new candidate. Other times Sumuru's agents simply kidnap women and take them to assorted hidden locations where they are essentially brain washed into become slave-like members of her cult. The mysterious disappearances of a number of prominent young women is one of the clues that tips off the authorities of Sumuru's secret operations in the very first novel.

Sumuru exploits the women who have joined her group as ruthlessly as the men she despises. She keeps them under tight supervision until she has picked a suitable potential mate for them, then advises them on how to ensnare the man she believes will be a perfect husband for each woman. She advises the women in her group to use their feminine wiles for the betterment of the organization. By carefully exposing important men to beautiful members of her group she is able to promote happy marriages, where the unsuspecting male is then lured into becoming a member of her new order thru his unconditional love of his new wife, who is already a dedicated member of the group. Thru these carefully arranged marriages Sumuru has expanded her power and information gathering facilities worldwide, reaching all levels of society.



The women of the cult act as Sumuru's foot soldiers, ferreting out information, taking important employment positions that will help increase the group's wealth or influence. They are sworn members of the new order, and are expected to gladly accept any assignment given them. Each sworn member has a faint tattoo of a coiling snake around an ankle. It wasn't until the fifth book that we learn that the tattoo coils around the disciple's left ankle.

In the first story one of these kidnapped women slips away from Sumuru's clutches and tries to escape, winding up in the apartment of Mark Donavan wearing nothing but a mink coat. The efforts of Sumuru to retrieve her strayed accolade and bring her back into the fold of true believers make up the core of the first novel. The story plot is somewhat similar to several previous Fu Manchu novels, in which the effort is to retrieve something that the leader has lost, or desires immediately. In this case Sumuru instructs all her many agents thruout London to discover where Charlotte is so that she can be kidnapped again and returned to the cult stronghold.

Beyond that, Sumuru also has interesting ideas about the future generations. She has declared that children born of very beautiful parents, particularly girl children, should be separated from their parents and raised by her organization in special schools so they will be indoctrinated with the proper mental and educational aptitudes to become the true future leaders of the new world order.

The fact that the parents of these beautiful children might object to having their beloved offspring taken away from them at a young age is not considered important. The needs of the greater good are more important than the emotions of mere parents.

In the second book, "Sumuru", this principle is put to the test. Mark Donavan, the hero of the first story has fallen in love with Claudette Duquesne, the beautiful girl who was the nude in mink of the first book, and has happily married her. Claudette was not a converted member of Sumuru's cult, and was trying to escape from her domination. The happy couple now have a charming and beautiful daughter who has reached the age of three. That is the age when Sumuru has declared that such girls should be removed from their parents and placed in one of her special schools. The second novel follows the efforts of Sumuru and her agents to kidnap the child, along with her plans to eliminate a ruthless racketeer who has taken over an essential labor union in the United States.

On the other hand, the British Isles have a long tradition of the upper class bundling up their

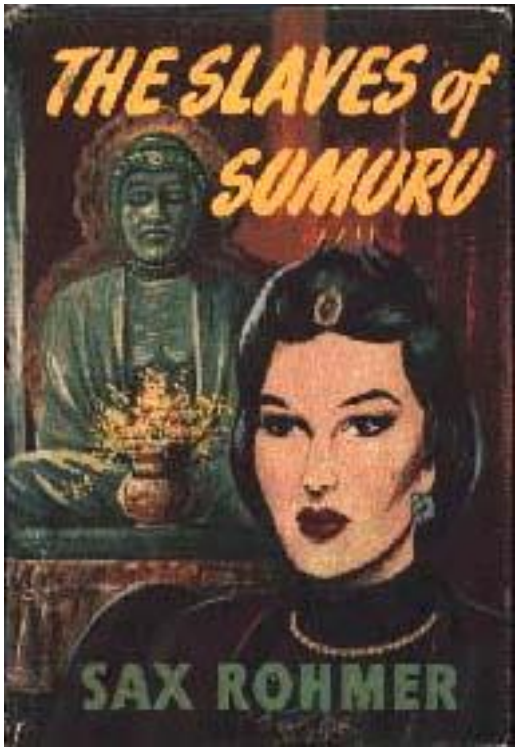
children at a relatively young age and shuffling them off into some boarding school, where they stay, separated from their families except for holiday visits, for a dozen or so years, so Our Madonna's plans to take in children, even at the tender age of three years, may not have shocked readers in the UK as much as it undoubtedly did readers in the US.

In the fourth novel Rohmer gives us a glance at one of her colleges, where a class of beautiful young girls just entering into their teen years is given a pep talk by Our Lady. It is revealed that some of the mothers of this class are long time members of her cult who have gladly surrendered their offspring to be properly trained and educated. There is also a separate school for beautiful young boys, who in addition to being properly trained and educated, are carefully tested to see what kind of specific talent and leadership abilities they might have, the better to serve The Order Of Our Lady.

This particular school is located away from a medium sized Egyptian city, with no roads that reach it. Surrounded by orchards and gardens, the school is almost self supporting. Visitors, particularly government officials, may visit by appointment. Visitors are given a tour of the facility, even allowed to speak to some of the children, who are of all races and nationalities. They are informed that this is a private, non-religious institution, but if asked, visitors are informed that there are no openings for new students at this time, even if the visitor happens to be wealthy and well positioned socially.

Female members of her cult who are unable to control their emotional interest in the male gender as rigidly as their leader were a continuing source of problems for Sumuru. She wanted her female followers to fall in love with the men she carefully chose for them. Unfortunately the hearts of the women, and sometimes those of the intended male paramours did not always follow her commands. Love proved stronger, and sometimes more fickle than their commitment to the new world order.

Our Lady's views on sex and sensuality were expanded on in the fourth novel. Two of her male antagonists have been captured and are enjoying pleasant but enforced imprisonment at the secluded school. Asked why Sumuru collects beautiful women from all over the world, Drake Roscoe replies: "For bait, Dick, to collect the big fish. In a tight corner, she's not above offering herself. Sex, in Sumuru's eyes, is simply an infallible method of conquering men that an all-wise Providence has given to women. As a source of pleasure she despises it. She regards her wonderful body as a weapon of power. For



physical passion she has utter contempt---but she uses it."

It might be noted that this view was offered by a bitter male opponent whose opinions were colored by past unfortunate encounters with the Our Dear Madonna. His comments concerning Our Lady's personal views about sex seem to have been correct. In the fifth novel, "Sinister Madonna", she confided to one of her cult members that she had never enjoyed sex, and had never sought or experienced the breathless passion of romantic love either.

She recruited her hidden army of women because she believed women to be naturally more responsible and more rational that men. It has been centuries of male control of government, science and industry that has created a world full of misery, wanton cruelty, and ugliness. Her secret order is planning a dramatic shift to worldwide female leadership, and she is particularly interested in abolishing ugliness, especially ugliness in the human form.

Of course the possibility that the female gender, being the other half of the human race, might be susceptible to malicious greed and callous cruelty just like the male half of humanity is did not enter into her calculations. History and human psychology were apparently not among Sumuru's strong points.

Of course men generally prefer to think of women as sweet, loving, gentle, and kind, and altogether finer than men in general. Since this series was written by Sax Rohmer, a man, who was also turning the novels out in the middle of the twentieth century, that particular opinion was also Sumuru's viewpoint.

Possibly influenced by the development of the first story as a radio serial, all the Sumuru stories concentrate equally on Sumuru and her cohorts as well as her opponents. In most of Rohmer's other novels, especially the Fu Manchu books, the villain is only viewed from affair, and the focus of those stories is always on the heroes of each adventure and what they are doing to oppose the criminal mastermind. The focus on the activities of Sumuru herself lends a much stronger sense of involvement for the reader. The writing style and the depth of characterization in the Sumuru adventures is far stronger than in almost all of Rohmer's other stories. His writing techniques and his perspective had matured over the years so that some of his best writing and most interesting plots were presented in the Sumuru series.

The first novel also demonstrates the methods Our Lady Sumuru will use in most of her subsequent adventures, as well as introducing a cast of key supporting characters. The person who functions as her chief of staff who carries out her personal commands within each headquarters that Sumuru has established is a man in constant attendance known only as Caspar. He is not a valet or butler, but more an administrative assistant. He is described as a tall man of slight build and fluid grace. He dresses in traditional Arab garb with black robe, black skull cap, and red slippers, and might be taken for an Arab, except when one sees his face, "a smiling mask of old ivory". He has an oily, calm voice, and his movements are always unhurried.

In later adventures it is revealed that he used to be a slave dealer in the middle east, with a special eye for comely young women, a quality that makes him especially useful to Sumuru. He is often able to anticipate Sumuru's commands when problems arise, which sometimes irritates her, even while admitting that Caspar has been one of her most faithful and devoted followers. In one book it is implied that he may also have a hand in one of Our Lady's special schools for beautiful boy children.

She uses many unique methods of accomplishing her ends including a bizarre and lethal poison that literally turns a human body to the composition of marble. This is "rigor Kubus", named after a tribe in Sumatra where it was first discovered in 1923. This startling death is caused by minute spores of a peculiar fungus found in that region. To quote the explanation provided by Dr. Maitland, the co-hero along with Mark Donavan in the first novel; "it is caused by a minute fungus. It invades the lymphatic membranes and multiples incredibly. As it moves on, it first produces complete paralysis and then brings about a blood change which converts living tissue to something as hard as marble. A lot depends on the point of infection." Maitland has a vaccine developed by a Dr. Van Voorden, the Dutch physician who first discovered the curious malady.

I have some doubts about a fungus able to multiple itself within a living human body that would cause those kinds of result. Science was not Rohmer's strong point, but his description of the horrifying effects are graphic indeed.

In the first novel this poison is cleverly administered to a British agent who has uncovered facts about Sumuru's organization that she considers too dangerous to be revealed. The fact that the victim was a corrupt, indolent, decadent sexual satyr with few redeeming qualities makes it easier for Sumuru to convince one of her female disciples to administer the poison. This horrifying weapon is used in many of the subsequent adventures.

Sumuru claims to prefer to avoid violence, believing that subterfuge and emotional pressure will accomplish more in the long run. However her personal strong arm men, two close confederates known as Philo and Abdulla, are definitely not reluctant to use violence to accomplish her commands.

Philo is most often used as a chauffer. He generally dresses in a chauffer's uniform, and is notable for his extremely broad shoulders, far wider than a man of his medium size might have. He is very strong, with a coarse brutal face, arms that seem longer than they should be, and very hairy hands. He is fanatically devoted to Our Lady Sumuru. He is intelligent but not particularly imaginative. He passes along orders and aids in abductions, generally participating and directing any violence when it is deemed necessary, and apparently has no hint of a conscience or any interest in life except for his dog-like devotion to Sumuru. He is the one who has to explain to his Dearest Madonna why some simple chore suddenly turned nasty and resulted in violence that has attracted the attention of the local police.

