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

Tracing the beginnings and continuity of science fiction and fantasy and their fandoms and their purposes

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2019

Origin is intended to help acquaint N3F members with their history and the history of fandom and science fiction, and to research what there has been before. We hope to help establish continuity and meaning for science fiction and fantasy literature and for our place in it, science fiction fandom. This publication is our means of communicating with the membership and placing the results of our work before them.

History and research will establish a solid basis in the past for science fiction as it exists in the present, and give it a means of progress into the future. Our present work establishes a gate for those following the science fiction way.

The Gate Is **O•P•E•N**

EDITORIAL



It's Even Money We'll Come Out On Top

Good work pays off, even giving the zealous worker a little extra as a bonus. Now here, we do not deal in money, but we are paid off in other ways. One of the ways is in overcoming adversity, and emerging triumphantly from periods of doubt and uncertainty. Science fiction has gotten into a period of neglect, as has been complained of in the NFFF over the last few years, but there are stalwart fans trying to pull out of it, and we are furthering these efforts. We do not want to have to stand looking down at our shoes, thinking, "I've walked many a mile in these, and the soles are getting a little bit loose"; instead, it's time to put on new shoes and acquire new energies—perhaps, as in our literature, even energies not known before to mortal man. *De Profundis, Ad Astra*, from the depths to the stars; what man can imagine, man can accomplish. These are mottos of fandom in the past, and we may wish to continue in this spirit.

Not only is there nothing to lose by putting forth this effort, but there is much to gain, and a certainty that we will not fail, because real and sincere effort, motivated by our wishes, always pays off; the Grinch is not really hard to defeat. In fact, the Grinch may be one of our own, but not having the right ideas as yet; we need to enlighten such and introduce them to better ways. A Grinch is a BEM, and we have always had those with us. Those who desire evil and woe and who terrorize man are the foes in science fiction from its beginning; lately there have been people speaking for them and taking sides with them, but that is not our own way. We can help the dastards of the science fiction tales of conflict to find enlightenment and introduce them to better ways. In the best science fiction, good always wins—and it usually does so by having some sympathy with the oppressions suffered by wrongdoers. This is the way we associate with sf.

Words from Judy Carroll

The other morning I was thinking about the N3F and its beginnings in April, 1941, with sixty-four members. That's seventy-seven years and nine months ago. That's amazing. I decided to check the N3F website and began reading all sorts of interesting things. The TNFF for June, 1946, had the following committees: Constitutional Trouble Shooter, Copyright Bureau, Manuscript Bureau, Pacific Liaison Officer, Plancom, Emblem Com, Book Com and Welcom.

Another thing I found fascinating was an editorial by Milton A. Rothman from the same issue:

EDITOR'S MESSAGE

Such irregularity in appearance of the official organ as we have just seen naturally creates the impression that the NFFF is tottering on its last legs, and that it is not performing sufficient of its functions to warrant its existence as a club. This unfortunate condition has been caused by the unforeseeable illness of Charles Tanner, and it is my function, as the new editor, to bring the organ back to regularity by producing a vigorous issue of The National Fantasy Fan every month from here on out.

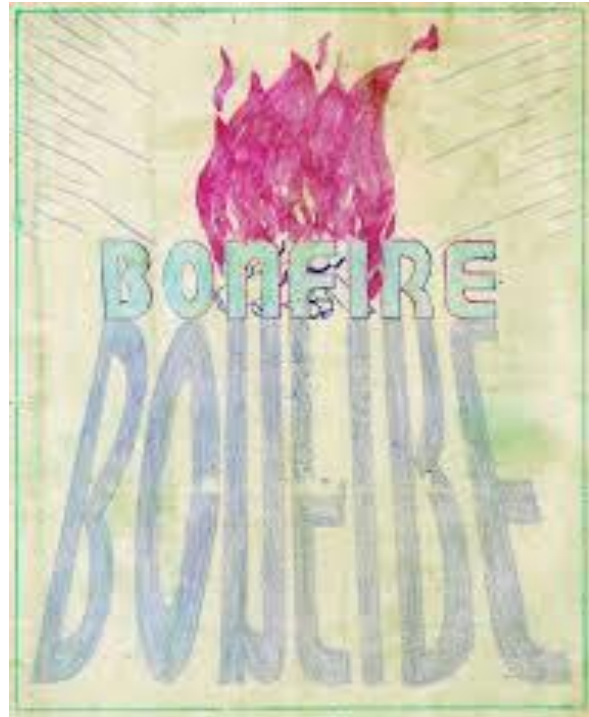
Can you believe that? Five years after the N3F began there was concern that it didn't "warrant its existence as a club". What has kept The National Fantasy Fan Federation alive and active all these years is its dedicated volunteers. Changes are always being made in how the club is run, or what activities and interests are available to the members, but it's the constant presence of volunteers that keeps the N3F alive and functioning.

