

# **Eklundia Stories**

The Complete  
Fan Fiction of  
**Gordon Eklund**

Edited by Robert Lichtman

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Dedicated to  
**"The Nameless Ones 1960-63"**

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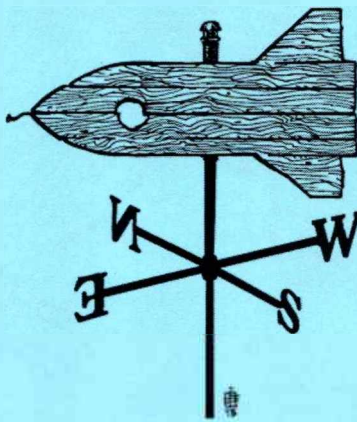
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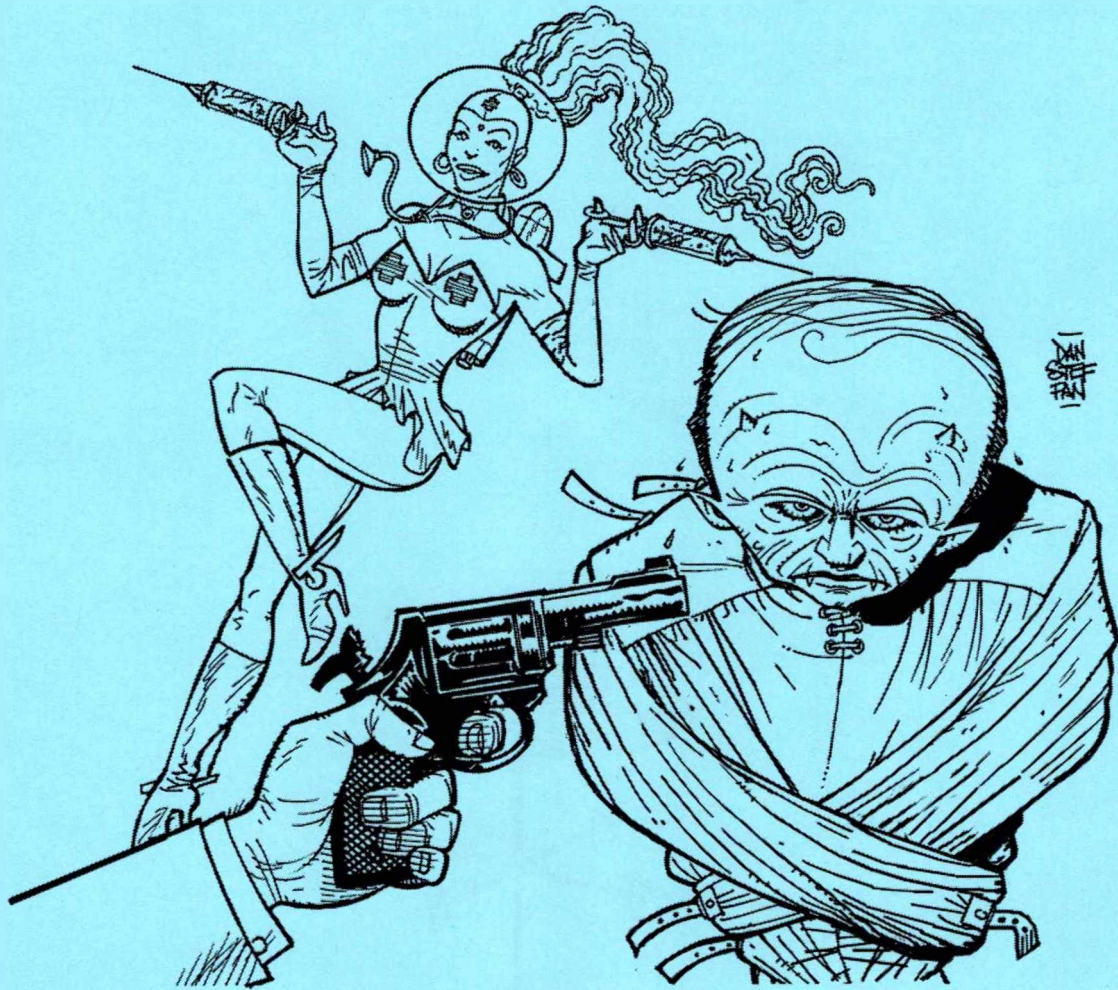
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Illustrations by Dan Steffan, Steve Stiles and Ray Nelson



# Introduction

## By Robert Lichtman

Fan Fiction: (1) Sometimes meaning by fans in the manner of pros; that is, ordinary fantasy published in a fanzine. Properly, it means (2) fiction by fans about fans (or sometimes about pros) having no necessary connection with sfantasy. "Convention reports are a nice example of this," Bob Pavlat points out. It may refer to real fans by name: "Redd Boggs silped his Nuclear Fizz in the Insurgent manner..." or it may be about types, especially Joe Fann. The background may be either fantastic, as "Joe Fann into Space," or mundane, as in "Murder at the ChiCon" (tho this would be fantasy under Speer's scheme, since it describes events we know didn't happen on our time line). Fictitious elements may be interspersed in accounts of fan activities. — *Fancylopedia II* (1959)

**I**t seems only appropriate that I should be editing a collection of Gordon Eklund's superb fan fiction because although I didn't know it right away, fan fiction has been one of my favorite things since I discovered fandom in the summer of 1958. The very first fanzine I received — Gregg Calkins's *Oops! #24* — contained "Egoboo Brummell" by John Berry. It seemed to my innocent eyes a breathless recounting of "the

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advent of wealth into Irish Fandom,” with every-one except John sharing in this incredible financial bonanza. Rereading it a year or so later (after a sharp learning curve) I realized that John’s piece was pure and delightful fabrication — conforming perfectly to the last sentence of the *Fancy II* definition.

My next encounter came quickly with Carl Brandon’s “My Fair Femmefan” in Boyd Raeburn’s *A Bas*, another of my first handful of fanzines. It was a different sort of fan fiction — a parody. I was a 16-year old whose musical tastes ran to r&r and r&b, so it wasn’t until I checked out the Broadway play on which it was based that I fully appreciated what a brilliant piece of work “Carl” had wrought. Little bits of the lyrics still pop up in my head now and then, much as old rock songs do.

After I published my first fanzine at the end of 1958 and began receiving trades, I noticed that fan fiction was present in a considerable number of fanzines and, not surprisingly, mostly in the ones I liked best. Around that time I also read *The Incomplete Burbee*, in which I found such delights as “Big Name Fan,” “The Variable Existence of Hyperfan,” and those lovely Al Ashley stories. In them all Burbee perfectly captured many of the foibles of fandom through his unique and irreverent perspective. Not long after that Ted White started the ASDFGHJKLibrary and published Kent Moomaw’s “The Adversaries” and Carl Brandon’s “The BNF of Iz.” Moomaw’s story was a parable of the clash between fans’ paper personalities and conflicts and their real lives. “The BNF of Iz” was not only a perfect parody of *The Wizard of Oz* but also a quest story reminiscent of *The Enchanted Duplicator*, with Dorothy as Jophan.