Another regular member of Sumuru's inner circle is Doctor Ariosto. Like most males in her command group, Ariosto adores Sumuru, but his interest is mostly basic lust rather than true romantic

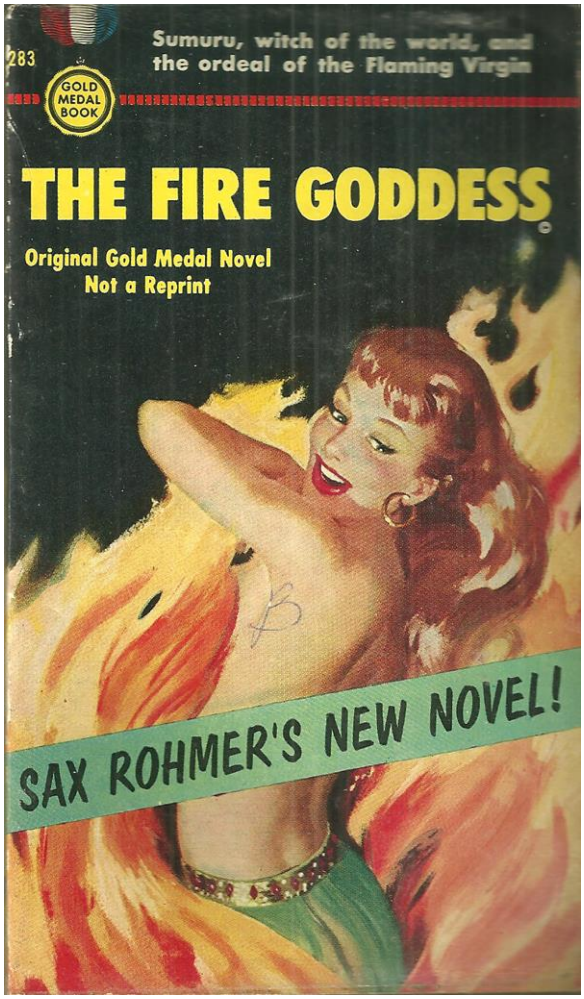
love. Sumuru has provided him with a wife, Dorores, to whom he is passionately devoted, but that genuine commitment has not really slaked his enthusiasm for Our Lady as a sexual object. Some of Rohmer's readers might have sympathized. Sumuru herself is mildly amused. She egotistically considers herself eminently worthy of the adoration of any male she might encounter.

Dr. Ariosto is quite adapt at taking on different roles to contact individuals or the authorities when Our Lady needs information, or to suppress information that might lead people to learn too much about her organization. He can plausibly pass as a prominent businessman, a scientist in some obscure specialty, a diplomat, or even a member of the local government. He is described as calm, with a smooth persuasive manner that inspires immediate confidence in anyone he meets. His ability to bluff out situations that might turn awkward is especially valuable considering the unusual missions he is sent to accomplish.

He is also an accomplished medical doctor able to take care of the organization members who are injured, but he also uses his medical skills and knowledge of special drug experiments he undertakes for other purposes. He has developed a drug that produces temporary amnesia, for example, or another one that renders the subjects disoriented and very susceptible to audio suggestions.

He is also not adverse to using violence when necessary, particularly when he is on an assignment that doesn't go quite as he expected. Philo often accompanies him on these missions and is happy to obey his commands when strong arm methods are ordered. Sumuru deplores these quick commitments to violence, but he is the field agent, and even she is forced to admit that often times the situation requires forthright handling.

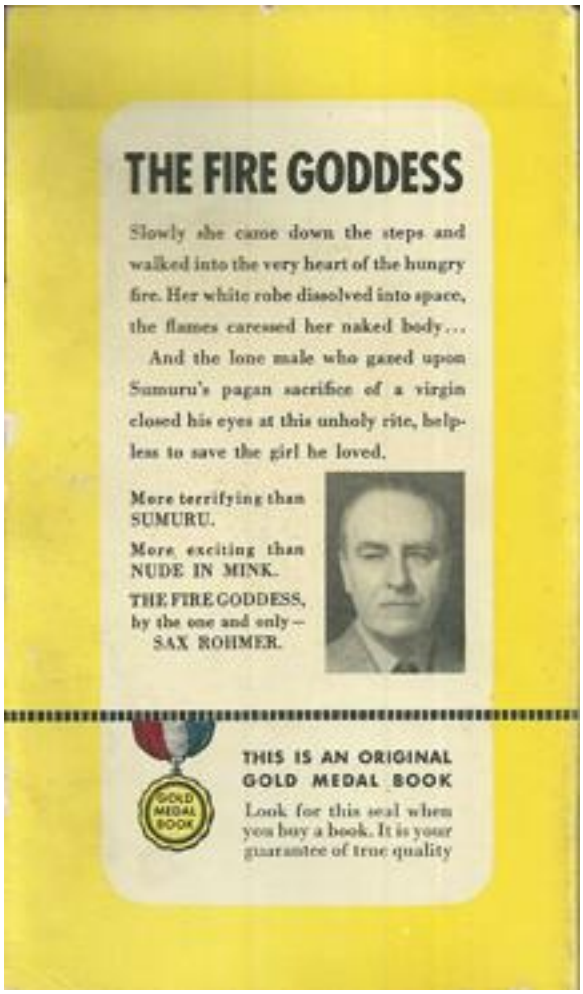
As the series developed Dr. Ariosto's interest in outside sexual encounters became more pronounced, and he also became more reckless. In the fourth book he used a compressed air pistol loaded with curare poisoned darts to kill a policeman in London. Unscripted killings are one of Sumuru's major taboos. Murder is a tool to used with the skill of a master surgeon, and must be resorted to only if the death will notable advance the cult's cause or to deal with a major obstacle that cannot be handled any other way. Killing an officer of the law is rarely acceptable. The police fraternity never forgets the murder of one of their own, and they never give up the search for the killer. That kind of intense, unending



investigation could lead directly to The Society of Our Lady and to Sumuru's current headquarters.

Ariosto's wandering sexual appetites also come to be regarded as potentially harmful to the harmony of the organization. The crisis comes to a head in the fourth book. His multiple talents are very useful to the organization, but this killing of a police officer marks the beginning of Ariosto's fall from grace.

The female members of the group who might be leaders or sub-commanders in her army of quiet revolution are barely mentioned and are not well described in the stories. In the third novel "The Fire Goddess", Sumuru travels from France to Jamaica on triple missions, the most important of which is to investigate reports that the woman in charge of her operations in the Caribbean has basically exceeded her authority and is using the members of the New Order to exploit the wide-spread belief in voodoo magic for her own purposes.



Deviation from the prescribed rules Our Lady has established is frowned upon, even when the ostensive purpose is to recruit more members and further the aims of the society. In this story Sumuru is hard pressed to keep her disciples and their activities secret from the authorities and is finally forced to deal with the errant group leader in a decisive manner that will be a lesson to others never to disobey her directives in the future.

Sumuru and her new order have accumulated vast wealth. By the third novel Rohmer has admitted that the beautiful leader has been married to a succession of very wealthy older men who have left her with plenty of money and vast business holdings around the world, business interests that she has been able to maintain and expand on.

Money comes from other sources as well. In the books it is stated that she owns ruby mines, where working conditions are far from pleasant. This again implies her connection with the Asian continent, since most of the world's rubies come from Myanmar (known as Burma when Rohmer was writing these stories). The ruby mines are understood to be a sort of Soviet Siberia. The mere threat of banishment to the mines is usually sufficient to inspire immediate repentance and a promise of more obedient behavior from any member of her organization who has displeased her.

In addition, sworn members of the secret society are expected to contribute small but reasonable sums to the group treasury to further the noble causes they are working for. Some members are willing to contribute a great deal more. Rosa Finelander, spinster daughter of an enormously wealthy business magnate, is a devoted disciple of Our Lady. When her father died she became sole heir to his enormous fortune. She not only provides financial support, but she has allowed Sumuru to plant her agents into the famous Finelander Charitable Society, and to use the extensive Finelander estates in Connecticut as one of her bases of operation.

That estate also has a private airfield, and the elder Finelander has special flying privileges with the state and federal aviation authorities, a factor that Sumuru finds particularly useful in several of the adventures. In the second and fourth stories the private airfield acts as a means for moving prospective neophytes out of the country and beyond the reach of worried parents or the law. It also served as a means of escape when the federal authorities were pressing her agents too closely.

Sumuru herself lives very well. Wherever she goes she establishes hidden headquarters that are ornately opulent. She lives in quarters often decorated in classic Greek or early middle-eastern barbaric style splendor, Her chambers are rich with rare antiques and costly works of art. She adores mink, and has a wide assortment of coats, stoles, cloaks, muffs made of mink. In one story she even has the floor of her inner chamber carpeted in silver mink.

Her clothing is also mentioned as being up to the second fashionable, chiefly consisting of designer dresses that flawlessly accent her figure. Her apartments are invariably equipped with a swimming pool and also a shallow in-floor aquarium where colorful tropical fish are stocked.

When she is in her chambers at whatever regional headquarters she might be at, she usually dresses is brief, revealing clothing. Gossamer fabric harem style costumes are a particular favorite. In the fourth novel "Return of Sumuru" Rohmer provides an interesting description: "She wore indoor native dress, with a sort of embroidered tunic and a small, close turban. Every line of her body and the sheen of her skin were revealed through the lilac-colored silk

gauze. Her pose, like her dress, was that of an instinctive exhibitionist."

We are told she also favors an odd, very provocative perfume named spikenard. This is an ancient scent whose manufacture had supposedly been lost in antiquity, yet Sumuru has managed to discover the ancient formula and is having it made now for her exclusive use.

So far as her personality itself is described, her passion is for power, luxury, and the worshipful devotion of her followers. She views vast wealth as useful and necessary to further her cause. She appears to have no interest in sex or real romance. She certainly uses her sex appeal to snare certain men and lure them into her web, but once a conquest has been made and the man is slavishly devoted to her, she considers the affair complete and then sometimes regards the hapless male with barely concealed scorn.

At the end of the second novel Drake Roscoe, American undercover agent, has managed to discover significant information about her organization, and has wormed his way into its inner circle. Sumuru was apparently impressed by his skill, not to mention his fearless bravery, and decided to seduce him. He succumbed and agreed to join her cult.

For some reason the British hardback completely changes the ending of that second novel, rewriting the story so that Drake manfully resists her seduction attempts and remains her enemy. This creates a real problem for British readers when the third novel was published.

In the third novel "The Fire Goddess" we learn that once Drake was completely under her spell, she turned him into a sub-lieutenant in her organization, working against the very government department that had sent him on the original mission. His bitter feelings of self-recrimination and the conflicting emotions of his unrequited love for Sumuru are an integral part of the story's plot. In the end Drake Roscoe escapes from her clutches, but warned Our Lady of an impending government raid so that she and her close confederates can escape.