The N3F has been here for over seventy-seven years, and I believe it will be here another seventy-seven years and more.



A PLATINUM ANNIVERSARY HISTORICAL VIGNETTE

By Jon D. Swartz



Bonfire Volume 1, Number 1

This historical vignette covers the first issue of the first fanzine ever published by the National Fantasy Fan Federation, **Bonfire #1**, dated June 1941. It seems appropriate to feature this particular zine in the current issue of **The Fan**, honoring as we are the seventieth anniversary of our club. [This article was first printed in *The Fan*.-ed]

The contents of this initial mimeographed issue, ten pages in length plus cover, are especially memorable. The first article is a draft of the proposed Constitution, a project that seems to have taken up much of the time of the original members. I suppose they wanted to get it right. The two page draft of the Constitution in this issue was submitted by Art Widner, Jr., and dated May 8, 1941. Widner then took an additional 4+ pages to explain just what he meant by the statements in this draft. It makes for interesting reading, 70+ years later, showing as it does just how hard it was to get a large number of active fans to agree on something.

The most unique section of this issue was a sample test for prospective members. The questions in this test were as follows:

- 1) What was the first magazine to publish science fiction exclusively?
- 2) What was the date of the first issue of the above magazine?
- 3) Who is generally conceded to be the number one fan in the US?
- 4) Name three prominent British fans.
- 5) Name the editors of the following pro magazines: COMET, UNKNOWN, WEIRD TALES, FUTURE FICTION, FAMOUS FANTASTIC MYSTERIES.
- 6) Name the editors of the following fanmags: SPACEWAYS, VOICE OF THE IMAGINATION, FANTASY FICTION FIELD, COMET, SNIDE.
- 7) Who is the author of the Jules De Grandin series?
- 8) Name the "Skylark" trilogy and the author.
- 9) Under what pseudonym did John W. Campbell, Jr., write many stories?
- 10) Name five stf or fantasy artists now illustrating.

It was not stated what score was necessary to gain membership, but partial credit was to be allowed on the questions with multiple answers (*i.e.*, questions 4,5,6,8, 10). It is easy to see, however, that in the beginning, gaining membership in the club was not a simple matter.

Other contents of this initial issue were quotes from letters received from Paul Klingbiel (Director, The Frontier Society) and E. Everett Evans (Chief Communications Office, The Galactic Roamers), a list of the club's 64 charter members, platforms for people running for president and vice-president (Tom Wright, Bob Studley, Louis Russell Chauvenet, who eventually became the first president of the club), and a note from Damon Knight, the fan/pro who can be said to have started it all. This note is reproduced below exactly as it was written and published in 1941.

NOTE

by

damon knight

The seed from which NFFF happened to germinate was my article, "Unite or Fiel", which was published in the Oct., 1940 FANFARE. It might have been any one of a hundred other notions of the same sort, for my idea was not original or even well-

expressed. But my article fell upon fertile soil; and so, here is NFFF.

The important thing, I think, is that this was bound to happen. If we had not begun it when we did, somebody else would have, sooner or later.