Fanzines that predated my discovery of fandom began coming my way, and I realized I’d just missed a major bubble of fan fiction in Ted White’s *Stellar*, which was devoted almost exclusively to the genre. I thought the best stories were by Larry Stark, but there were also solid contributions from Marion Zimmer Bradley, Burbee, Gregg Calkins, Terry Carr and Harry Warner Jr. I indulged myself in a binge of fan-fiction reading, and realized over and over that the best of it contained no less insight and depth than that of mainstream fiction.

When I came back to fandom after a decade in the Tennessee woods, I was pleased to find that some fan fiction was still being produced. I fondly remember rediscovering my old favorite, Larry Stark, whose “Con Report” appeared in the “Suddenly it’s 1981!” issue of Dan Steffan’s *Boonfark*. It was a fascinating mix of romance novel and the fantasy role-playing that had become common at large conventions. That was Stark’s last story as far as I know. After that fan fiction was not much in evidence until the degafiation of Arnie Katz in 1990. Once he got his fannish bearings reestablished, Arnie began turning out yarn after yarn.

And then, as 1994 drew to a close, a new and brilliant writer of fan fiction appeared. That was Gordon Eklund — not a new fan, of course, but new to fan fiction—with his delightful “Blodgett Recollected” in the final issue of Ted White’s and Dan Steffan’s *Blat!* Its skillful blurring of the lines between fiction and reality so inspired me that I continued his (no other word for it) fantasy in the form of a letter to Gordon adding my own history with Blodgett. I sent it to Dan and Ted for *Blat!* #5, but they never published another issue — so “Dear Gordon” appears here for the first time.

Around the same time, Gordon began sending me stories for *Trap Door*, and I’ve been pleased (yes, as punch) to have published them for the last twenty years. One thing that delighted me over the years and did the same for Dan when he got them all at once for this collection is the Phildickian-like shared characters and history in some of them.

Dan had the inspired idea of gathering them together in this commemorative volume, and I hope you enjoy reading them—either again or, lucky you, for the first time. Special thanks to Gordon for providing introductions to each story and to Dan for designing the final product. ■

—Robert Lichtman (April 2013)

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**F**or reasons that now escape me I was running for president of FAPA against Arnie K, the entrenched incumbent, when I tossed this off as a bit of campaign propaganda. (The punch-line: I won.) I suppose if you begin with the concept of fans who disappear the next obvious evolutionary phase is a fan who never really existed to begin with. Like most propaganda the whole thing is a lie. Arnie Katz is actually real. I first met him in 1966 in Bill Donaho's living room during a party. Arnie and a bunch of other New York fans were on their way either to or from a Westercon back when Westercons were something worth traveling 3,000 miles to attend. I've met him again a few times since and as far as I can tell he's pretty much as real as he ever was.

## The Katz Kontroversy, A Document

"I have every confidence that the Fantasy Amateur Press Association will still be here next year for the next election. This is very important, because that's when I plan to run for President...." *Arnie Katz in his FAPAZine, February 2001*

"It was always the feeling among those who started the club that all four FAPA officers ought at the very least to be human beings...." *Jack Speer reminiscing on the Internet, June 2002*

**T**he revelation early in the year 2002 that the current incarnation of old-time New York fan "Arnie Katz" was in actuality a house name adopted by a loose assortment of Las Vegas fanzine fans in order to (in the words of Ken Forman) "provide a veneer of cohesiveness to our collective fanac" has sparked considerable controversy throughout the length and breadth of fandom. What follows is a series of statements of fact gathered by the author over time as the controversy has grown tentacles and spread like rancid butter on a poppy seed bagel. That which follows, one hopes, will serve if not as the final statement on this matter, then at least as a starting point for collective fannish closure.

### 1

"We were neofans," Forman has been quoted as saying. "And fandom seemed to us a giant and frightening morass, a Gordian knot to be unraveled, a sandwich of living writhing beetles to be nibbled and swallowed. I don't remember which of us came up with the 'Katz' idea. It may even have been in the form of a letter. I think it was Boyd Raeburn from up in Canada — we wanted him as Guest of Honor at one of our early local cons but he

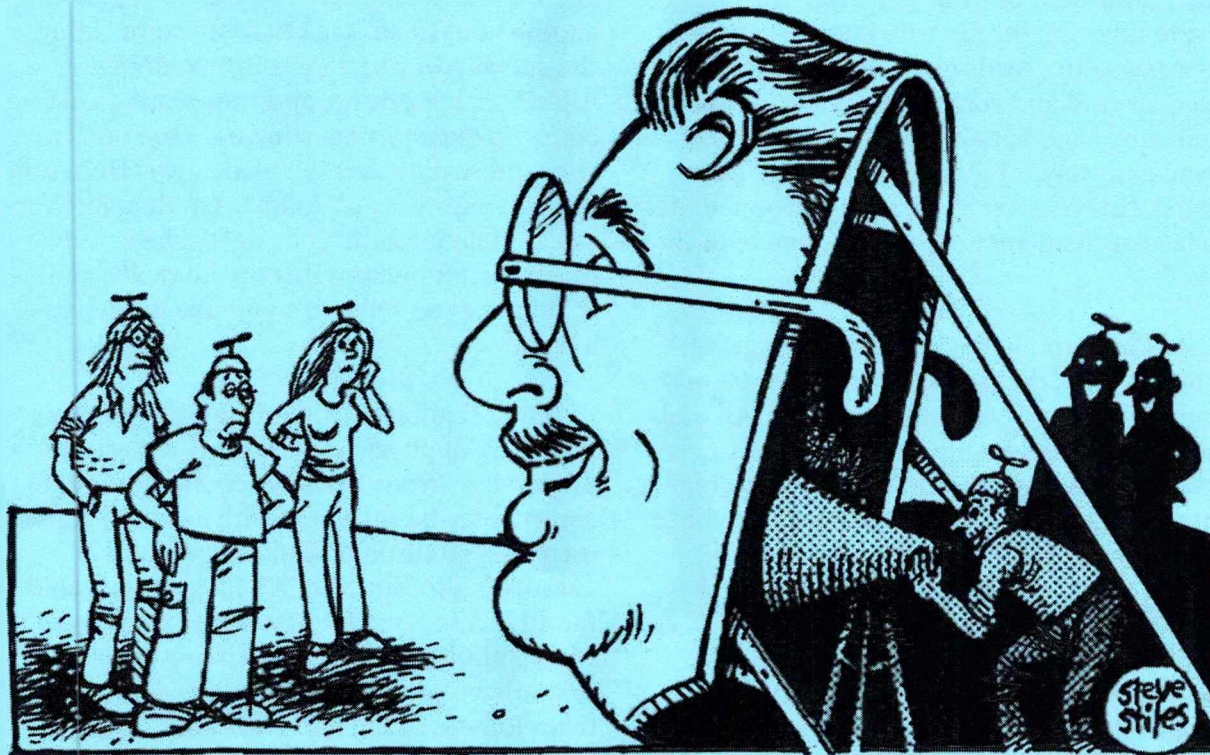
said he didn't have a cool costume — who wrote saying that he'd heard that Arnie Katz had settled in Las Vegas and was working as a barker at a strip club. Of course none of us had even heard of 'Katz' then, so it all sort of naturally developed from there."