Sumuru dismisses him as a spineless conquest of no further consequence, but as the series develops Drake Roscoe become her primary antagonist, the person who is able to use his knowledge of the woman and her methods to thwart her schemes and save many of her intended victims.

Sumuru has enormous self confidence. Perhaps the fact that she effortlessly commands and controls an international secret organization that is busily working toward the goals of the new world order has blunted her otherwise keen intelligence. She consistently underestimates the determination and the abilities of her opponents, whether they be local police officials or individuals who happen to stumble onto her activities. The implication is that she is intellectually brilliant, but entirely too self confidence and sure of her own abilities.

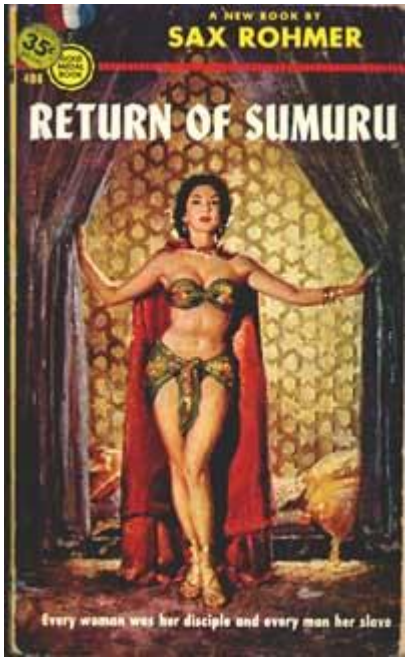
In addition it is shown in most of the adventures that she enjoys the thrill of danger. She can bluff her way out of tight situations, and escaping from a trap right under the nose of the authorities is one of her greatest satisfactions, a dangerous thrill that all of her inner circle of confederates constantly warn her against.

Unlike many other stories about would-be world conquerors, Sumuru is neither arrogant nor vicious. She is absorbed with her cause, but she is not an angry self centered egomaniac. She is invariably pleasant and courteous to everyone, even her enemies, and is generous with those in her cult who might fail in their mission. More than once she declares that no one suffers if they have done their very best to accomplish their assignment.

Incompetents are not invited into her group, and those who show themselves to be stupid or unpredictable are moved to some type of work that will not endanger the organization or themselves. She deplores cruelty, which she regards as primarily a trait of the male sex, but she can be ruthless when dealing with people she regards as maliciously evil.

Ariosto's mate, Dolores, is Sumuru's personal secretary, and in later books she is revealed to also be the head of the principle training school for beautiful young children located in Egypt. She is Spanish, but speaks French most often and is fluent in several other languages. As the stories progress it is clear that she does not love Dr. Ariosto, and has stayed with him only because Our Lady has decreed it. In the fourth novel it is revealed that she secretly loves Drake Roscoe, one of Sumuru's most ardent enemies. Sumuru is not upset at this development. She dissolves Dolores's union with Dr. Ariosto and offers Drake Roscoe an opportunity to wed Dolores, but only if he will agree to Sumuru's terms.

It is worth noting that the Sumuru adventures are often multi-track, with three or four primary plot threads that need to be resolved, and an equal number of sub plots that work into the main themes. The protagonists opposing her schemes are usually two men, one an innocent person somehow drawn into the intrigue, along with some government agent or local police authority who has some knowledge about the activities of her secret organization, but someone who hasn't enuf evidence to act on the information as yet.



In the final volumes of the series that opponent is always Drake Roscoe.

This might be said to be a reflection of real life. Real life organizations, whether government, business, religious, or otherwise, do not normally face one simple problem that can be handled concisely. Problems are often multi-faceted, and tend to come along in batches, sometimes linked or overlapping. Some of these problems can be dealt with easily and some cannot. Sumuru's cult, being super secret and devoted to usurping the existing governments of the planet, has more than its share of difficulties, including problems important enuf to demand her personal attention.

In the first novel, for example, her primary goal is eliminating the British agent who has unearthed too much information about her organization. But the problem of Claudette who decides to run away occurs at the same time, while another British foe, Dr. Maitland, is becoming very much a danger and seizes on the multiple situations to form his own conclusions and alerts the authorities to strike against her agents. American journalist Mark Donavon is drawn into the intrigue thru his earlier friendship with Maitland, but soon becomes an even greater threat to Sumuru's operations that Maitland or the authorities.

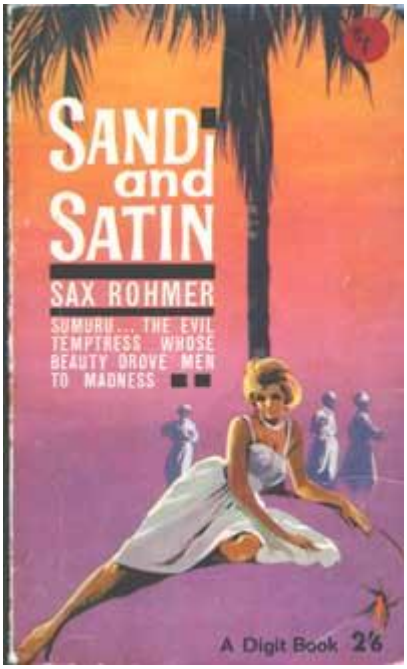
The logical goals of her movement have enlisted thousands in her cause, mostly women, who are quick to conclude that the male gender has naturally oppressed womankind for centuries. Sumuru's magnetic personality is such that thru personal contact she can usually overcome the objections of most people she encounters. Sometimes her ability to gauge the personalities she meets face to face is so adapt that she almost seems able to read the minds of the people she was speaking with, paraphrasing and answering their questions even before they can speak. Needless to say this quirk is very unnerving to the males she meets.

In the fourth book Sumuru shares her philosophy of regulated human breeding in a visit to the secret Egyptian school where beautiful girl children are indoctrinated and molded to the needs of her organization. "The most perfect blooms in the garden, the choicest birds and animals, are products of guided evolution. Our order seeks to guide the evolution of humanity---to evolve the perfect race. We date back to Pythagoras, and the task was taken up and the system improved by Plato. I myself am such a product, without one blemish in the selection---for even a long line of beauty and intelligence can be destroyed by a single misalliance."

Whether she actually believes this line or malarkey about her own history or is just spouting the new world order's line of reasoning to reinforce the loyalty of her cult member is unknown. I suspect Rohmer injected this neo-Nazi racial style propaganda to induce his readers to feel less empathy for his master villain, whose other pronouncements, no matter how radical, might have seemed pretty reasonable in light what had happened in the 20th century with two world wars, violent revolutions, and abrupt social upheavals sweeping the planet during the period he was writing these novels.

Rohmer makes it plain that Sumuru does not consider herself to be evil, and scoffs at those opposing her who declare her to be some kind of soulless monster. She sincerely believes she is working to save the human race from destruction; that her blueprint of the new world order is necessary to ensure that humanity and its civilization continue to exist. The new world order that her cult promotes will eliminate war, suffering, poverty, and ensure full equality of all races and genders. Who could possibly be opposed to such worthwhile goals? Yes, some of her methods may seem cold and ruthless to the uninformed outsider, but aren't her selective methods better and more benign than engaging in massive, brutal warfare, or the relentless crushing of entire segments of society for the selfish financial betterment of a few ruthless individuals who use the capitalist system for their owns ends despite the misery and suffering it might cause others?

Part of the fascination with and fear of Sumuru's organization can probably be traced to the Red Scare that exploded across the western world in the late 1940s and early 1950s. The idea of a secret organization claiming vague utopian political goals, whose members operated in secret cells controlled by one mastermind who organized the activities of all those elements sounded to a lot of people like international communism. The Red party organization was supposedly entrenched and spread out over the entire western world. The international communist conspiracy was supposed to be directly controlled by Stalin and his cohorts from Moscow, with their ultimate goal the violent overthrow of democracy, to be replaced by a central totalitarian communist dictatorship. Anti-communist hysteria permeated multiple layers of society during those years. Rohmer's sinister Madonna novels may have inadvertently played into a dark lurking fear already planted in the minds of a great many people living in the United States and Britain.



By the fourth novel Sumuru's activities were known to Scotland Yard, and to police officials in France and the United States. Scotland Yard has a special investigator, Inspector Calligan, specifically in charge of trying to identify and trace her activities. However despite knowing her name, the name of her secret society, and having records of many crimes her cult has committed, the authorities do not have an accurate description of her, or a fingerprint, or really a clue as to where she might strike next.

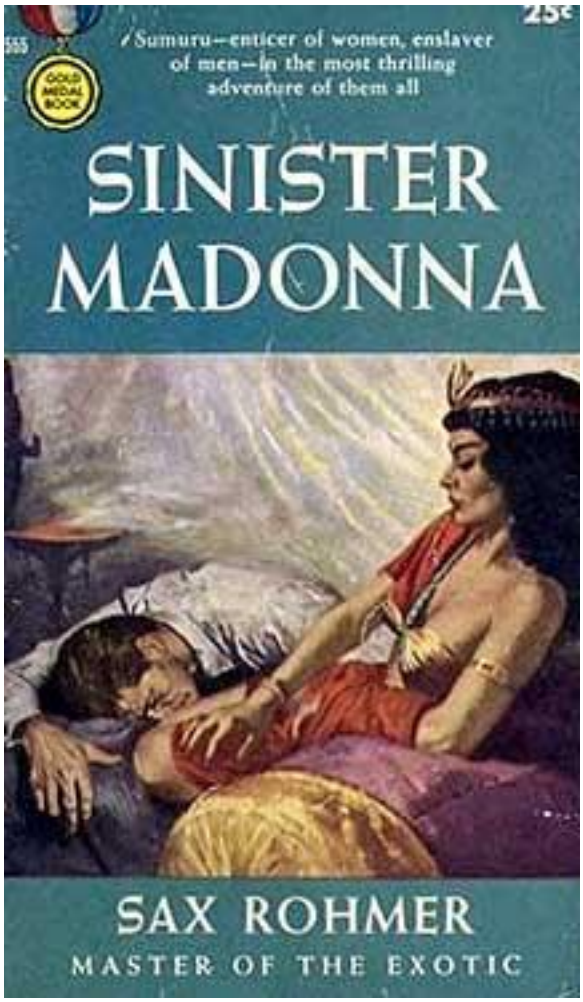
It turns out she has struck on several different fronts in that particular novel. Fortunately the CID has an accurate description of Philo and Dr. Ariosto. When a beautiful young woman trying to escape the cult jumps into the car of playwright Dick Cartaret during a near total London fog, and then just as mysteriously vanishes, his description of the two people who break into his apartment to force him to reveal where the young lady has gone leads Inspector Calligan to easily match the description of the two assailants with Sumuru's inner circle henchmen. An agent in Cairo has also indentified Our Lady as operating some kind of scheme among the native born upper echelon of society.