Fandom is continually evolving. No one who knows anything of the history of fandom in the last ten years can doubt that it is so. First came letter-writing, then local clubs, the fanzines, then national clubs and conventions. Now, it may be, we are standing on the threshold of a new era, at whose possibilities we can only guess. It may be that fandom is only now coming of age.

And it may be that in this coming of age the National Fantasy Fan Federation will play an important part. At any rate, this much we know: NFFF is a step in the right direction.

It may be that now we shall have for keeps the things we have wanted, most of us, for years: a united front towards the outside world: an active voice in the improvement of professional fantasy; internal harmony and cooperation.

And certainly these things CAN be, if only enough of us want them sufficiently to work for them together.

Quite a statement from our founder, a forward-thinking but very modest man.



fan organizers

SCIENCE FICTION PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE

by Jeffrey Redmond



Science fiction is a *genre*, with numerous sub-genres, generally dealing with an imagined future. But it is not just a modern invention or story idea. Novels, comics, movies, and radio and television shows have all made it popular, while continuously added into it is more and more actual hard science.

Science fiction, abbreviated as SF or Sci Fi, is described as a form of fiction that mainly deals with the impact of actual or imagined science upon society and/or individuals. The term science fiction was popularized, if not invented, in the 1920s by one of the genre's principal advocates, the American publisher Hugo Gernsback (1884-1967). The Hugo Awards, given annually since 1953 by the World Science Fiction Society, are named after him. These achievement awards are given to the top SF writers, editors, illustrators, films, and fanzines.

Beginnings of science fiction can be found in the remote past. Among the earliest examples is the ancient Greek satirist Lucian (AD 125-180). He wrote TRIPS TO THE MOON, where he described sailing to the Moon. Such flights of fancy, or fantastic tales, provided a popular format in which to satirize the Roman Empire, society, and religion,

while evading libel suits, censorship, and persecution.

The clearest forerunner of the genre, however, was the French writer and duellist Cyrano de Bergerac (1619-1655). He wrote of a voyager to the Moon finding a utopian society of men free from war, disease, and hunger. The voyager eats fruit from the Biblical tree of knowledge and joins lunar society as a philosopher, although he is soon expelled from the Moon for blasphemy. Following a short return to Earth, he travels to the Sun, where solar birds put him on trial for humanity's crimes.

In creating this diversion, Cyrano took it as his mission to make impossible things seem plausible. Although this and his other SF-like writings were published only posthumously, and in various censored versions, Cyrano had a great influence on later satirists and social critics.

Two works in particular show Cyrano's mark with their weird monsters, gross inversions of normalcy, and similar harsh satire attacking royalty, nobility, and the wealthy.

Another forerunner was Louis-Sebastian Mercier (1740-1814) who wrote *L'An Deux Mille Quatre Cent Quarante* (around 1771). This translates from the original French as "Memoirs of the Year Two Thousand Five Hundred". It is a work of French political speculation, set in a 25th Century utopian society that worships science. While many writers had depicted some future utopian "Kingdom of God", or a utopian society in some mythical land, this was the first work to postulate a utopian society on Earth in the realizable future.

The book was swiftly banned by the French *ancien regime*, which recognized that Mercier's fantasy about "the future" was a thin disguise for his subversive revolutionary sentiments. Despite this official sanction, or perhaps because of it, Mercier's book became an international best seller. Both Thomas Jefferson (1743-1826) and George Washington (1732-1799) owned and read copies.

Science Fiction, in its current more advanced state, can be considered as a more modern genre. Writers in the past also dealt with themes common to modern science fiction, but their stories made no attempt at scientific or technological plausibility. These are features that distinguish Science Fiction from earlier speculative writings, and other contemporary speculative genres such as fantasy and horror. The genre formally emerged in the West. The social transformations brought by the 19th Century Industrial Revolution first led writers and intellectuals to extrapolate the future impact of technology.

