



The Good Die Young

An Appreciation of PAUL FREEHAFFER by Forry Ackerman and friends

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Gone at 26, leaving Shangri-LA sorrowed, is Paul Robinson Freehafer. He died March 26th, 1944.

"Too young to die" is a familiar, heart-rending cry down the ages, and any age would have been too soon for such a swell guy as Paul to go; but for it to happen so suddenly, so unexpectedly...

Paul never was in good health, but what most of us didn't know was that it was in the cards for him to die an untimely death, that a rheumatic heart had doomed him from the start and it was in fact a wonder that he lived a quarter of a century. A wonder, and a boon to fankind.

But Paul! How sad a thing it is that he, who contributed how much we may never know, to the advance of rocketry, should never live to see the dawn of space travel. It was his favorite theme. The fan, Freehafer, member I believe of the California Rocket Society and probably of the American Rocket Society, was professionally engaged in work with five of the greatest minds in rocketry. A crack research chemist, he was supervising junior laboratoricians, as well as assisting higher-ups and tackling astronautical techniques on his own.

It might be nice if I could write some flowery spiritual phrases like "...but no matter if Freehafer did not live to see the first interplanetary flight with his own eyes, science fiction stamped him as an explorer of the universe and we may well believe that out there, somewhere, amidst the starry reaches of infinity, the indestructible ego that was he will one day see man's triumph through special senses of a trans-material nature." I do not like to inject my views into this, for it is all for Paul, but I must only briefly explain that such to me is inane; I cannot offer any such grandiloquent finale, for I am an atheist and feel he is gone from us forever, except for photographs of him, his writings and the sound of his voice on a few phonograph records. And the living memory of

him. (Paul, himself, was, I think, an agnostic; no more, at least, than mildly religious.) I dreamed about him the night I learned he died. I dreamed I walked into the club room he was wont to frequent and he was sitting there and I spoke to him, and then I did a double take and was so happy because his death was all a hoax. I keep thinking about him yet, and looking up at the door, expecting him to walk in, back from Idaho, back from his home town, Payette, where the doctor ordered him for a rest, and where he died twenty-four hours after his arrival.

Good old Paul, the modest, the self-effacing, who might have lived longer had he obliged others less, had he had more ego, if he'd put on his coat and taken care of himself, or had someone to look after him. But, with his well-concealed fatalistic attitude, perhaps he realized it would not be fair to try to share his life with that "sweet someone", when it was so likely to be snuffed out without warning. Several young ladies felt very fondly towards Paul. And he was my best friend.

I corresponded with him ten years ago. And I remember when he first came to California. Roy Test, then a prominent fan, phoned me at Morojo's, in days before some of you might even remember, when she was known as Morojo. "Paul Freehafer was just here at my place," Test informed me. "He's coming to the next club meeting." And Roy included a first impression of Paul's face as being flat as a fence, or something of the sort.

Paul admittedly wasn't a handsome devil. He wasn't a devil. Fandom never rated him in the top ten, but he rated tops with me. As a fan, and as a fellow. I was at his graduation from the University of Technology at Pasadena (famous for John Taine). I bunked with him at the Denvention. Many the night he drove me home from a club meeting, to sit outside my flat and talk stf with me. We shared several secrets. Paul, dear funny Paul, with his squinty eyes and scraggle of hair that always tried to fall down in them; he may have looked like a poor man's Stan Laurel--personally I often suspected him of being not of this earth, but perhaps a Martian in disguise--but he was a fine person, wholesome, intelligent, true-blue. A sterling character. Gentleman, scholar, stfan. His interest in science-fiction had a slight edge on fantasy, but Unknown was probably his favorite pro. His collection, of which it is said we have only seen the lesser portion, the best part being in Payette, must be classical. Second only to his interest in the imagi-nation was his passion for fine music, a facet of his nature about which, unfortunately, I do not know too much, not sharing that taste with him; but I am certain it will be covered by others who knew him more intimately as the patronizer of the Bowl, the Philharmonic Auditorium, the ballet...