With the authorities on three continents aware of Sumuru and her cult, as well as knowing the usual techniques she uses in her operations, you would think things might be more difficult for the master temptress. However, and typically, Sumuru underestimates her enemies and has supreme confidence in her abilities to deal with any situation. She also trusts that her sworn cult members will follow thru on her orders. Cracks in the loyalty of the women in the rank and file undermine her operations, and provide a wedge for Drake Roscoe to strike against her. As a former member of the cult Drake Roscoe does know what Sumuru looks like, and he is well acquainted with her personal habits.

The fifth novel "Sinister Madonna" harkens back to some of Rohmer's earlier themes, particularly from the Fu Manchu series in which the oriental mastermind was searching for an object that will so impress a large population segment of some region that it will immediately advance his ultimate goal of world conquest. In the 1940 Republic serial "The Drums of Fu Manchu" that object was the lost sacred scepter of Genghis Khan.

In this fifth Sumuru adventure the object is the fabled Seal of Solomon, purportedly carved into the largest diamond known in the ancient world. Hidden and lost after the fall of the Jewish Temple in Jerusalem, the seal will directly influence both the governments and the populations of Asia, altho exactly how that might work is never explained.

The first three novels in the Sumuru series appeared in rapid order. "Nude In Mink" came out in May, 1950, followed exactly a year later by "Sumuru", followed by "The Fire Goddess" in 1952. There was a gap of about two years before the fourth book "Return of Sumuru" came out in May 1954. There was another two year gap before the fifth adventure "Sinister Madonna" was published in 1956. That was the end of the series.



It is likely that Rohmer would have written more, but he died on June 1, 1959 at the age of 76 after contracting Asian flu shortly after returning to London. His lifetime as a regular smoker had not helped his overall physical condition. He had written fiction continuously thru the final months of his life. Perhaps fittingly his last published story was "Fu Manchu and the Frightened Red-Head" which appeared in the Feb 1st, 1959 issue of *This Week Magazine*. Rohmer's original title had been "Secret of the Flying Saucer". The story was incorporated into the novel "The Wraith of Fu Manchu" which was published in 1973, a composition of stories and material assembled by his wife and daughter.

Sales of the Sumuru paperback books had been very strong at the beginning of the series, but at the end of the run public enthusiasm seems to have dropped. Fawcett kept the series in print thru much of the 1960s, and 1970s. In 1967 and 1969 two color movies were made using the character.

The connections between Rohmer's character and these cheaply made exploitation pictures is thin at best. The stories are trite with the productions clearly showing that they were shot rapidly on short budgets. The first one "The Million Eyes of Sumuru" is a spy thriller, in which Sumuru is the sadistic leader of a cult seeking world domination thru wholesale assassinations.

Shirley Eaton starred in that film and the second one "The Seven Secrets of Sumuru" (better known as "The Girl From Rio"). It was more of the same, only worse, mixing her gang of man-hating femi-zons with racketeers, a hidden jungle city and martial arts high-camp action. Today these films can be seen for free on many internet sites or purchased from video dealers at low prices.

In 2003 a science fiction film titled "Sumuru" was made that had even less to do with the original novels. I hope the Rohmer estate at least got some buckos for the use and abuse of the character's name.

Too many people these days are happy to dismiss the Sumuru series as just an imitation female version of Fu Manchu. There are similarities of course---both are ruthless leaders determined to remake human civilization in their own image, but my opinion is that the Sumuru series is better written,

with much better characterization and more developed plot work than the majority of the Fu novels, or most of Rohmer's other works either.

The problem today is finding these stories to actually read the material. The first two paperback novels turn up regularly, and sell for not much money due to the many first run copies and the many reprintings that survived. Indeed, the first two Sumuru novels are available in e-book format for a very low price from any number of internet book dealers, including Amazon.

After that things become more difficult. The third novel can be found in paperback or hardback formats, but they tend to be a bit more costly than one might expect. I have found prices ranging from eight to twenty dollars to be the norm, depending on condition. The final two novels are hard to find, and the prices start at twenty bucks and go up, way up.

Interestingly enuf John Robert Colombo, Canadian poet and collector of Canadian ghost and paranormal accounts, as well as being a dedicated Rohmer fan and collector himself, managed to put out a hardback volume a few years ago that collected the entire five novel Sumuru series as a 448 page hardback omnibus. This book reprinted the British editions of the novels (including the edited ending to the second novel) and had a retail price of $80 (Canadian dollars). That may seem expensive, but considering how much you would pay to get all the original paperbacks, or the original hardback editions, it's quite reasonable.

I happen to already have the series in the original paperback editions, but I was more than prepared to pay the price, plus the expensive Canadian shipping costs, to get this book. Unfortunately, it can't be had.

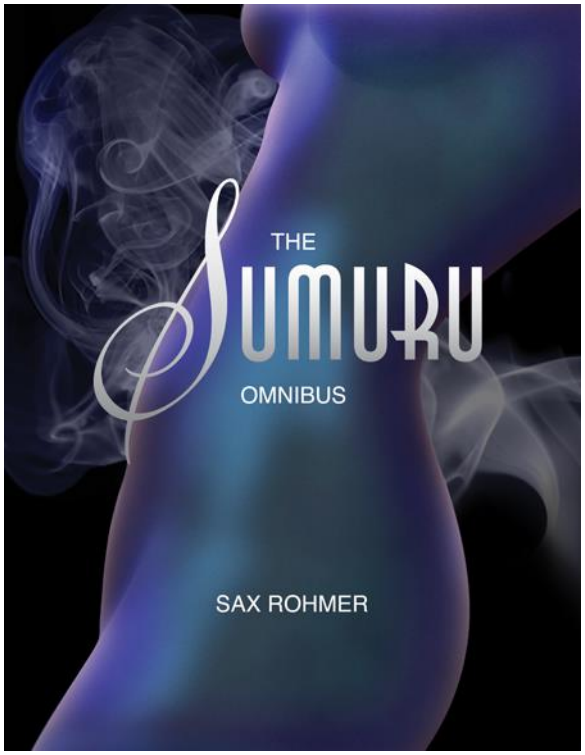
First off, it was only authorized to be sold in Canada. An attempt to sell copies on Amazon right after the book came out was nipped in the bud, and at this point in time it may no longer be available even in Canada.

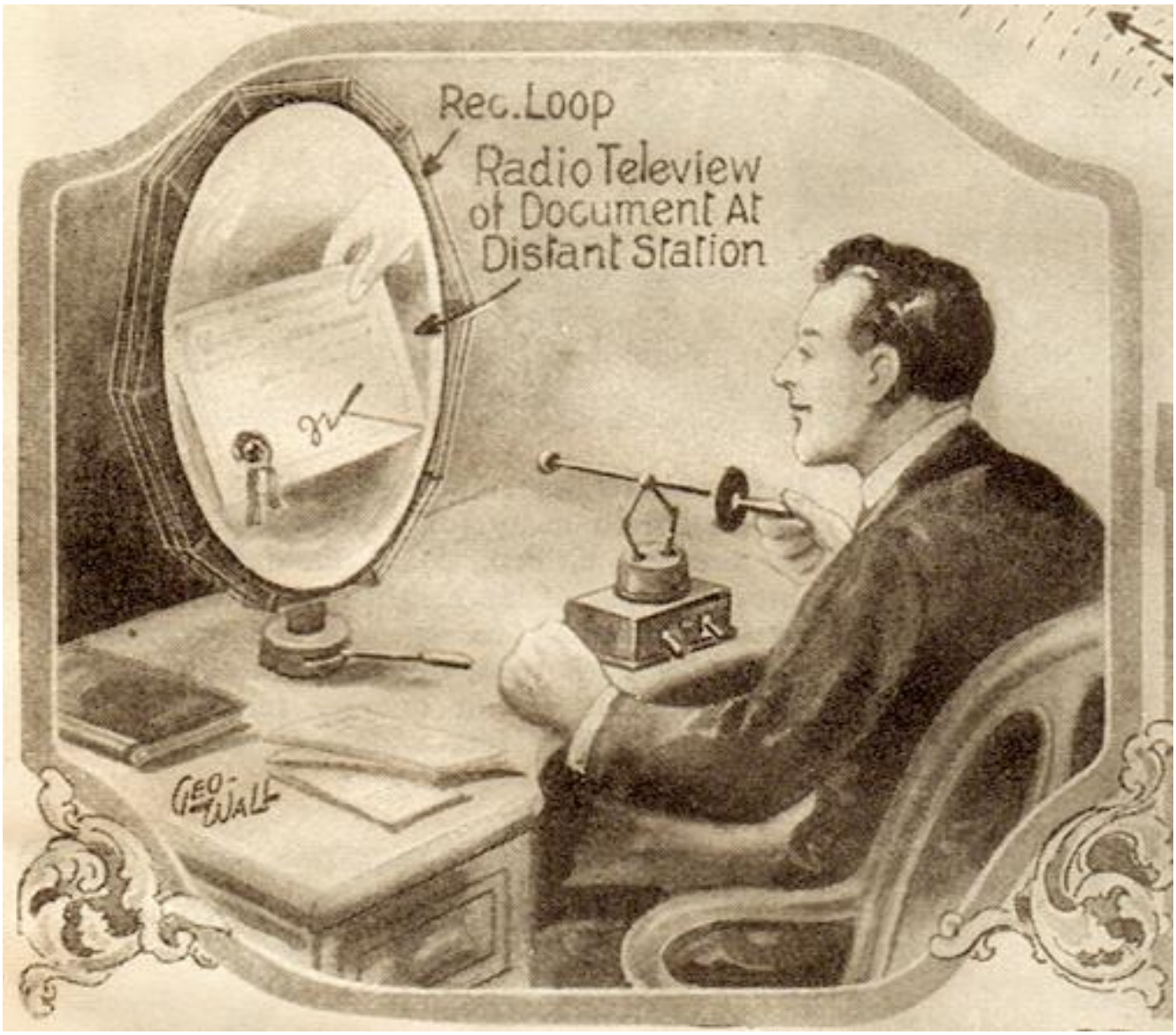
The publisher, at Batteredbox.com, has a site that lists copies still available at $75 (Canadian), but will not sell to anyone outside of Canada. Their site has not been updated in over a year, so I'm not sure copies can still be obtained even in Canada. There may be copies out there on some independent book selling sites, but if so I haven't been able to find them.

This is very disappointing. I am at a loss to understand how the first two novels could be out of copyright or with rights so easy to negotiate that they could be offered as inexpensive e-books, yet the last three adventures cannot be reissued in pixel format. Fawcett Books has been sold several times over the past few decades, so the rights may be convoluted. Or perhaps the Sax Rohmer estate has some odious conditions regarding the character, but it seems unusual to me.

I wish some enterprising publisher or fan would put the entire series out in e-book format. Sumuru was a memorable character. The adventures were fast moving, with strong characterization and interesting plots that hold up very nicely over the passage of time.

