

Origin 11



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**Official Bulletin of the National Fantasy Fan
Federation's History and Research Bureau**

Studying the history and
literary place of fantasy, science fiction and fandom

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Origin is dedicated to the improvement of knowledge of science fiction and fantasy, science fiction and fantasy fandom, and the National Fantasy Fan Federation. We are doing history and research, and hope to make it possible for the membership to do the same. We are finding writings from fandom's past to help explicate fandom's present. Members are welcome to contribute to our findings.

We hope to contribute to the building of a strong fandom, and resurrect some of the original spirit of earlier fandoms and the science fiction of the preceding century. Join with us, if you will, in this adventure.

You will find us working to do our best.

EDITORIAL



How Long Must This Go On?

Far into the future, if what we are discussing is science fiction and its fandom. But if we are referring to the problems we are facing, I hope these will be overcome in the not too distant future. We are not finding many quick responses to our calls for action; people seem to be in a state of inertia at present, as regards this and perhaps a lot of other things. *C'est le maladie d' temps*, or, it is the depression of the times; as people look at things in the world about them, and see such things as increasing warfare and the high government officials getting almost murderous in their conflicts, widespread depression and bankruptcy instead of prosperity, and a discontent populace putting on absurd costumes and besieging various establishment enclaves, we can't shake off an existential tremor or rid ourselves of a morbid outlook toward the present and perhaps the future. We here in the N3F do not stand aloof from world problems—but we would do well to look to our own problems and see what may be done about them. There's much to be said for simply doing this, with or without success, and then more to be said for success in our aims if we do achieve them.

Science fiction has always been progressive and critical of the world situation, and we need not have this cease because the world situation has become stagnant or too awful for anything to be done; we should maintain our own integrity and sense of purpose. As I recall the N3F, there have always been discussions of world affairs going on in it, and a concentration upon the problems that exist in the world and affect us. Why not continue in this instead of maintaining an aspect of utter silence in the face of present-day disasters? Have we run out of ideas and attitudes? If so, perhaps our speculative facilities have not diminished, and we can try to make out new prospects of existence. It does nothing to just sit around looking. Maybe we could look around instead of sitting around. You don't get anything when you don't try for anything. But the best way of trying is maintaining an agreeable perspective.

I, for one, am hoping to see better things come to pass.

HISTORICAL VIGNETTE

Jon D. Swartz

N3F Historian

December 1943 Issue of BONFIRE

Bonfire was the first name of the official National Fantasy Fan Federation (NFFF, N3F) fanzine, and preceded **The National Fantasy Fan** by three and a half years. The name was conceived by the club's first president, Louis Russell Chauvanet, and is said to have come from the phrase "Bulletin of the National Fan Federation". Volume 1, Number 1 was dated June 1941, and the name wasn't changed to The National Fantasy Fan until after the December 1944 issue. Science fiction fan and later professional author E.E. Evans was the first editor.

This December 1943 issue was mailed from Battle Creek, Michigan—a magical name for those of us who grew up listening to kids' programs on radio. Although only eight pages in length, the issue was divided into several distinct parts. With the exception of a crudely hand-lettered title on the first page, there were no illustrations.

"What Has Gone Before", nearly two pages in length, was written by Acting President Al Ashley, because President Evans was in the military. In this report Ashley told how the work of the club had come "to a grinding halt" in the summer of 1942, partly because of disagreements over the club's constitution. Because of this heated issue, the membership was asked to vote on a new Emergency Constitution.

The Emergency Constitution, a seven-part document, was presented on pages 3-4 and consisted of the following: 1) duration of the constitution, 2) purpose, 3) club officers and their duties, 4) requirements for membership in the club, 5) dues, 6) means of amending the constitution, and 7) the purpose of Bonfire, the club's official publication—"which shall be issued monthly".

Next was an announcement about voting rules and a list of NFFF officers: Evans, Ashley, Chauvanet, Bob Tucker, Art Widner, Harry Warner, D.B. Thompson, Phil Bronson, and Walt Daugherty.

The following two pages were devoted to a numbered list of club members as of January 1, 1943. At the time there were 76 active members, among them several prominent names in SF. In addition to those already mentioned, these included Forrest J. Ackerman, Gordon Dickson, David A. Kyle, Robert Lowndes, Leonard Moffatt, Morojo

(fan name of Myrtle Rebecca Douglas), Elmer Perdue, Oliver Saari, Larry Shaw, E.E. (Doc) Smith, Jack Speer, Julius Unger, Richard Wilson, and Donald Wollheim. Several of the male members were in the military, and there were only a half dozen female members.

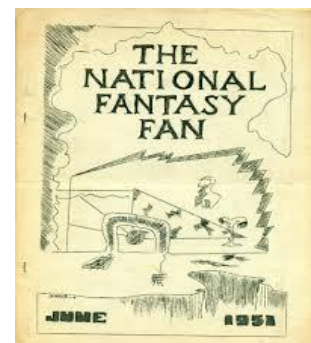
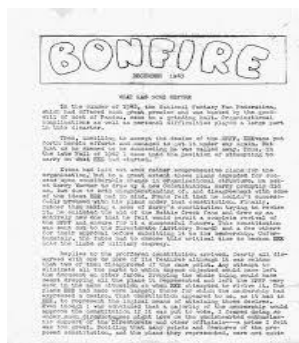
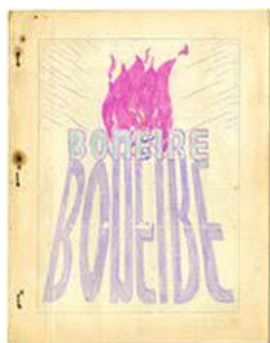
Dues were \$1.00 per year, and the Treasurer's Report from Chauvanet revealed that the club had a total of \$25.00 on hand. This was significantly more than previously, however. The former Secretary-Treasurer had turned over a total of \$5.00 to Chauvanet, when he became Treasurer!