By the beginning of the 20th Century, an array of standard science fiction "sets" had developed around certain themes. Among these are commonly space travel, robots, alien beings, and time travel. The customary "theatrics" of science fiction include prophetic warnings, utopian aspirations, elaborate scenarios for entirely imaginary worlds, titanic disasters, strange voyages, and political agitation of various extremes. They can be presented in the form of sermons, meditations, satires, allegories, and parodies. And they exhibit every conceivable attitude toward the process of technical and social change, from cynical despair to cosmic bliss.

Science Fiction writers often seek out new scientific and technical developments, this in order to freely foretell the techno-social changes that will shock the readers' sense of cultural propriety, and expand their consciousness. The approach was central to the works of H.G. Wells (1866-1946), a founder of the genre and most likely its greatest writer.

Wells was an ardent student of the British scientist T.H. Huxley (1825-1893), whose conspicuous championing of Charles Darwin (1809-1882) and the Theory of Evolution earned him the epithet "Darwin's Bulldog". Wells' literary career gives ample evidence of Science Fiction's latent radicalism, its affinity for aggressive satire and utopian political agendas, as well as its dire predictions of technological destruction.

This dark dystopian side can be seen especially in the work of T.H. Huxley's grandson Aldous Huxley (1894-1963), who was a social satirist, an advocate of psychedelic drugs, and the author of the dystopian classic BRAVE NEW WORLD (1932). The sense of dread was also cultivated by H.P. Lovecraft (1894-1937), who invented the famous NECRONOMICON, an imaginary book of knowledge so ferocious that any scientist who dares to read it supposedly succumbs to madness.

On a more personal level, the works of Philip K. Dick (1928-1982) present complicated metaphysical problems about identity, humanity, and the nature of reality. Perhaps bleakest of all is the English philosopher Olaf Stapledon (1886-1950). His mind-stretching novels picture all of human history as a frail, passing bubble in the cold galactic stream of space and time.

Stapledon's views were rather specialized for the typical science fiction reader. When the genre began to form in the early 20th Century, it was generally not well respected, particularly in the United States, where it first catered to a juvenile audience. Following World War II, Science Fiction spread throughout the world from its epicentre in the United States. It was spurred on by ever more staggering scientific feats. These included

the development of nuclear energy and atomic bombs, the advent of space travel, human visits to the Moon, and the real possibility of cloning human life.

Now, by the 21st Century, Science Fiction has become much more than a literary genre. Its avid followers and practitioners constitute thriving worldwide subcultures. Fans relish the seemingly endless variety of SF-related products and pastimes, including books, movies, television shows, computer games, magazines, paintings, comics, collectible figurines, websites, DVDs, and imaginative toy weaponry. They frequently hold well-attended, well-organized conventions (cons), at which costumes are worn (cosplay), handicrafts are sold, and theme music is played.

Hopefully Science Fiction (of all sub-genres) will continue as a popular pastime, appealing to an ever-increasing amount of enthusiastic and loyal fans. It is certainly a fun and well-worthwhile activity in which to participate.





GARY LABOWITZ: Okay, research is always necessary with me—I forget a LOT nowadays.

My very own blog is reached at <http://garythecommonmen.blogspot.com> . I am forever changing it to “post” and that’s wrong. The reference I made to my thoughts on science vs. religion were from 2017 in July and August. Oddly enough they were posted in reverse. There must be a fandom ghod of the Internet, but whoever that is, he/she/it is working against me. [Worth considering. Note how the type is practically pied in this letter, and it is not correctible.-ed] I shall have to burn some fanzines to try to atone.

My son keeps pointing out that the blogspot is out of date/favor. I should be using some more current (?) portals, but I don’t know which he might be referring to and how to transfer old stuff to them. I still post once in awhile but I don’t know which he might be referring to and how to transfer old stuff to them. I still post once in awhile as the spirit moves me, and I dutifully enter a mention on my Facebook page that is still there. I have no idea of who might be seeing it. We old fans don’t have many friends either in person or online. I just turned 80. I was browsing some online archives of fanzines that various schools are building and maintaining. The names of persons involved in old fanzines hit my mind and feeds my sense of wonder. I remember most of them fondly, except for Dick Lupoff, who still owes me ten dollars for an old parking ticket. (It’s an inside joke of mine, and I doubt if he even remembers it.)