Even more satisfying would be if the Rohmer estate would authorize the creation of new stories involving the character. She is a timeless villainess who could fit easily into the modern world situation. Either way it would be a shame if new generations of fans could not read her fantastic adventures.





READER REACTION

Ken Faig, Jr.; carolfaig@comcast.net

Thanks for another great issue. I liked John Cody's front cover depicting the giant bear-like creature. Good coverage of cultural artifacts like "Dr. Drew" and "Johnny Jupiter"--as usual.

Dale Nelson writes interestingly of the emotional flatness of much of Lovecraft's work in "Lovecraft's Comfortable World." In my own recollection, the emotional peak of HPL's work occurred in "At the Mountains of Madness": ""Radiates, vegetables, monstrosities, star-spawn--whatever they had been, they were men!" (CF3 143). Perhaps those lines alone acquit HPL of being an "extinctionist." The narrator's sympathy for the besieged family in "The Colour out of Space" probably accounts in part for that work being at the summit of HPL's work. While there are some grotesque moments in HPL's fiction (e.g., the exchange of consciousnesses in cadavers in "The Thing on the Doorstep"--I really don't recall being very scared by any of his work. Perhaps like other adolescent readers I liked the distinctive milieu of his work. On the other hand, the adolescent me was pretty scared by the adaptation of Robert E. Howard's "Pigeons from Hell" on "Thriller." For some reason,

I also found the adaptation of Derleth's "The Return of Andrew Bentley" on the same show very chilling.

Lively correspondence column, as usual. Granted that Ramble House has being doing landmark work with the horror pulps, I think there is still room for series like Wordsworth and Equation in the UK which try to reprint classics of the supernatural genre. I am sure there are many unjustly neglected works which deserve revival.

///A few of Lovecraft's stories actually frightened me. The one I remember most vividly was "Pickman's Model". Most of his other material struck me as being very interesting, some of it creepy, and certainly unusual, well beyond the scope of tales one would expect from supernatural fiction.

So far as other written works that actually frightened me, I consider Howard's "Pigeons From Hell" to be at the top of the list. I confess I was impressed, but not frightened by the treatment of the story on Thriller . Another Thriller episode that impressed me (but didn't scare me) was the adaptation of "Yours Truly, Jack the Ripper". Interesting to me that well known actor Ray Milland directed that episode and a bunch of others.

There are a ton of great supernatural stories by authors known and otherwise that certainly deserve to be reprinted. Whether they will be or not is another matter. The specialty press seems intend on producing expensive books, sometimes volumes that aren't even that well constructed. The field of e-books offers some interesting possibilities for gathering up and offering SF/fantasy and horror tales in a more affordable format. Amazon.com and the Barnes & Noble book sites already have a pretty good selection of obscure material in anthology e-book form, altho to be honest a few of them should have stayed obscure, or even better, forgotten.///

Jefferson P. Swycaffer; P.O. Box 15373; San Diego CA 92175

My golly, you always have the best cover art! John Cody's confrontation between some mole-men with the boring (not in the slightest!) machine is grand! It's one of those "hold you breath" moments, because the violence is only a second-and-a-half from breaking out. And Dan Carroll's back cover, with a Burroughs-esque hero and heroine in the throes of a romantic hug is
also tightrope-walking, because in about a second-and-a-half -- um -- well, the author will change the scene, won't he!

Rober Cepeda's and Brad Foster's whimsy and humor are outstanding: you guys are completely nuts, and I love ya!

I admire and adore modern astronomy, especially the cutting edges of cosmology, which suggest a universe bigger by far than we could ever have imagined...and just what we knew in the 1950s, when we realized our galaxy was only one among thousands.

I have some respect for the "They must be socially advanced...or else they'd have killed themselves off" theory of civilization's advance. The human race is still unable to decide which of these paths to follow. A Darwinian point of view suggests that we can't go through too many more such crises without either dying...or growing up, gosh darn it. It does, however, echo
amusingly of the 1970s Communist SF writer who said that all space-going civilizations would have to be communists...because of the historical imperative. Okay, "determinism" of that kind can go too far...

I'd never heard of Dr. Drew! I'll try to track down a copy of the collection! You have a knack for pointing us toward some very remarkable treasures!

I'd also never heard of Johnny Jupiter, and enjoyed Rich Dengrove's summary. The diversity of the *Fadeaway* group-envelope never ceases to astonish!

I very much admire Dale Nelson's "psychoanalysis," so to speak, of the Cthulhu Mythos, and how the stories give comfort back, almost as fast as they take it away. The stories are horrific and disturbing and hideous, but they come with some built-in reassurances. The Ghouls remain buried in the graveyard; the Whisperers in Darkness go back into space; Great Cthulhu
sinks into the sea at the end.

There was a recent-ish anthology of "modern" Cthulhu stories, on the premise that Cthulhu rises and conquers. I read half of the first story, and threw the book in the trash. Intolerable: it seemed only to be the rankest foul-imaged horror pornography, with excesses of dismemberment, rape, and rape-of-the-spirit. The period Mythos-cycle we all love so much kept that kind of thing at a comforting distance. (I think "The Dunwich Horror" may have been just about the most explicit of the stories.)

I would politely disagree with Charles Rector, and agree with our good host: E-Book Publishing is certainly not going to "fade away" any time soon, and is certainly not a fad. Even if it reverted to its most basic form – text on a tablet, and otherwise exactly the same as classical publishing – it won't go away, because the media format is so INCREDIBLY convenient! Ten thousand volumes in a doohinkey the size of a paperback: brother, we have seen the future, and this is it! And I think the same is true for self-publishing: the information age not only makes it possible, it makes it inevitable. The room and role for amateur story-sharing, such as Reddit, is a tool that the internet's simple communication function makes viable.

Now, whether Amazon will continue to dominate, and what the future is of access-control, no one can guess. Copy-protection will always be at war with cracking, hacking, and piracy. Smuggling will come and go in waves and phases, as the market competes *with itself* in self-governance.

Infinite thanks again to Darrell Schweitzer for having bequeathed the N3F Amateur Short Story Contest to me. You did a very good job running the contest, and I only wish I could have equalled your level of dedication and skill. My own principle failing has been in publicity and marketing, things I am absolutely incompetent at. George Phillies has done miracles in getting the contest publicized, bringing in enough entries to make the contest viable again. At very least, I can vouch for the quality of the stories themselves: people are sending us stuff that is of professionally publishable quality, and the recent anthology of winners is like a dream come true.

Rich Dengrove mentions me, and alludes to scuttlebutt that I wasn't writing any more. Gosharooty, I sure am! I never stopped! I've been writing five books every four years...since 1985! I've got quite a collection! Now, it's tragic (for me!) that I'm not *selling* them any more. I had my heyday, and now my own literary agent won't answer my calls, let alone the publishers. So it goes: I'm a "has been" who, at least, "still is" to the degree of actually writing. I've put up some of my better stuff on Amazon. (Check out "At the Sign of the Brass Breast" -- for the cover art! My sister, Atanielle Rowland, drew that one, and I think it is absolutely peachy!)

After some discussion here, I read "The Maltese Falcon," which I thought was treated with almost photographic integrity by the movie -- and "The Thin Man" which I thought the movie only loosely resembled. In fact, I thought the book's treatment of Nick Charles was quite weak, compared to the *sterling* performance by William Powell. Powell gave Charles a sparkle, a glint, a brisk air of lightness and wit, which, in the book, was mostly lacking. In the book, Charles pretty much goes through the whole story *not answering questions.!* That's his one schtick. (That and drinking too much.) People ask him, "What do you think happened?" and he'll go through absurd gyrations to evade answering. To me, that got VERY dull, very quickly. The movies are much better than this rather dull thud of a book.

However, moving forward, there's "Spade and Archer" by Joe Gores, a "prequel" to "The Maltese Falcon," which is a pip! It's extremely faithful to Hammett's original, in style and texture and characterization. If you liked "The Maltese Falcon," Gores' offering is well worth a sniff.

///Yep, the lady in Dan Carroll's bacov illo is just seconds away from snatching the dagger out of the sheath and stabbing the guy in the back. Most women are more subtle about those kinds of actions.

I think it is short-sighted, maybe even foolhardy to assume that alien races from other planets would be even remotely similar to the human race in their behaviors or philosophies. Trying to suggest that planets with many earth similarities would automatically create races sortta-maybe-kinda akin to the humanity neglects the enormous variety of life forms we find right here on our own planet. As I said in my editorial, I think we may have intelligent life forms existing right here on planet earth that we simply cannot recognize because they are so different from us.

There have been a fair number of stories set within Lovecraft's Cthulu Mythos where the Mythos creatures triumph. This is the ultimate horror story; not only does the protagonist die or suffer the torments of the damned, but the entire human race is lost. I agree that a little of that goes a long way; not something I care to read on a regular basis. Whole volumes where everybody looses probably have limited appeal, but somebody must be buying the things, because more new ones keep coming out. Psychological evaluations of the personality types who read and enjoy tales of absolute horror would seem to indicate they appeal and enhance the sadistic impulses in their readers.

I firmly believe that e-books are going to dominate the future of publishing. Because the cost of making pixels is so much cheaper than printing words on paper, the retail prices will continue to go down. The major book publishers are trying desperately to hold the line with moderately expensive e-books, but just within the past few years the publisher price-point has declined, and will continue to decline under the push of competition and the self-publishing explosion. I don't think we will ever get to the point where every e-book is going to retail for ninety-nine cents, but competition and expanding sales for lower priced books is slowly pushing the price-point down.

I think the final battlefield in this area will be with comic books and heavily illustrated children's books. Four bucks is a lot to pay for a new printed comic book, and sooner or later the major companies are going to figure they can make more money selling more copies in electronic form for a pixel price of a buck or two. Right now the major companies are fighting off pirate copying of their new comics being posted for free on the internet. Most people would prefer to buy a legal copy from the legitimate publisher, but free vs $4.00 is a powerful incentive to patronize the pirate sites.///

Rob Imes; 13510 Cambridge #307; Southgate, MI 48195

Gavin Callaghan's 10-page article "HPL and Fascism" is a defense of his description of H. P. Lovecraft as a fascist, providing examples (including Lovecraft's own words describing himself as a fascist). It was a bit of a chore to read, especially since it seemed like Gavin was defending a position that didn't deserve the article's length. Following America's entry into World War Two in 1941, Americans' views on many things began to change – for example, the discrediting of isolationism as a viable response in the modern world. Our country, that had previously refused to join the League of Nations, now helped create the United Nations. Hitler's idea of a "master race" was mocked during the war, which may have helped eventually discredit long-held notions of white superiority here at home. I suspect that Lovecraft himself might have changed with the times as well had he lived longer, adopting more accepting attitudes toward democracy and minorities thanks to the counter-example that the Nazis provided. Unfortunately he died in 1937 and so we'll never know. It seems a bit unfair to pile on about the man being a fascist in 2017, when Lovecraft's understanding was limited to his own time and place, unable to know the things we now know, and the horrible consequences of his prejudiced beliefs. (Of course Lovecraft could have known it was wrong back then, too, as many others did, if he'd opened his eyes more, but evidently it took the Holocaust to thoroughly discredit fascism.)