Paul joined the LASFS on a fitting night for a weirdist: The 13th meeting of the club. It was the Los Angeles Science Fiction League, then (Chapter #4) and the date, September 16th, 1937. Those who met him that night, besides Morojo and myself, included Bruce Yerke, Russ Hodgkins, Pogo, George Tullis and Roy Test.

Paul started reading science fiction with the April 1932 Astounding. "Skylark" and "Old Faithful" were a couple of his old favorites; Keller and Merritt; and he selected "Things to Come" as his favorite scientifiilm. He knew German and had a fair knowledge of Esperanto. He published his own fan magazine, Polaris, for six issues, beginning December 1939. It featured fiction, verse and articles with a weird slant, by Lowndes, Barlow, Warner, Bradbury, Ackermann, Tucker, Rimel, Wollheim, Knight, Miske and Carnell. Named after the unwavering North Star, his publication was hailed everywhere as a paragon of fine amateur fantasy. He joined FAPA in 1939, served on the Laureate Committee, was very likely given an award himself.

Freehafer was Director of the LASFS from January 1943 through the middle of November, that year. He was Treasurer of the Pacificon Society, and it is a great source of regret to me that you fans are either not going to get to renew acquaintanceship with Paul, or meet him for the first time, at the Postwarcon. Oh, what a grand fellow he was! I don't know whether anyone else ever thought of him in the same way, but to me he was a kind of fan-Lovecraft, if you get what I mean. In the Shangri-LA split up, which grieved him deeply, caused him considerable concern, he was a neutral, mollifying influence, retaining relations with both factions, and respected by both. I daresay Paul was about as popular and universally liked a fan as you could find.

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(I gratefully acknowledge certain personal information on the foregoing from Adrian Mosser, Paul's room mate. Do not confuse him with Singleton's room mate, and I cannot help that the date is April 1st. I would give anything if this were only a joke. Unfortunately, it is tragically far from it.)

I will now turn you over to expressions from various local friends of his. Pardon me, while I go cry again. So long, Paul. So long, old friend.

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"Few people today can be truthfully considered to approximate the ideal of the cultured gentleman, to use the term in the older sense that Lovecraft would use and indeed outstandingly exemplified. Paul Freehafer was the only fan I have ever known who fully deserved the description and was, I think, pretty close to unique in fandom in having surmounted the mental conflicts of the sensitive fantasist in a world of brutality and won through to a calm balance and dignity of personality that made him truly a man worthy of the species."--SDR.

Morojo: "He was mild and well-mannered, a brilliant mentality with high ideals. His death is a severe loss to fandom. It will probably be years before we quit missing him around the club room and at our various festivities. I'm only sorry I shall never be able to express to him my gratitude for all he did for the Los Angeles Science Fantasy Society: His gift of venetian blinds for the club room, without any expectations of reimbursement; his monthly contributions of \$5 toward the maintenance of the club room when other persons were only paying one and two dollars."

"I would rather take a beating than to write this brief note about Paul. I have known him for several years and have considered him as one of my best friends. Forry has very well covered his fan life but I can only add my personal feelings.

"I was speaking to Mel Brown only a few nights ago when I said, 'Well, Mel, as far as I can see, Paul Freehafer has only one fault.'

"What is that?" questioned Mel.

"He stopped publishing Polaris, which I believe is one of the finest mags ever published."

"Paul's ability to raise himself above local and nationwide feuds has in itself made him admirable to me. Always a helping hand. Always a good word.

"I am truly at a loss for words. I can only say, 'So long, Paul--we'll really miss you.'"--Walt Daugherty.

Lora Crozetti: "It is hard to find words to express the sorrow I feel at losing my friend, Paul Freehafer...I never knew him intimately, but we were friends. His kindness toward Finn, in her illness and death, his assistance in coming to visit her so that we who were caring for her could rest, is typical of the goodness that was Paul...To me, he was the finer things in life--good music, good books--gentleness--that was Paul."#