I thought the poem “Sweet Susan” was very good. The last line mentioning a “blood moon” was startling. We had one two weeks ago right here over the USA. Did you get to see it? I went out at totality to see, and it was indeed a blood moon! Remarkable. With all the astronomy activities I have had over the years I never saw one. Lovely, and not to return for another couple of years.

Every time I read another zine online I think I'd like to go to some con or other. Then reality sets in: what on earth would I do there? I have aged out of all aspects of fandom except hanging around and groaning. Better than nothing.

It's always good to recollect things of the past and contemplate them in the present.

I'd opine that the past is not to be swept aside.

Weather didn't give me a chance to see the blood moon, but there was a photo of one of those on my calendar to represent the month of January, shot locally and showing a blood moon in the sky over a moonshine still. The still was recognizable to me; I'd driven past a cop car parked in there near it and on my way back the police had set up a roadblock and were detaining everyone for examination. They paused as my car came up and as they weren't paying attention I drove on out of there without being examined, and made it on back home straightly.

I found your blogspot highly interesting and would like to point out to readers that they might find it so as well. Gary does a lot of talking on interesting topics.



Further History of Fandom: SCIENCE FICTION FANDOM, from Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia
researched by John Thiel



Helsinki Hugo Awards Ceremony, Finland World SF Convention

Science fiction fandom, or SF Fandom, is a community or fandom of people interested in science fiction in contact with one another, based upon that interest. SF fandom has a life of its own, but not much in the way of formal organization (although clubs such as The Futurians [1937 to 1945] are a recognized example of organized fandom.

Most often simply called "fandom" within the community, it can be viewed as a distinct subculture, with its own literature and jargon.

Science fiction fandom started through the letter column of Hugo Gernsback's fiction magazines. Not only did fans write comments about the stories, they sent their addresses, and Gernsback published them. Soon, fans were writing letters directly to

each other, and meeting in person when they lived close together, or when one of them could manage a trip. In New York City, David Lasser, Gernsback's managing editor, nurtured the birth of a small local club called the Scienceeers, which held its first meeting in a Harlem apartment on December 11, 1929. Almost all the members were adolescent boys.

Around this time a few other small local groups began to spring up in metropolitan areas around the United States, many of them connecting with fellow enthusiasts in the Science Correspondence Club. In May 1930 the first science fiction fan magazine, **The Comet**, was produced by the Chicago branch of the Science Correspondence Club under the editorship of Raymond A. Palmer (later a noted and notorious SF magazine editor) and Walter Dennis. In January 1932, the New York City circle, which by then included future comic book editors Julius Schwartz and Mort Weisinger, brought out the first issue of their own publication, **The Time Traveler**, with Forrest J Ackerman of the embryonic Los Angeles group as a contributing editor.

In 1934, Gernsback established a correspondence club for fans called the Science Fiction League, the first fannish organization. Local groups across the nation could join by filling out an application. A number of clubs came into being around this time. LASFS (the Los Angeles Science Fantasy Society) was founded at this time as a local branch of the SF League, while several competing local branches sprang up in New York City (and immediately began feuding among themselves).

In 1935, PSFS (the Philadelphia Science Fiction Society, 1935-Present) was formed. The next year, half a dozen fans from New York City came to Philadelphia to meet with the members, at the first Philadelphia Science Fiction Conference, which some claim as the world's first science fiction convention.

Soon after the fans started communicating came the creation of science fiction fanzines. These amateur publications might or might not discuss science fiction and were generally traded rather than sold. They ranged from the utilitarian or inept to professional quality printing and editing.

Usenet Newsgroups such as Rec. Arts SF Fandom, websites and blogs have somewhat supplanted printed fanzines as an outlet for expression in fandom, though many popular fanzines continue to be published. Science fiction fans have been among the first users of computers, email, personal computers, and the Internet.

Many professional science fiction authors started their interest in science fiction as

fans, and some still publish their own fanzines or contribute to those published by others.



end of issue