### 2

An anonymous, heavy-set female Las Vegas fan adds the following: "We just thought it was a funny name. Like Waldo Meatpacker, something like that. 'Arnie Katz.' We just thought it was weird and wild and very very hot — you know *muy caliente* — like anonymous group sex when everybody's wearing a different fantasy costume."

### 3

The matter of the documented existence of a "Joyce Katz" has been raised by several stubborn doubters. Ms. "Katz" herself responds: "They paid me ten bucks to use the name. Ten bucks and all the Old Granddad I could put away and I'd have people out to some rental house and we'd hang around and I'd go to their cons. The real name's Meatpacker. Patti Jo Meatpacker. I've been married fifteen years to the same no good lazy thieving bastard whose name ain't Arnie, let



me tell you. I'm a dancer in the chorus at the Crystal Lounge. But what I really want to do is act."

4

And what of the amiable, beaming figure of the "Arnie Katz" whose presence at innumerable conventions over recent years has been thoroughly testified to? Ms. Meat-packer/"Katz" elucidates: "They used different guys. It was never my no good husband but one time it was my brother-in-law Ralph. When he was out of work from the cab company. They paid your expenses plus ten dollars and they gave you the fake mustache and the glasses and a pillow if you needed it. Mostly they used homeless people. We got them in Vegas like hairs on an armpit. One time at one of the Corflu things — I think it was the one in California — the guy being Arnie got so loaded he swallows his own mustache. And nobody notices. It was as funny as a kangaroo on crutches. I still bust a gut to this day."

5

So who did the writing? Ken Forman again: "Nobody really. We just sort of recycled. Jack Speer let us borrow from his fanzine collection. I don't know if he knew what we were doing but if he did he never let

on. We took a bunch of old articles and just changed the names and moved some of the words around, especially the adjectives. Nobody caught on. One time Greg Benford wrote a loc raving about some article or another in *Wild Heirs* and it was really just one of his own old editorials from *Void*. The one about cleaning out his desk. We must have used that one ten times. The thing with fans is they're bright with high IQs but very little memory, even when it's written down. I think it comes from smoking all that dope back in the sixties."

6

Ken Forman's "Final Statement on the Matter of 'Arnie Katz'" as it appears in his current FAPazine: "It was just our way of gaining entry to fandom on a more or less equal footing. If it bothers anybody or hurts their feelings, then I apologize to everyone. Such was never our intention or our motivation."

7

And yet what of the supposed real Arnie Katz reported by several fans to be living and working in contemporary Las Vegas. Forman again: "Sure, we tried to find him. Who wouldn't? We wanted to at least let him know what we were doing and hope it was okay with him. But he wasn't in the phone book. No-



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body'd ever hear of him. We even asked this private investigator my wife knew from when she was dealing cards at the Hilton and he nosed around and came back and said there wasn't any such person — not in the state of Nevada anyway. It was like, if he ever had existed, this real Arnie Katz, he'd dropped off the face of the planet. So we went on with the hoax."

**8**

An anonymous Vegas femmefan again: "A bunch of us developed a real crush on ol' Arnie. We wanted to sleep with him. All of us. One at a time or in a big bunch, it didn't matter. But he wasn't real. It was just a big fantasy. Like Mr. Spock. When we were little kids we all wanted to screw him, too."

**9**

So there it lies. Or does it? On August 13, 2002, old time fan rich brown posts the following on an obscure internet chat group: "To all whom it may or may not concern: Arnie Katz does not exist. He never existed. He wasn't real when he was in Vegas and he wasn't real when he was in Brooklyn. The guy's a figment and all of you who believed in him, all of you who ever went down that bad road, then I'm telling you you've been had, brother, and big time."

**10**

Within days another old-line fan and supposed friend of "Katz" from back in the sixties, Ted White, responds: "Rich just got his medication mixed up. It was Tuesday and he thought it was Thursday and he got the wrong bottle. Of course Arnie was real back in the sixties. Jeez, he came to Fanoclast meetings, some of them at my own home."

**11**

Somebody surely did, but who? Rich brown again: "Ted White is a friend of mine but he's scared shitless. He doesn't know the whole story, none of us do, but I'll tell you this much. The only medication I ever took was out of the business end of a Cherokee peace pipe. And Ted White knows that, too."

**12**

Another former fan from that era, a one-time close associate of both White and brown but who prefers not to have his name used here: "I don't know nothing about no Las Vegas Arnie, that's way after my time, but the

guy I knew in Brooklyn, he was as real as the snot in your nose. One time we were riding the subway way up in the Bronx, doing an Allen Ginsberg thing, and these four punks come up and start hassling us. One pulls a shiv and Arnie takes the blade away from him so fast your eye can't follow. Go thou and forswear violence in all your deeds, he sez. I mean, I ain't making this up, he really said that. Now you tell me, a guy like that: he's a hoax?"

**13**

Greg Benford is not only a fan but also a professor of physics at a leading American university. When asked to comment on the controversy he responds with a formal statement issued through a spokesperson: "According to Einstein, it's fully conceivable for an 'Arnie Katz' to exist here in this spot while simultaneously not existing in there, that other spot. It's all a matter of temperatures Kelvin, of the universal continuum, of mass plus energy divided by Jennifer Lopez's waist size. If you don't believe me, ask Stephen Hawking."

**14**

From *The Los Angeles Times*, September 6, 2002: "Physicist and sci-fi author Gregory Benford has recently been incarcerated in a private mental institution, a spokesperson revealed. The precise nature of his affliction is not known."

**15**

San Francisco fan Len Bailes has been named over the years "Arnie Katz"'s oldest fan acquaintance. In fact, according to one version, Bailes and "Katz" went to school together as boys. Bailes explodes this myth: "That was all a mistake, a confusion. I think I know how it got started. The guy I went to school with was named Arnie Blatz. Blatz, not Katz. He was a moron, a real ignorant ignoramus. He couldn't have spelled cat front-wards, let alone if his name was Katz. The biggest pimples I've ever seen on a kid, too. I don't know what happened to him. Somebody told me he died in Vietnam. Stepped on a land mine. No, he was never a fan."