"The Guns of Late July" was a surprisingly enjoyable short story, reminiscent of 1950s humorous science fiction. I say "surprisingly" because I'd never read any fiction by you before and didn't know that you could write fiction so well. It felt like I was listening to an old episode of "X Minus One." In fact the "voice" of the narrator seemed to have a bit of a New York accent to it, like the kind heard in some old radio shows. (Shreevie in "The Shadow" is a famous example of this type of voice, but this was not as extreme as that.) Was the voice of the narrator based on any particular person?

In the lettercol, there was discussion about the decline of used bookstores due to the popularity of e-books. I personally think that the decline of used bookstores may have more to do with the availability of inexpensive old books elsewhere. For the past ten years I've been visiting local libraries and thrift stores with some regularity, sometimes once a week. Prices vary at each place: Last week I went to a Goodwill store that had hardcovers for $2 each and paperbacks for $1 each, but that is on the high end. Some thrift stores in my area price their books as low as "10 for $1.00." And two libraries in my area have an ongoing used book sale where you buy a grocery bag for $1.00 at the desk and then put as many books as you can fit into the bag. The "fill a bag for $1.00" sale suggests to me that the library wants to get rid of these books, that you are practically doing them a favor by taking them away.

I've been buying used books off & on since the mid-1980s and I don't recall running across as many great sales like that as I do now. If I had, my book collection would have been a lot larger as a teenager. I would occasionally find some cheap books at a garage sale or church book sale, or the annual book fair that a local shopping mall held. But I don't recall being able to buy shelves full of books for ten cents each no matter their size or weight. If I'm right about this, that physical books are becoming more plentiful and becoming more affordable as a result, this may indicate that books are thought to have less value or worth than they did in the past, or that people who had large collections are dying off and their books are ending up in the thrift store and library book sales. Sometimes while browsing the cheap books at such places, I'll notice a pattern that suggests some of the books came from one owner – for example, if the books are about a single (or related) topic, or many by the same author.

A few months ago at a local thrift store, I was browsing their rows upon rows of paperback books (priced at 10 for $1.00) when I noticed that several of them were about airplanes – true tales of pilots or airwar, or novels about air adventure. I bought around 20 of them ($2.00) and left, but after thinking about it some more I

returned to the thrift store hoping to get the rest of them. It had obviously been someone's collection, and I wanted to keep it together, thinking I could sell it on eBay for more than what I'd be paying for them (10 cents each). The problem was that I knew it would be a huge amount of books. I started filling up the cart with all of the airplane-related books (they were mixed in with the other paperbacks, so I had to read the spine of each book) and when an employee saw what I was doing she gave me a big plastic tub to put the books in. In the end, it came to around 200 paperback books ($20). When I got home, I found that most of the books had the original owner's initials on the back inside cover, along with the date which I assume indicated date of purchase. (It could indicate when he read the book, but most of them looked so well-preserved I doubted that they had been read.) The owner had obtained most of the books around the time that the book was published, mainly from the 1960s to the 1980s. A few of the books were the same book but different editions. The guy was obviously interested in planes. Doing a Google search, I managed to find out his name and learned that he had been a flight instructor during World War Two and was currently around 99 years old. I didn't find an obituary online, so it's possible that he moved to an assisted-living facility and his book collection was donated to the thrift store. In any event, I sold most of the collection on eBay for more than what I paid for it, and I think the books ended up going to good homes – certainly better homes than a thrift store, which is like one step away from being tossed in the dumpster.

At this same thrift store, a few weeks later, I found a ton of mystery novels, although in far more worn, well-read condition, which made them less attractive to me. But I did buy a few that were by British writer John Creasey. Some years previously I'd bought a half-dozen Creasey paperbacks at a local library for 10 cents each, though I hadn't gotten around to reading any of them. More recently I've become obsessed with vintage British TV and have been watching the 1960s series "The Baron" which was loosely based on Creasey's Baron novels. So when I saw those few well-read Creasey books at the thrift store recently, I bought them and did read one of them when I got home. This made me want to get more Creasey, so I looked on eBay, but no one was selling them for the dirt-cheap prices that I've been spoiled with due to my thrift-store shopping. On the other hand, shopping at a thrift store or library sale relies entirely on chance; you have no idea what you'll find on the shelf each time, and can't simply buy a specific book on demand.

So I decided to check a local used bookstore to see if they had any Creasey. Now, this is an excellent used bookstore – the old-fashioned kind that any true booklover would love. The floor creaks when you walk on it. The books are categorized by genre, and there is even a section specifically for vintage paperbacks. A few years back I even bought a 1950s issue of Weird Tales here. So, it's a great place to find old books – but unfortunately on that particular day I didn't find any Creasey books. I bought two old paperbacks on other topics that caught my eye (and also because they were cheap, $1.50 to $2.00 each, which was on the low end of the store's usual prices) and left. On my way home, I decided to stop at another thrift store located on the same street as the used bookstore. To my surprise, I found a John Creasey paperback on the shelf at this thrift store, and bought it for 25 cents. This was an example to me of how a thrift store was able to outdo a used bookstore at its own game!

The lettercol in #52 also discussed penny dreadfuls, in response to your article about them in a previous issue. I've never read one, but I'll take your word for it that some of them do contain worthwhile reading material. I think some readers have preconceived notions about things based on assumptions about what something is like, without experiencing it themselves or giving it a fair chance. (I guess it goes both ways: some people assume they don't like old stuff and won't give it a try, while other people assume they won't like new stuff and won't give that a try.) I do think that one has to be a bit immersed in older material to be more receptive to it. If one's entertainment diet consists entirely of current TV shows, one is unlikely to appreciate the beauty of a silent film from 100 years ago; the experience would probably be too unfamiliar to be appreciated. The silent movie would look too "primitive" to the contemporary-focused eye to be enjoyed properly.

I first heard of penny dreadfuls in *A Pictorial History of Horror Stories* by Peter Haining (1985 edition), a British hardcover that I found on the bargain-book table at K-Mart when I was a teenager in the mid-1980s. (That bargain table at K-Mart often had U.K. imports for some reason and I bought many a great book there.) When I pored over the lavishly-illustrated pages of that book as a teen, it never occurred to me that I would someday have copies of the depicted magazines in my own collection, and cheaply acquired to boot. (Not the 19th century publications, of course, but pulps and digests from the 1940s-60s.) I think that part of the fascination with those old magazines was their unavailability – it was the same with Golden-Age comics, which were out-of-reach things that we could only dream about. Now these things (including the comics) are

becoming available via eBay, online scans, reprints, etc. and it will be interesting to see what impact they might have on creators of the future. The discovery of ancient classical art helped inspire the Renaissance, and it's possible that 19th and 20th century art may have a profound effect on 21st century work, as older work gets rediscovered and remastered for new generations. It's perhaps no surprise that time travel, Steampunk, and revisionist history are popular themes in today's entertainment. Thankfully it doesn't appear that new creators will be ignored in favor of past masters, as there continue to be people who prefer to experience brand-new work, deeming the work of their own time "a new Golden Age" (as fans of current TV & comic books have claimed about the present).

Ironically the modern digital age allows an immersion into the past that is the next best thing to time travel (I'd still prefer time travel, though). Last year or so, I was reading scans of old movie magazines circa 1915 and read an article about a child actor who was appearing in a series of comedies. I wondered if this might be an example of an early child star, so in another window of my web browser I googled the kid's name and one of the links was to a YouTube video of one of his silent movies, from around the same time period as the article I'd read. I had more access to this older material, at my fingertips, than even the people who lived back then would have had, without even getting up from my chair. A month or two ago, I was reading some more online scans of movie mags, this time from around 1917-1919, and was impressed by some of the poster-like ads for movies that were on the pages, some of them wonderfully illustrated in color. So I kept scrolling through the scanned pages, downloading items of interest to a folder in my computer (where I'd later organize the images according to film studio), and spent several hours doing this. When I got up to go outside and check the mail, I momentarily wondered if I could have stepped back in time, since there was nothing in the dark hallway of my apartment to suggest 2017 instead of 1917. Even when I opened the front door and stepped outside, nothing in particular except the cars indicated the time period that I was inhabiting. After a couple moments away from the screen, though, the familiar feeling of being in the present day gradually seeped back into my consciousness.

But it was a wonderful feeling to read those old magazines and be immersed in the past, reading about old things when they were new, seeing past events unfolding as they happened, so that they didn't seem "old" anymore at all, but (for a fleeting moment) my own present. Such immersion in the past, and easier availability today of long-ago material, may lead to greater appreciation for that older work, since it will be more familiar and less remote to those inclined to try it. (Including, of course, for lesser-known 19th century writing such as that found in the penny dreadfuls, which started off the spiel above.)

///Ah, you are assuming that WWII changed the views held by many people about such things as fascism, or national isolationism. This is not necessarily true. As I said in issue #53, WWII and the horrors of the Nazi regime did blacken the terminology so that the word fascism is now used mainly as a slur or an insult, but the underlying principles of fascism still have great appeal to a lot of people. A dynamic leader who can get things done, a person who will work for the greater good of the people and the national well being as a whole, using a chosen group of experts ready to get things done fast and efficiently, without having to worry about the wrangling, delays, obstructions and petty in-fighting most government efforts normally entail, this concept still seem like a good idea to a considerable portion of the world's population.

This is why so many American voters, for example, want and expect the President to do things that the office does not allow him or her to do. The US government is designed to produce a balance of power, yet half or more of the population expect the president to act like a king or a dictator and get things done immediately, without having to bother with Congressional approval or a review of its legality by the courts.

As for isolationism, in the USA, a recent survey showed that over sixty percent of people preferred that the US not interfere or even interact with foreign governments except in the matters of trade, immigration, and tourism. Their view was that the government should pursue a policy of America First, America Only, and pretty much ignore the rest of the planet, certainly not get involved politically or militarily with other nations.

This has great appeal. Withdrawing all, or even most of the military installations the US has established around the world would save untold billions of dollars immediately, possibly enuf to balance the national budget and delivery a hefty surplus that could be used to pay down the national debt.

I think fascism as a political idea is alive and well both here and around the world, only the names have been changed.///

Dale Nelson; extollager@gmail.com

Thanks, Bob, for sending the latest issue! Your editorial musings reminded me a lot of a story I first wrote in the oughts and finalized in 2010, "Being There for Kay-Elle" (attached).

I've been really interested in the possible consequences to popular sentiment of increasing awareness that there are ineluctable limits affecting things we've generally assumed would be surpassed in time if the money were spent: we'd keep on living longer, we'd get interplanetary and even interstellar manned flight, etc.