The final section was a brief report by Tucker (signed "Boob" Tucker) on the club's failed proposal "to supply fen in service with free fanzines". The reasons for the failure were many: lack of money, problem of printing extra copies of the various zines, lack of storage space, *etc.* In addition, Tucker reported that most of those in the service reported that they didn't need charity now that they were being paid as much as "fifty bucks a month".

Conclusions

This early issue of the club zine mentions several things that should be of interest to the membership today. While 1943 was a war year, and much of the information reported was related to this conflict, items in common with today's club are apparent. In particular, the club was having some internal problems and there were concerns regarding the membership. While the money in the treasury was only a pittance by today's standards, the more active club members were intent upon "doing things"—such as providing free fanzines for those fans in the military.

Note: The above article is from John Swartz's files and possibly not up-to-date.



issues of Bonfire

title change

Wikipedia Definitions of Science Fiction and Fandom

Researched by John Thiel

SCIENCE FICTION (often shortened to Sci-Fi or SF) is a genre of speculative fiction, typically dealing with imaginative concepts such as advanced science and technology, space flight, time travel, and extraterrestrial life. Science fiction often explores the potential consequences of scientific and other innovations, and has been called a "literature of ideas".

"Science fiction" is difficult to define, as it includes a wide range of subgenres and themes. James Blish wrote, "Wells used the term originally to cover what today we would call 'hard' science fiction, in which a conscientious attempt to be faithful to already known facts (as of the date of writing) was the substrate on which the story was to be built, and if the story was also to contain a miracle, it ought at least not to contain a whole arsenal of them."

Isaac Asimov said, "Science fiction can be defined as that branch of literature which deals with the reaction of human beings to changes in science and technology". According to Robert A. Heinlein, "A handy short definition of almost all science fiction might read: realistic speculation about possible future events, based solidly on adequate knowledge of the real world, past and present, and on a thorough understanding of the nature and significance of the scientific method."

Lester Del Rey wrote, "Even the devoted *aficionado* or fan has a hard time trying to explain what science fiction is", and said that the reason for there not being a "full satisfactory explanation" is that "there are no easily delineated limits to science fiction". Author and editor Damon Knight summed up the difficulty, saying "Science fiction is what we point to when we say it", while author Mark C. Glassy argues that the definition of science fiction is like the definition of pornography; you do not know what it is, but you know it when you see it.

Forrest J. Ackerman is credited with first using the term "Sci-Fi" (analogous to the then-trendy "hi-fi") in 1954. As science fiction entered popular culture, writers and fans active in the field came to associate the term with low-budget, low tech "B-movies" and with low quality pulp science fiction. By the 1970s, critics within the field such as Knight and Terry Carr were using sci-fi to distinguish hack work from serious science fiction. Peter Nicholls writes that "SF" is "the preferred abbreviation within the community of sf writers and readers". Robert Heinlein found even "science fiction" insufficient and

suggested the term speculative fiction be used instead, which has continued to be applied to “serious” or “thoughtful” science fiction.

SCIENCE FICTION FANDOM is the community of the literature of ideas...the culture in which new ideas emerge and grow before being released into society at large. Members of this community, “fans”, are in contact with each other at conventions or clubs, through print or online fanzines, or on the internet using websites, mailing lists, and other resources. SF fandom emerged from the letters column in *Amazing Stories* magazine. Soon fans began writing letters to each other, and then grouping their comments together in informal publications that became known as fanzines. Once they were in regular contact, fans wanted to meet each other, and they organized local clubs. In the late 1930s, the first science fiction conventions gathered fans from a wider area.

The first science fiction fanzine, **The Comet**, was published in 1930. Fanzine printing methods have changed over the decades, from the hectograph, the mimeograph, and the ditto machine, to modern photocopying. Modern fanzines are printed on computer printers or at local copy shops, or they may only be sent as email.

The earliest organized fandom online was the SF Lovers community, originally a mailing list in the late 1970s with a text archive file that was updated regularly. In the 1980s, Usenet groups greatly expanded the circle of fans online. In the 1990s, the development of the World-Wide Web exploded the community of online fandom, by orders of magnitude, with thousands and then literally millions of websites devoted to science fiction and related genres for all media. Most such sites are small, ephemeral, and/or very narrowly focused, though sites like SF Site and SF Crows’ Nest offer a broad range of references and reviews about science fiction.



Letters to Origin



WILL MAYO: Keep things coming and I'll try to keep active and get involved as best I can in a positive way.

I think it's interesting that you trace the history of fandom back to newsletters devoted to Arthur Conan Doyle. I read a biography of him recently and noted with interest his devotion to spiritualism and fantasy. He took seriously the voices at the séances he attended and was outspoken well into old age.

Doyle wrote some science fiction, such as THE MARICOT DEEP, as well as his mystery stories, so he qualifies as one of the earliest writers of science fiction. Like Houdini, he was highly materialistic, but both developed an interest in the supernatural. Houdini used to say "If something unusual isn't a trick, it isn't real", but he changed his mind on that. Houdini's tricks were scientifically accomplished pieces of fantasy, so you might say he hovers in the crux existing where science fiction meets with fantasy. At any rate, Houdini was sometimes attired in the manner of a phantom when he performed.

It's interesting that Doyle's middle name was the name Robert Howard chose for his super-swordsman Conan. That may be relevant to those newsletters referred to. It's an interesting study of the literary scene as it existed in those times.