**16**

Robert Lichtman of Glen Ellen, California, has accumulated a core collection of most of the major fanzines published over the last fifty

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years. His opinion for this article: "I've nothing to say. Lives have been threatened over this and to me it's just not worth it. Fandom is supposed to be for fun, a way to relax short of spilling one's seed on the ground. You shouldn't have to worry about getting locked up in a loony bin for the rest of your life."

**17**

"I remember being shown the large, bland object that purported to be 'Arnie Katz' long ago at Ted White's home in Brooklyn, and was immediately suspicious of its authenticity, but when I voiced those suspicions in my mild, befuddled way I was immediately shouted down ('He's confused,' they said, 'he's only a pro, he doesn't understand fannish stuff any more') and I have kept quiet ever since."

– Bob Silverberg in *Snickersnee*,  
August 2001

**18**

And Harry Warner, Jr., our leading fannish historian. "Katz? Arnie Katz? There was once a Milton Katz who published a

fanzine called *Barf* but I think it only lasted two issues and you couldn't read it — it was published using purple ink on single-ply toilet paper and there was too much see-through. In my opinion, Arnie Katz does not now and never did exist. But that's just my opinion."

**19**

Bob Tucker, who goes back to the very beginning: "I remember Degler."

**20**

Albert Einstein: "The universe is stranger than we imagine. Stranger than we ever can imagine."

**21**

From a private letter of "Arnie Katz" circa 1966: "The cool thing about fandom is that you never really know anybody. It's all a paper world. I've known some people three years like Harry Warner and never even met them once. And even after you do meet them, how do you know it's the same guy?" ■

(from *Trap Door* #21, March 2002)

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**N**ot a parody but openly inspired by the James Thurber story "The Greatest Man in the World," a piece I first encountered dramatized on PBS's "American Playhouse" back in the seventies before I read it. Thurber's worst guy is a record-setting round-the-world aviator, a Charles Lindbergh if Lindbergh had been a sociopathic thug, which he could have been of course — no reason not to be. Goodliness has nothing to do with flying an airplane. Pulling the same thing off with a writer, even a fanzine writer, proved more difficult. Not that there aren't writers who are socio-paths or thugs but when they are it's usually readily apparent — and part of their charm. Thus in this case the necessary invention of the character of the sister. A bit of Sammy Glick mixed in here too. Sammy, the protagonist of Budd Schulberg's *What Makes Sammy Run*, is a highly successful Hollywood screenwriter of the 1930's who never actually writes a word. Instead Sammy steals, borrows, purloins credit for the work of more talented others. Fandom's not 1930's Hollywood so in this version the "theft" is more benign. I'm happy they all got together at the end and threw him out the hotel window. A fan in need is a fan indeed, right?

## The Greatest Fan in the World

**I**t's kind of funny/peculiar looking back from today's perspective how little is remembered of 1963's poll-winning Best New Fan Earl "Pigg" Foss and his superb genzine *Potato Head*. You'd almost think a veil of conspiratorial silence had been draped over the collective fannish memory in order to blot out all references to this once leading fan face.

As a matter of fact, if you thought that, you'd be right.

But, gosh darn it, people, fifty years is like fifty years even when more precisely it's only forty-eight and I'm here today to tell the whole mean story.

When Earl "Pigg" Foss first came into contact with fanzine fandom in late 1961 he did so out of the high northwestern timber town of Mule Creek WA. RR 1, Box 63, said the return address on the first letters of comment any of us received from him. If you're curious to know more about Mule Creek WA, don't bother. A few years after the events here depicted, the entire town was flooded a hundred fathoms deep beneath the watery overflow from a huge concrete dam constructed as part of the federal Coulee Water Project.

Anyway, down in Seamount, the closest major fan population center to Mule Creek, Budd Champion was the first of us to receive a loc from Earl Foss. Budd and his wife Melanie were then still publishing their Hugo-winning zine *Howl of the Rocketeer* on a regular monthly basis. That initial letter from Earl

Foss came in response to one of Budd's prozine review columns dissecting a Robert Randall novelette in one of the last issues of *Surprising Stories* before its controversial name change to *Serendipity Scientific Fact and Fiction*. "This," I remember Budd remarking at the next regular Rocketeers club meeting, "is the smartest goddamn letter we've gotten from a new fan since Tom Purdom started writing us. I don't know who the hell this kid is but he's going places."

This turned out not to be entirely accurate. The part about Earl Foss being a kid, that is. Back then — in the sixties — just about every new fan entering the microcosm was a young boy still in his teens — many like me in their relatively early teens — and the handful that weren't like Les Nirenberg or Bob Leman or our own Tom Powers stood out like bats in a butterfly swarm. Earl Foss was definitely no boy. I don't know exactly how old he was since like everybody else I only met him the one time but would estimate from appearances he was somewhere in his middle to late thirties. He actually looked a good decade older but Earl was clearly the sort of person who would always look older. If you know what I mean.

After that first letter in *Howl*, Earl Foss's name soon started appearing in other fanzines as well. Not just locs but articles, reviews funny little snapshots from life. My favorite remains the long piece in an early '62 *Howl*



detailing Earl's daily life working as a lumberjack in a northwestern timber camp. He wrapped it up with an description of how his best friend had been killed the summer before in freak chainsaw accident and bled to death in his arms. I know I wasn't the only reader who ended up with tears running down his face. Even Hapgood Snails, the notorious ex-fan turned Hollywood pro, wrote in to say how deeply he'd been moved. "Like the kick of a bull moose coming off a week-long Benzedrine jag," is how he summed up his reaction.

"It may be the best damn thing we've ever published," Budd said.

"Better than Avram's thingy," Melanie concurred.

This was about the same time the first issue of *Potato Head* appeared. Unlike most neo-zines it looked and read magnificently right from the start. Then, as it attracted outside contributors — Willis, Bloch, and Greg Benford all in the fifth issue for example along with regular columns from Budd, Ted White, and newszine editor Walter Wunderly — it quickly came to rival not only the best contemporary zines from *Warhoon* to *Void* but many of the great fabled titles of the past as well. The artwork — ATom, Rotsler, Steve Stiles — was a joy to the eye, the layout as tasteful as a delicate vintage wine.

If *Potato Head* failed to receive a Hugo nomination during its only year of publication

it was only because of its tightly limited circulation. I doubt that more than fifty copies of any issue ever went out. "This is our the best new writer since Grennell, the best new publisher since Boggs," Harry Warner summed up.