But it seems, as you suggest, that here too there are limits, just as we are not going to keep getting taller and taller. For me a good way to sharpen the point about limits was to imagine the situation in which we *know* that we have received broadcasts from intelligent aliens and we also *know* that we will never understand them. What might happen? I wondered if, turned away from the passing of *those* limits, we might find there are other things, which we have tended to forget or deny, that relate to what existence does have to offer -- "symbolized" in the story by the ghost at the end.

PS: I wasn't trying to find more information about the "moving coffins." I wanted to pin down a fugitive memory of a Ripley's Believe It or Not! feature on the coffins. Assuming the memory is correct, this would be something I have remembered for almost 50 years. It would be fun to have the memory confirmed and to see the very picture and words that stuck it there.

Likewise I have a fugitive memory that must be almost 50 years old of seeing the front page of a *National Inquirer* paper with a photo of an infant allegedly afflicted with a dreadful condition that speeded up aging, so that the wee one was all wrinkled. It made me uncomfortable! I ended up drawing on the memory for a story written in response to a challenge to write a ghost story or horror tale in 100 words exactly. This was one of "Nelson's Centuries" published in Pierre Comtois's *Fungi*, like "Being There for Kay-Elle."

///Jeeze! I think you are going to find it close to impossible to locate that specific page of the Ripley's comic strip devoted to the moving coffins. Several *Fadeaway* readers mentioned the phenom and pointed out a few articles about it, but not one person could suggest in what volume of the Ripley paperback reprints that particular page might be found. I suppose it is possible to physically thumb thru all the hundreds of different volumes that have been published, but there is always a chance you'd inadvertently skip over that entry anyway. But, hey, best of luck with it anyway!///

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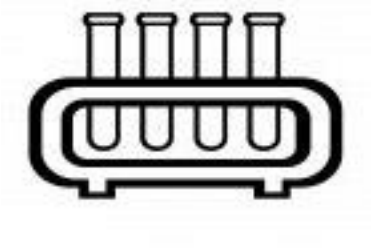

A short note on ebooks and paperback books. There have been recent articles claiming that ebooks were a fad. Readers interested in much more discussion of this should consider perusing amdgeniusclub.com. In short, the figures for ebook sales refer only to sales by major conventional book publishers, and do not including independent publication via Amazon, 3mpub.com, Smashwords.com, and many others. Many conventional publishers charge for an ebook something toward the price of a hardback or trade paperback, which is off the top end of the profit curve based on studies by smashwords.

Total ebooks sales are way up. That's mostly sales of independent and small publishers, not included in that crashing ebook claim. In particular, genre fiction is being dominated by independent publishers, with romance novels in the lead.

However, as Charles Rector correctly points out, we need vast numbers of new reviewers to cover the one or two hundred or so new SF novels being published every month. I would like to see the N3F do this, though it will not be simple. There is some good stuff and some awful stuff. The Washburne War of the Worlds sequels are reasonably well done. The WW1 German warship in the late Roman Empire...the plotting is clever, but you can tell English is not the author's native language. All of these are better than last year's Hugo novel winner.

///Even the sales figures from the major publishers show that sales of ebooks are a strong and steady market, tied to the popularity of the author or the quality of the book itself; pretty much the same as with the sales figures on print volumes. I

am sure there are plenty of print publishers who would like for ebooks to be a transitory fad, but it ain't gonna happen. Once the genie is out of the bottle there's no putting it back in.

The other side of the ebook coin, mentioned in *Fadeaway* before, is that public domain and out of print books get converted to ebook format on a very frequent and constant basis, so titles that the traditional print publishers have either ignored or counted as bunny money thru their backlist catalog are not out there as e-books either offered up for free, or at extremely low prices. These older and previously out of print books coming back into the market as accessible, low priced pixel versions have also cut into the sales of traditional books, particularly at the level of brick & mortar stores, another reason physical book stores are struggling and going out of business at an alarming rate.

Ahem; that was my suggestion that the hobby needs reviews of the independent e-book output, which is literally flooding the market. I think your estimate or a hundred or two hundred new books in electronic and physical formats per month is on the low side. I think the N3F could help sort the wheat from the chaff thru its regular journals, but finding people to do the reviews, especially people willing to say a bad book is actually bad, is the real problem.///

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In *Fadeaway* #53, Rich Dengrove's article on Johnny Jupiter brought back all sorts of memories. The memories weren't about the show itself, because I never saw the show. It may not have been broadcast in the Los Angeles area. That seems probable, since I watched just about anything that even pretended to be science fiction in the early fifties. A casual observer might have thought I was becoming ***obsessed*** with science fiction. Of course, that would have been a silly idea.

One exception was Tom Corbett, Space Cadet. Years later, I tried to remember why I didn't watch it, since it was reputedly quite good for the period. It may have been opposite some other show I wanted to watch. I suspect it might have been Time for Beany the puppet version. Time for Beany was at least fantasy with characters like Cecil the Seasick Sea Serpent (Stan Freberg). In one adventure, they visited a square planet which had a square orbit.

Some other shows of the period---Space Patrol: (1950-55) All nine planets were habitable in this series. They also had a tenth planet which they had built as a capital of the solar system and an eleventh which was out beyond Pluto. Futuristic cities were represented as toys arranged on a tabletop. I knew because I had most of the same toys. You just can't fool kids that way.

Rocky Jones, Space Ranger: (1955) A couple of years ago, Barbara Hambly mentioned this had been her favorite TV show as a kid. She made the mistake of watching an episode in the recent past. It didn't stand up well. I've long known that childhood favorites should be left in the past where they belong.

Atom Squad: (1953) I was about ten years old when I was watching this show. It was the first series where I regularly knew more science than the script writers did. People think kids watch SF with bad science because they don't know any better. No, they watch them because it gives them a sense of superiority.

Captain Video and his Video Rangers: (1949-55) This one was parodied as Captain TVideo in Mad Comics. Its special effects were legendary. Not good, just legendary. I had thought the show started as a framing device for a cartoon show and then developed into an actual SF series. I was wrong. It was the other way around.

Tales of Tomorrow: (1951-53) This was an adult SF series. It was on at 10 pm which was usually past my bedtime. I remember they did versions of "Dune Roller" by Julian May and "A Child is Crying" by Judith Merril.

Flash Gordon: (1954) This was the Steve Holland version. All the scenes were very dark, and the actors all sounded like they had Teutonic overtones. In other words, they all sounded like Arnold Schwarzenegger.

Science Fiction Theatre: (1955-57) I always hoped this series would do some actual science fiction. As I recall, they never did.

///There were a whole bunch of science fiction related programs on television and radio from the early fifties. For whatever reason there was boom interest in space travel and exploring other planets. Some of these programs were very good, and some were just awful.

The problem with television science fiction is that the budget for special effects (or much of anything else) was limited, so there wasn't a whole lot that could be accomplished that was believable. As I have mentioned many times before, the Space Patrol radio program was primarily responsible for my becoming interested in science fiction. Most of those programs (the ones that have survived anyway), stand up pretty well over the passage of time. I never saw the television

Space Patrol show, which is probably a good thing, because it was pretty pathetic. Back in the early 1990s some copies of the TV show surfaced and I was able to watch those episodes, and the lack of any kind of budget for anything beyond actor salaries was painfully obvious. If I had encountered that show when I was a kid I would probably never have become fascinated with science fiction.

Many of the kiddie SF shows suffered the same fate. Captain Video is fondly remembered by the youngsters who lived thru the era, but then, this may be because there wasn't much else on the tube during that time period anyway.///

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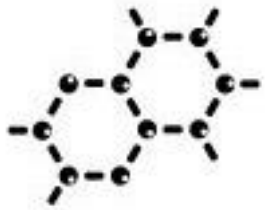

Lots of fodder for my comments in *Fadeaway* #53. Perhaps I should cut down on them. Commenting on all that takes a lot of time. Time I could spend on writing my erstwhile book. However, I can't resist. Unless I get religion, and join Commenters' Anonymous, I will probably continue, not even cutting down on the number of my comments.

Among the interesting comment hooks was the topic of extraterrestrials. I think history provides the answer to why people yearn for us to find a goldilocks planet, where, presumably, life evolved, Bob. That's a response to a topic that has fascinated the West from the 16th Century onward. In fact, the high point for belief in extraterrestrials isn't even cresting now. No, I suspect it crested in the early 19th Century when many believed that asteroids and comets were inhabited.

What inspired this has been the feeling that the existence of countless planets, suns and extraterrestrials were a good. In fact, the feeling it gives is almost ecstatic. It is a feeling that the vast majority for the past two or three centuries has felt. It started out as an idea too, and remained an idea as well as a feeling until recently. You have to go back to the Greeks for who inspired the idea – Plato. It is ironic because he believed in a small universe, with other planets and stars that were not earths or suns but divinities. Unknowingly, Plato started the belief with one sentence. There, he said the great god was very tolerant, and had decided to create the greatest variety of all things. Until the 15th Century, the doctrine was restricted to the Earth. However, in the 16th Century, that it could be applied to the entire universe started spreading like wild fire. After the middle of the 19th Century, it took a new form, where it divorced itself from philosophy and theology, and settled in as a feeling.

Up until recently, the feeling has resulted in fantasy more than reality. Then, at least, we started shooting humans and probes into outer space. Of course, flights to the countless other suns and their planets remain a fantasy. What about the real prospect of space travel? I am more optimistic about it than you are, Bob. Apparently, gravitation can be simulated in outer space by having the spaceship circular and revolving around itself. That, I imagine, would eliminate the loss of bone density under low gravity. Another danger you mention is cosmic rays. According to NASA, with sufficient shielding, space men can be sufficiently protected from cosmic rays. Apparently, not too much protection and not too little.

That answer flowed from your position on going into outer space. This doesn't flow as well from a stray remark of yours about Waldman. Still, it hit me and I'm staying with it. Your discussion of Waldman somehow reminded me of what happened to Johnny Gruelle, who created Raggedy Ann, and other children's characters popular in their time. He died in 1938, and left a hundred unpublished manuscripts, which have been published slowly. Last I heard – several decades ago – some of the manuscripts had not been used yet.

I didn't disagree or agree with what you said about Waldman. I do disagree with Dale Nelson on Lovecraft. Not that, as Dale says, his horror landscapes aren't more 'comfortable' than a lot of horror. Not, for instance, Shirley Jackson's horror. My understanding – of course, based only on a few letters – is he didn't take his horror stories very seriously. In fact, he found them hilarious. While he may not have considered them totally popular swill either, he considered them what editors wanted.

Now I go from the articles to reader reaction. First off, I will comment on Sheryl Birkhead's letter. She complains about having to fix four brakes, not just, two, on her 14 year old car. Good luck on keeping up with mounting expenses on a limited budget. I have known how that is. In 1993, I gave up my twenty-three year old Volvo only because it had finally become impractical to get it fixed.