Which brings us to the rainy season PuCon of November 1962. It was our own little Rocketeers con intended for West Coast fanzine fans and our local gang of hangers-on. We contracted out with a decent but by no means plush downtown hotel and deliberately limited publicity to the major zines and apas of the day. In our committee meetings we kept kicking around possible guests of honor — Yul Mellman nominated Darrell T. Langart and Tom Powers pumped for Philo Botts — but the trouble was it didn't matter who we wanted because we didn't have the funds to pay travel expenses and sf writers back then — excepting Heinlein and Arthur Clarke — weren't clearing enough from their writing to justify a trip to our far distant nook of the world. The general plan all along was that Dr. Alvin Dector, our only local writer, would end up stepping in but he turned out to be out of town that weekend at a chiropractic gathering.

"Why does it always have to be a god-damn pro?" said Tom Powers finally. "I thought this was supposed to be a fan's convention."

"Well, it always is," said Melanie. "A pro, I mean."

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“But it doesn’t have to be. It’s not written down.”

“Uh...no.”

“Then I say we invite a fan as our guest of honor.”

“Like...who? We still couldn’t pay...”

“Somebody close-by. Somebody who could get here by Greyhound bus. Somebody like...”

And we all chimed in unison as if it were one of those spontaneous ideas like evolutionary theory that strike the enlightened few all at once: “Like Earl Foss,” we sang out.

“Hell,” Budd said, “Earl’s a logger and this is the off-season up there in the woods. I bet he could make it for sure.”

We decided to call him with the good news.

And we tried — but the operator there in Mule Creek said that phone calls to the Foss residence were “not being put through, not out that way,” not at this time, which made little sense — nor did her explanation that we need-ed to talk to the sheriff if we wanted to find out more. So we gave it up, fired off a telegram via Western Union instead.

We got a letter in return. Neatly type-written and double-spaced like all of Earl’s correspondence, like something from the office secretarial pool. It was succinct and to the point. “Hell yes,” he wrote back. “I’ll be there. I’ll be there with spurs and boots on.”

He added in a postscript that the part about the free hotel room for the weekend sounded like a darn square deal.

Tom Powers and I were delegated to meet Earl Foss at the downtown Greyhound terminal the Friday before the con officially kicked off. We hung around the outdoor lot scoping out passengers as they disembarked from the northern local but failed to spot anyone who looked likely. Finally with us standing there looking goofy as hell in our matching propeller beanies, a hunched-over, tobacco-chewing, yellow-skinned little man in a black leather jacket, filthy blue jeans, and scuffed engineer boots strolled up and thrust out a hand sorely in need of washing. “I’m Earl fucking Foss,” he said. “You must be the guys from the science fiction crowd. Call me Pigg. Everybody does.”

He was plainly drunk on his bony royal ass.

A pint bottle of white port wine jutted

from the inside pocket of his leather jacket.

The plan was for Earl to spend the night at Budd and Melanie’s place on Queen Jane’s Hill and then the next afternoon go on over to the con hotel and check in while we set up the registration tables. As Tom drove to the Champions with all the windows rolled down due to Earl puffing one hand-rolled cigarette after another — while simultaneously chewing a bulging fat wad of Red Man tobacco — his conversation in response to our blithe fannish chatter was limited to grunts, gurgles, burps and snorts. Without asking permission, half-way there he switched on the AM radio to full blast and sang along in shrill falsetto with a medley of hit Four Seasons songs the rest of the way.

We dropped him off in front of the Champion house and sped off. “Jesus Lord,” said Tom, waving at the air to try and clear the dense smoke. “I think I need a drink myself.”

“White port?” I said, with a smirk.

“Charlie, boy, I think you just made a joke,” Tom said, rolling his eyes in feigned astonishment.

The following morning at the con hotel we ran into Budd Champion first thing looking bleary-eyed and shaken. “Where’s Earl?” we asked.

“You mean Pigg?”

“Right, Pigg.”

“Up in his room, I hope to God. Passed out cold and sleeping it off. We drove him over here at six a.m.”

“He couldn’t sleep?”

“That wasn’t the problem. After you two bugged out, the son of a bitch started right in slurping up all the booze in the house. Then he turned on the goddamn TV and laid around on the couch watching ‘Gilligan’s Island’ the rest of the night. Mel and I crapped out around ten. At three a.m. we got woke up again.”

Budd and Melanie had two children, twin girls, innocent as lambs, who’d just turned twelve.

“We heard a noise like a goddamn gunny sack of bricks hitting the floor and then the girls started yelling their heads off,” Budd explained. “When we got in there we found Earl passed out buck naked on the floor in between the two girls’ beds. I can’t prove it but I think he was trying to make up his mind which one to crawl in with when the goddamn

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ocean of booze he'd put away hit him like a hammer and he toppled over flat on his ugly face. We calmed the girls down, got them back asleep — with their door locked — poured a gallon of coffee down Earl, got him dressed, and drove him the hell over here. He didn't say two words the whole time. Just grinned and winked and said he sure liked our free big city ways."

"Jesus God," said Tom.

"Jesus had nothing to do with it," Budd corrected.

That afternoon Earl himself appeared, looking absolutely none the worse for wear, as chipper as a squirrel at a peanut harvest. I noticed there was now another bottle of white port jutting out of his pocket the same as the day before. Spotting my glance he pulled it out, took a long swig, and offered it around to the rest of us. There were no takers. I hurried off in the direction of the art show which featured a selection of Rotsler's erotic etchings.

During the evening panel discussion on the state of contemporary fanzine fandom, Earl had to be physically restrained from going after fellow panelist Ed Pikestaff, who'd casually remarked that he thought the sercon fanzines of the forties and fifties were better than today's more fan oriented product. "Ass-hole's got no place talking that kind of shit at me," Earl said. Several witnesses insisted they'd seen a switchblade knife in Earl's fist when he first leaped to his feet. Afterward, no sign of the knife could be found, however.

At the big room party that night Earl started things off by stripping down to his frayed Fruit-of-the-Loon jockey shorts and trying to take a cold shower, the trouble being that the bathtub was full of beer and he slipped and nearly drowned before rather reluctantly being pulled out. Later on, still in his damp underwear, he chased two comely California femme fans costumed as slave girls of Barsoom around the room while loudly demanding they show off their bassoons and let us see exactly what they had to sell. Soon after one of his many discarded cigarette butts caught the window drapes on fire and he tried to quench the flames by spraying white port wine from the bottle in his pocket.

"I thought we were going to have to tie him up," Tom explained, when he came by to pick me up at home the following morning. "Lucky for everybody he passed out right after the fire

and four of us carted him back to his room. And look what I took home with me." Tom held up a room key. "He ought to still be locked in there if things went right."

They hadn't. And he wasn't. When we got to the hotel one of the first two people we saw in the lobby was Earl Foss, who had long-time Los Angeles BNF Milton Arbogast caught in a vicious choke hold. Tom and I dashed over, managed somehow to pry Earl's hands loose, and let Milton escape. We never did find out what had caused the altercation. Milton left by cab immediately after. Word eventually drifted back from L.A. that he'd caught the first plane home while vowing never to come within a thousand miles of Seamount again. That was the end our pro-posed 1967 worldcon bid, by the way.

This was some hours before the incident involving the hotel maid found naked and locked in the closet in Earl's room with the committee having to come up with fifty dollars cash in order to convince the hotel detective not to file formal police charges.

The banquet that afternoon went off without a major hitch except for the fact that the Guest of Honor failed to appear to deliver his scheduled speech. Earl had last been seen an hour earlier headed up to his room in the company of two rather ravaged-looking women wearing thick make-up and unseasonably tiny skirts over black lace stockings. If you look closely at the final PuCon treasury report you'll note an entry of \$99.99 under the ambiguous sub-heading "miscellaneous committee entertainment." It struck me then — and now also — as more than worth the expense.

Looking only slightly worn from his recent activities, Earl showed up right on time — in boots if not spurs — for the concluding Sunday night dead dog party. Here everything reached its fated climax. Many who were there claim it came down to the moment when Earl pulled the marijuana cigarette out of his boot top and lit up. (Remember this was 1962. Five years later nobody would have blinked. But this was still a time when simple pot possession could bring five-to-ten hard ones in the state pen.)

But in truth that only marked the final fat camel on the straw man's weak back, so to speak. I think the critical moment occurred shortly before when Earl, white port bottle in

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hand, launched into his personal summing up of his initial con-going experience. "I love you fucking science fiction flying saucer nuts," he announced to the room as a whole. "People say to me you're a bunch of crazy dumb assholes but shit I'm saying you're the salt of the goddamn earth. Free booze, free beer, free broads. What more could a guy want?"

He then went on to explain how with the long winter looming ahead he was going to invest in one of those \$99-for-99-day Greyhound bus tickets and tour the country, stopping at every town where more than a half-dozen fans lived. "Hell, they'll put me up, that much I know, and we'll have ourselves one son of a bitch of a rocking good old time! A fan in need is a fan indeed! I'll have it fucking made, by God!"

Those of us hearing this looked one another straight in the eye.

Then Earl lit up his joint.

I don't know who moved first. Frankly even at the time it was hard to tell. Call it a mass movement. I think there may have been as many as ten of us total.

Some of us hit him high, some hit him low.

It was November, yes, but with the dense smoke filling the room in those pre-air-conditioning days the windows were all open. Earl stood sucking on his pot, the window right behind him hung wide open to the night.

It was over in a matter of seconds.

When we hit him Earl immediately lost his balance, pedaled backward, hands flaying the air, and struck the lower window sash with the back of his knees.

And he toppled straight on back — and out.

Out the open window.

Eleven stories down.

The odd part, on the way he never uttered a sound. (My own explanation: he was holding the marijuana smoke in his lungs in order to achieve full blast.)

Of course that ended the con. At least it did as soon as the police let us go. But with all witnesses agreeing that it was nothing but a dreadful accident — too much to drink and the poor man slipped and fell — name was Earl Voss or something like that, from up north someplace. No, none of us knew him well.

Warrants? No, we knew nothing about any felony warrants out for his arrest.

Tom Powers was the only one of us to

attend the subsequent funeral in Mule Creek. I'll give Tom that. He said it wasn't so much guilt as curiosity. There were only four other people there, he said. One was the sheriff, another the minister who delivered the eulogy, one the gravedigger leaning on his shovel, and the fourth was Earl's sister.

"I didn't know he had a sister," I said.

"Who did? Quite a bit older, I'd guess.

Though with Earl that's hard to say. Big as a house, bad teeth, bad complexion, but clean, prim, neatly dressed and bright as a light bulb too, I'd figure. She was hauling a big burlap bag around with her the whole time. I drifted over and snuck a peek inside. It was full of books. Guess what kind? Heinlein, Asimov, Silverberg and Ellison, *Rogue Moon* and *Venus Plus X*. A couple issues of *Galaxy* and *Serendipity* too. And I saw some fanzines. *Yandro*, *Xero*, *Howl*."

"They were Earl's fanzines, you mean?"

"Depends on how you want to look at it, son."

"Oh," I said. "Then you think the sister was the one who —"

He cut me off. "Who can say? She wouldn't talk to me. Not one word. And I tried. I finally asked the sheriff and he said Miss Mildred Foss doesn't say two words to anybody unless she has to. A nice girl, a lady, but quiet, he said. Keeps to herself. Unlike her goddamn crazy psycho brother Pigg."

"But why would...?"

This time I was the one who broke off. Maybe because by then I'd more or less figured it out on my own.

"She would because she could," Tom said.

"Heck, in fandom, aren't we all putting it on at least a bit? She just went the whole way and named it after her brother."

Tom left it there.

And, no, we never heard a word from the sister again. Nobody did. Maybe she found another outlet. She became a coin fan, she collected stamps, she joined a church or became a Rosicrucian. Who can say?

But one thing for sure. For a time in the early sixties a fan of great talent and accomplishment came and went among us in the quick flicker of an eye, a fan known by the name of Earl "Pigg" Foss.

For that one quick shimmering instant the greatest fan in the world. ■

(from *Trap Door* #28, December 2011)

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**A**s should be easy to spot (hey, just read it) this one was entirely improvised first draft on the spot. I was facing an imminent apa deadline, had no idea what to write, sat down in front of a whirring (they sort of did that back then) computer and out this came. There'd been an actual recent Westercon held in nearby suburban Bellevue as evoked in the story and I'd attended for maybe half an hour to do an interview before fleeing desperately into the night. (Or day — I think it was early and I'd just thought of maybe thirty-nine other things I'd rather be doing on a sunny Saturday.) The story stands as a metaphor. No idea where the Norman Mailer-ish first-person rift came from but the plethora of parentheses were an authorial quirk I couldn't seem to rid myself of at the time. Too many second thoughts in my then mid-life consciousness, I guess. If they get in the way of your way reading, mentally delete them. I do.

## Charlie Parker Revisited, or, The Brain Police in Bellevue

**A**nd so your narrator (to be called henceforth Leo not because it's his name but because it's the zodiac sign under which he was born 24 July 1945 in the wet misty wartime mosaic of Seattle, Washington, 12:30 a.m.) awoke fully dressed in black pinstripes and red tie on the hard wood floor of his apartment, the taste of dust on his lips like a bathtub full of mud, an odor faintly like wisteria tickling his nostrils like the memory of an old love gone sour named Muriel. He gulped a blistering mug of hot java and hummed an old sad tune. It definitely looked like another of those goddamn days, thought Leo wearily, reaching into his pocket as he gulped and pulling out a thin creased booklet like a Chinese fortune extended into the absurd or like something they handed you as you went into church, not that he'd been to church, not since that fatal day, not since the pew crashed under the extra weight. Westercon 1993, said the booklet. Bellevue, Washington. July 3, 1993. Leo glanced at his watch, waiting for the hands to steady, waiting like a mariner in a sailor's suit and cap lashed to the wheel of a wooden ship, waiting for a stormy sea to subside. July 3, said the watch. Seven-fifteen a.m. Fuck, thought Leo, and I've got a ten o'clock panel.