Thus, I sympathized with Sheryl on her comment. I guess that constitutes an agreement. With your comment to Bill Plott on old penny dreadfuls, I don't actually disagree with you, but I wanted to suggest another reason for their rarity. That the old penny dreadfuls were made of pulp and they crumbled after a short time. I

remember my home town newspaper doing that after a few months as late as the '50s. On the other hand, I hear paper with a lot of cloth content in it can last centuries. Some books from the 16th Century look like new. Having been a kibitzer, I will be completely agreeable, about your comment to Jerry Kaufman. You couldn't be more right. A person needs a will unless he's totally flat broke and has nothing of value. I and my wife have both experienced the utter greed and animosity that comes with even small inheritances. My brother became impossible. My father-in-law's supposed care giver had the will made out to herself, and became impossible. In the case of my brother, this despicable attitude ended after my father's will had been closed. He transformed. from a monster back into a sane but problem laden individual.

I'm disagreeable again. I have to disagree with Tom McGovern that a college writing course would have helped. It would still be hard to make it as a writer. What percentage of writers make less than $3,000 a year. I hear a goodly proportion. ...99%? ... I suspect it helps if you know somebody, and you're on friendly terms with them. Otherwise, your writing has to have charisma mine lacks. I have one consolation. A lot of other people I know have failed to climb the summit, and become published authors. So why, after all these years, am I writing a book? Damned if I know.

I have to say this to Lawrence Dagstine. Up above, I agree it's hard to support yourself professionally in writing. Now I will deal with how writers burn out, a subject you brought up, Bob. Lawrence may set the time of writers' burnout differently, but he agrees with you. I do too as far as most writers are concerned, but not all.. A few writers constantly get new ideas: for plots, for characters, for concepts, and for viewpoints. They continue to sell. It takes a while for them to burn out. Some never do.

I guess you agree, at least in the current *Fadeaway*.

I agreed for the most part on writers' burnout. Next, something I actually applaud. Darrel Schweitzer points out the obvious: namely, Lovecraft lived during an era where doubting capitalism was common. The extreme right wing had their objections as well as extreme leftists. Hitler didn't call his party the Nationalist Socialists for nothing. What we today would consider racism was also common then. In fact, I gather, after World War I, socialists were more likely to be racist than more conservative folk. In short, if one knows the realities of the past, one would not be as anxious to condemn it as we would sins in the present.

However, I have to disagree with Darrel Schweitzer on one thing. I am not certain that Stalin's regime became so murderous because he loved using his supreme power to kill people. I suspect a lot of other people were always involved. I gather he first came to power because he listened to powerful people lower down in the Soviet hierarchy, and was able to figure out what side to follow. Thus he succeeded in ousting the star Communists, and ended up on the top of the heap. The factions apparently were not at each other's throats when he did this in the '20s, however. I don't know why things became murderous during the '30s, but they did. Stalin took advantage of this too. He would side with one faction, and kill off their enemies. Then he would side with an enemy faction that later rose to ascendancy, and kill off the first faction.

My next comment is another comment that is neither an agreement with Darrel or disagreement. This time, it is an addition. I gather George Bernard Shaw knew more about the threat of Communism than Lovecraft. On the other hand, he liked to shock everyone by claiming to be a Stalinist. I remember him wondering whether the Soviet constitution of 1936 would convert Russia to a democracy with free speech. Happily, he said, it wouldn't. Also, I remember, in the book T*he Intelligent Woman's Guide to Socialism and Capitalism*, he advocated killing people who were no longer able to do productive work. If true, so much for a safety net for everyone in his 'utopia.' On these matters, I hope my ancient, porous memory is wrong. Having made an addition to comments, I have to say I agree with Larry Johnson. For me, Jeremy Brett played the best Sherlock Holmes ever. I can also assure him that what he saw of the series was no fluke: after seeing a lot more of the series, I can say with confidence it remained the same greats series it was early on. However, I wish to point out one feature that made the series great that the Victorians would have frowned on. Jeremy's Holmes was a neurotic. He has a lot of a twitches, and the scriptwriters had him take a lot more cocaine than Arthur Conan Doyle would have countenanced. In short, these days we want a neurotic Sherlock Holmes, with his emotions and repressions. In the earlier days, I hear, his utter rationality was considered the very height of sanity.

For Larry, as well as commenting on Sherlock Holmes, I have another comment to make. He wonders what will happen to his art work after he dies. My family had a similar problem. My mother did court room sketch work for NBC news for fifteen years, and she left 5,000 sketches, which we wanted to have preserved. Her twin probably left more sketches, and her children, in the end, had to either throw them out or give them

away. We got good advice, though. My sister who handled the will, was advised to donate the collection to an institution specializing in the law, like a university law library. They would be interested in courtroom sketches. Currently, the sketches are residing at the University of Virginia law school, and a website with many of them can be found by searching my mother's name, Ida Libby Dengrove.

I think the principle here is your family should find an institution with the same specialty as your art. Of course, since such advice is not magical, I wish your family luck.

I hope I have helped Larry on his art. I fear probably not. Next, I am going to discuss specific works of art, the Sherlock Holmes canon. Bob, you comment on what I said about Sherlock Holmes. You deny that Sherlock Holmes ever fell in love with a woman, had sex relations with a woman, or was ever intimate with a woman. I am not going to disagree. However, it was obvious he had feelings for Irene Adler, a woman who outsmarted him and whom he considered beautiful. I don't claim anything more about his relationship with her. So much for the attitude of Sherlock Holmes toward one woman. How about the attitude of humans toward the human-like extraterrestrials in your story, "The Guns of Late July"? I disagree that you had to explain why those extraterrestrials were human-like. It is not compulsory for a writer to explain anything in a humorous story if it adds to the humor. Humor suffices as an explanation. Friendly ghosts, insurance men from Atlantis, the psychology of electrons pass if there are, at least, a few hilk-ahs in them.

Now that I'm commenting on literature, I may as well comment on Dale Nelson's rap on the authoress Phyllis Paul. She specialized in fleeting experiences that could be supernatural phenomena or all in someone's mind. That used to be popular enough. Currently, I doubt it would be. These days, the reader wants the supernatural to come out and hit him over the head with sledgehammers. There is a need to leave no doubt whatsoever that a supernatural event happened. The werewolf has to jump out and eat five people; or else our wish dream of a world of magic is not fulfilled.

After commenting on psychic phenomena that came on subtly rather than pounded by a hammer, I guess I will choose to fadeaway from *Fadeaway*. All of my comments are responses to articles and comments made in *Fadeaway*. They get my seal of approval even if they don't get others' seal of approval. Since I discussed ideas about Lovecraft, Stalinism, the occult, extraterrestrials, Sherlock Holmes, and other subjects people get worked up about, I probably don't get the seal of approval of a lot of people. But, Bob, I am sure you know the advantages of being controversial as well as the disadvantages.

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Just got done with *Fadeaway* #53 and a pretty interesting issue it was. First off, some pretty good in-depth pieces about both Dr. Drew and Johnny Jupiter, characters who I had heard a little about, but knew almost nothing about them.

Also found pretty interesting your discussion about the possibility that extrasolar planets might harbor life. I especially appreciated your discussion of J.F. Bone. Back in the summer of 1997 when I first joined the Little Rock Science Fiction Society (LRSFS), as a new member I was asked who my favorite science fiction writers were. When I mentioned J.F. Bone as one, the other members were surprised. It turned out that none of them had any idea who he was or what he had written. So your prominent mention of Bone was very well appreciated.

Dale Nelson's essay about H.P. Lovecraft really captured what makes Lovecraft one of the single most interesting pulp writers. It also showed just why there has been so much more written about than any other horror author.

In Sheryl Birkhead's LOC, she says that she misses Dale Speirs's fanzine Opuntia "since it went all electric." Does this mean that since Opuntia became a e-fanzine, she stopped reading it since she wants to only read postal fanzines? If so, that's pretty bad since its a lot easier to produce and distribute a fanzine electronically than it is to produce/distribute a physical fanzine. That goes double if you are physically handicapped as I am. Here's an idea: Perhaps Sheryl could simply print up fanzines that she finds on EFanzines so she does not have to read them on the computer screen. That way she could still read Opuntia on paper just like she did in the olden days.

Moving on to Darrell Schweitzer's LOC, as someone who was active during the horror small press boom of 1985-1995, I find it highly doubtful that there were 1,500 different low circulation fantasy fiction magazine titles. Even if you took an expansive definition of fantasy to mean everything that's published outside the literary "mainstream" its hard to see how you could even get 1,500 issues. Unless of course, your definition of "fiction magazine" includes fanzines that publish no more than one or two stories per issue.

As for Darrell's trashing of Ezines, its doubtful that he's ever read *Planetary Stories* or its companions where he can read consistently quality stories on an online fiction fanzine that does not pay its writers anything. As for Shakespeare's politics, he was noting but a lowly commoner, so why would he have any real interest in politics anyways? It's tricky to try to read anything into a writer's work about what he was like personally given the number of academics who have taken the position that "The Merchant of Venice" was actually an attack on anti-Semitism.

/// We do not know that all short fiction published on the web is terrible, but I suspect that a lot is. Because it is so easy to self-publish your own fiction as pixel format e-books these days, and there are so many places that will gladly help you do it, my contention is that a lot of bad writers are posting a lot of bad books and stories, so many that it is extremely difficult (damn near close to impossible in fact) to locate the good stuff and point it out to other fans.

Every month, for example, SmashWords releases close to three hundred brand new SF or fantasy books. Some months the number is even higher. The selling prices range from free up to $24.99, and almost all of those books are being written by people I've never even heard of before. I am not sure what the number of new independently produced e-books posted on Amazon.com or Barnes & Noble is, but I suspect the quantities are similar. Most of these new e-book have no marketing programs at all, so there is even less of a chance they will reach their target audiences.

Add in dozens of web based magazines that offer fiction both short and long and we have a nightmare avalanche of new material being released. Trying to make sense out of this is a formidable chore. Fanzines such as *Tightbeam* and *Alexiad* can be helpful by providing plenty of reviews each issue, but, significantly, few of those reviews specifically cover the e-book market.

Like it or not, what traditional publishing houses did was provide a gateway thru editors and publishers who screened out most of the dreak and provided a print platform that at least promised a potential profit for authors, retailers, and publishers based on a reasonable business plan. We don't have that any more, and we are downing in an ocean of new material that nobody seems able to organize and properly report on. If you, or anybody else, has constructive suggestions on how to handle this, I would certainly love to hear them.///

OUR ESTEEMED ART STAFF & WHERE THEIR WORK MAY BE FOUND HEREIN:

Dan Carroll---Front cover & bacover

page 38---from a 1926 issue of *Science & Invention*

clip art from the internet---39, 41, 44, 45, 46, 48, 49


CARROLL