He didn't twitch a muscle.

I wish I had a saxophone, he thought.

(But Leo was always wishing he had a saxophone. He wished he had a saxophone

and he was a black person and he played like Charlie Parker. But he also wanted simultaneously to look like Burt Lancaster in the 1946 version of *The Killers* when he crushes Ava Gardner to his chest and says don't ever leave me, baby, don't ever leave.)

(But she does. And much worse. She rams a figurative antler through his eye and leaves him holed up in that stark, pale-walled boarding house room while Nick Adams flips flapjacks in the diner down the road and Burt's the Swede who cares not whether he lives or dies.) (Well it's the same story you read in English class. And Leo is also Swedish by descent.)

A ten a.m. panel. (Leo checks the schedule to be sure. "The alien sex scene as a metaphor for the baseball hall of fame," it says. Christ, and they'd let him pick the theme himself. Now what was he going to say? As for the other panelists, three were women who'd written one fantasy trilogy each and who bragged about having had sex with elves. The other was Luther A. Silverman. Leo once had a cellmate in Chino named Luther Silverman but it probably wasn't the same guy. That Silverman had been a raging psycho.)

Leo rose to his feet.

(Leo had been a goddamned scientifiction fan since the early 1960s, since just before Jack Kennedy had got elected to the White House and the world turned fascinating for





a while. A thirty-year ride on a downbound train, he now thought, stubbing out his fourth stale Pall Mall cigarette of the morning. (He thought about eating a bowl of Cheerios.) That was what him and stf were like, big ol' legs wrapped around each other, a mad passionate coupling that couldn't be severed short

of death, like antlers sprouting on a bull moose's head. Hell, ol' Leo had read his first real science fiction story back in October 1957, the same month the Russians hurled Sputnik spinning into space, sitting mutely mouth open in his junior high English class, eyes bulging with naked wonderment. That first story, as he'd related (probably endlessly) elsewhere, was Clifford Simak's brilliant "Desertion," a story about what it would be like to become something (not someone but something) different, every fifties adolescent's major wet dream short of French kissing your favorite Mouseketeer. But what Leo never mentioned was that the second story he'd read was something by Sturgeon. And he'd loathed that story, found that it made him almost physically ill. So what, he now asked himself, if he'd read the Sturgeon first and not the Simak? What if his first reaction to the world of stf had been physical nausea rather than spiritual marvel? Would he have come back for more? Would he have tossed that thirty-five cent Teenage Book Club edition of Groff Conklin's *A Treasury of Science Fiction* into the trash bucket and let it lie there forevermore. Could be. Could very well goddamn be.) (But Burt Lancaster knew about that kind of stuff. Charlie Parker, too.)

He tossed the smoldering cigarette of his remembrance into the waves of the sea of life and tried to trudge on.

Time to think about starting the car (Leo wheeled a '55 Packard) if he intended to make that panel way over in Bellevue.

(But he'd definitely have to play the radio. That was just about the only way he could make it sanely down the road of life these days. Most of the time he just spun the dial down to an oldies station and let it roar. What did it matter what they played? Every song from the fifties made him think of young love, every song from the sixties of good dope. He remembered how the first time he'd heard the Rolling Stones' *Between the Buttons* album he had been so fucked on acid that he'd fused with the floor of a friend's apartment, he'd become a throw rug. But the drugs were better back then. Or maybe just the kids. Everyone was so fucking mean to each other anymore. So hung up on being tough. What did it matter if you were tough once you were reborn as a sea slug? Who gave a shit?)

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The telephone rang. Leo let it. If it was her, he knew what she wanted and if it wasn't her, then he knew what she ought to want.

(Lately Leo had been telling everyone he met that it was Elvis Presley who had changed his life the most. It was August of 1956 when he'd bought his first Presley record, a 78 rpm RCA Victor reprint of the second Sun single: "Good Rockin' Tonight" b/w "I Don't Care If The Sun Don't Shine." Nothing was the same after that. It was as if you could cut his life with a knife. Before Presley, everything was bland. It wasn't bad or evil or ugly or anything like that. Actually, his childhood had been mostly rather nice. But after Presley he all of a sudden knew about danger. And about the possible. Danger and possibility. The possibility of danger. Before Presley everything there was just there in front of him. After Presley it was all out there to be found, to be searched for. And there was so very very much more.)

(Elvis Presley and Clifford D. Simak. In truth those two were equals. The two together had shown him the true range of experience. Two men he'd never actually met, never even seen.)

Leo wondered if he had a clean suit in the closet. The one he had on looked as if it had been slept in. (Which it had.)

(The one hand he hoped they wouldn't play on the radio as he drove to the Westercon in Bellevue was the Doors. He hated the fucking Doors. Hello, I Love You was the worst piece of shit but they were all lousy, even Light My Fire, to the throbbing beat of which he'd once fucked Anita Ekberg in a fountain in the middle of Rome. But that was then. This was now. And something had definitely changed. Something important. Oddly it wasn't Morrison who got to him. Morrison always had been a posturing jerk. He still was. No, now it was Manzarek and his goddamn organ. The way it sounded like a refugee out of a seedy merry-go-round ride. Worse than fingernails on a blackboard. (When Leo was in grade

school, the blackboards were all painted green but people still called them blackboards.) He hadn't been able to listen to the Doors since Terry Carr died. He didn't know what the connection was. Maybe there wasn't any connection. But it was still a fact. The last time he'd seen Terry Carr was at a science fiction convention sometime in the eighties. (The eighties were the only decade he'd lived through where he couldn't differentiate one year from the next. Or want to.) Terry had looked rail thin, dark as a shut eyelid, wraith-like. There might have been a premonition there but Leo had failed to catch it. When Terry died it hit him like an antler in the eye. He didn't cry anymore — hadn't since prison — but for one of the few times he wanted to.)

He went into the kitchen, opened the refrigerator, and pulled a fifth of Johnnie Walker off the shelf. He sat on the floor and drank straight from the bottle.

The first disc jockey around these parts was a guy named Bob Salter who had an afternoon show on KJR 950 AM. The rest of the day (and Leo stayed home from school several times just to be sure) KJR was just another 1956 mainstream station. Frank Sinatra and Teresa Brewer, Patti Paige and Peggy Lee. But then Salter would come on the air at three just as all the kids got out of school and the earth would seem to swallow itself whole and spit itself out and be transformed. That's when you'd hear Presley. And Gene Vincent. Chuck Berry and Little Richard. And the Coasters. The Del Vikings. It always amazed Leo the good taste in music he'd had as a kid. Damn near all of it still stood up. His favorite after Presley was Jerry Lee Lewis. (He'd once written a fan letter to Jerry Lee, something he'd never done even with Elvis.)

Leo took another big swallow of whiskey. Then he turned the bottle upright and poured it out around him. He lit a match. ■

(from *Trap Door* #14, July 1994)



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**M**ore on the Sixties. More on the fannish *Disappeared*. In this version they begin to reappear too but I'm less sure about that part. I keep an eye peeled though. Another thing that strikes me reading this over is how much sheer work it took to publish a fanzine back in those days: the clanking of the typewriter keys, the cutting of the stencils, the cranking of the mimeograph. How did they (we) ever do it? More importantly, why? I was the laziest kid in the world when I was sixteen and all of a sudden I was getting up at five in the morning in order to pub my ish before I had to go off to school. My parents couldn't believe it. Who was this weird kid with all the energy who'd suddenly taken over their son's body?

## The Great Gafia of 1967

**I** have this from one with no right to tell it. But fans blab — always have, always will. Besides which, truth to tell, I knew most of it already. A lot of people do. You'd be shocked. If they don't talk about it there's good reason. They're scared.

And they ought to be.

I'm scared, too.

When certain powerful institutions catch wind of the full truth of what I'm about to reveal, one hell of a lot of heads will roll. Including the one belonging to the guy who blabbed it.

And me too.

So why am I going ahead and writing this anyway?

That's for me to know, you to find out.

**L**et's call him J. Arthur Goodbody, Artie for short.

And, no — surprise! — that's not his real name, no more than the name at the top of this page is my real name either. That one is a real name — a few of you may find it remotely familiar — but not mine. I'm borrowing it for the duration. The real Gordon Eklund owes me and says he's willing to put his head on the line to help get the story out. He claims, as a veteran of a foreign war, the folks in power won't dare touch him. I'm not so sure of that myself. I think he's just angling for a way to get his name back before the public and help his flagging book sales. Gutsy or nutsy? You decide.

But I do want to make it clear as water on the brain that it's not him who's doing the

talking here, who's telling the tale. He's the Beard.

The story isn't about him anyway. (That one maybe later. Though don't hold your breath.) This one's about Goodbody, J. Arthur. Known to his friends at the time of which we speak, the fabulous fannish 1960s, as Artie.

**J**. Arthur Goodbody pubbed a fanzine called *Porcupine*.

Now the ears prick up. Now the chins sagely nod. *Why, you do know him*, you think. (Under another name that is.) You've seen that zine, read it, collected it, nominated it for the Hugo. For *Porcupine* in its day was a major fanzine, a significant contribution to the microcosm, even though its official circulation never topped 120. Willis was a columnist. Tucker also. Ted White reviewed mystery fiction. Terry Carr wrote about rock & roll. Greg and Jim Benford coauthored a massive opus on fannish drug use through the ages that had to be serialized over four issues and then a surprise fifth installment appeared when they chose to include a consciousness-wrenching, eyebrow-fluttering account of an alleged visit to the sacred Ecuadorian underground brothel in suburban Guayaquil where the mystical psychedelic potion Wapato (roughly translated *bad headache*) was dispensed in the form of soluble merkins. (In their description the co-authors spent the night downstairs singing along as the organ grinder played Vanilla Fudge tunes, though they seemed oddly cognizant of the intimate

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details of what went on upstairs.) Lenny Bailes wrote about his pending move to San Francisco. Arnie Katz had a piece in which absolutely nothing happened in over 10,000 words. There was a lengthy letter column loaded with BNFs and several slumming pros. Illos were by Rotsler, Bergeron, Stiles, and Nelson.

In addition, *Porcupine* was renowned for its ongoing series of photo-offset nude fannish centerfolds with the names of the femmes on display (always women in these pre-liberation times) left unidentified. Though guesses were encouraged. (Winners receiving free lifetime subs to the zine.)

*Porcupine* just missed placing on the final Hugo ballot for 1967. (Losing out to *ERBdom*, I think it was.)

Eleven impeccably mimeoed issues appeared between May 1966 and April 1967 with the giant anniversary "Summer of Love" annish announced for June 1967, which along with the regular contributors was heralded to include an exclusive excerpt from an anonymous BNF's secret fannish memoir including his personal confession to a two-year federal prison sentence incurred for exchanging explicitly pornographic missives through the U.S. mails with a well known feminist science fiction authoress. (He supposedly led a failed prison break while incarcerated.)

All of which, by the way, was thoroughly a crock. There was no anonymous BNF, no lady SF authoress, no failed prison escape. It was all an intricate hoax promulgated by the editor. Goodbody was famously adept at the practice of deception.

For good reason. Artie Goodbody by profession was a secret agent.

U.S. government style.

**B**ut didn't he, um, live in San Francisco? say the ones with the straightest, least drug-addled memories of the day.

Well, in theory, yes, he did. And there indeed stood a three-story Victorian flat in the Upper Sunset district on Sixth Avenue between Irving and Judah where mail addressed to J. Arthur Goodbody was delivered. His name — his real one — was inscribed on a tag beside the doorbell. But if you ever pushed the bell — and, trust me, I have — no one would answer. Some of the time somebody might be at home but it likely wouldn't have

been anybody you knew. Or wanted to know. The flat on Sixth Avenue was a government-operated safe house. It was a refuge where secret agents came, rested, or hid out. It was all part of a certain ultra-confidential government agency, one so secret, in fact, that its very initials were classified Eyes Only.

Where Artie Goodbody actually "lived" — the domicile where he kept the tools needed to produce a leading fanzine — typewriter, mimeo, stencils, lettering guides, corflu — I never knew.

Though I do know where he worked.

Artie worked at "the Lab."

In Berkeley.

For officially speaking the Lab was part of the University of California, though located far back in the densest, heavily forested regions that bloomed among the rolling hills to the east of the campus core. It was here in an otherwise modest underground concrete bunker that much of the theoretical work on the proposed "cobalt" bomb had been carried out before John Kennedy ordered the project shut down when apprised of the fifty-fifty odds that any actual detonation of such a device would annihilate all life on Earth. (And some continue to wonder why many defense specialists never trusted Kennedy — afraid to take risks, they complained of him.)

But Artie had nothing to do with that part of the Lab's operations anyway. Bombs were another department. Artie was primarily a Psych Ops boy with a strong corollary leaning toward chemical weapons. (And a little biological stuff tossed in.)

Drug warfare, one might call it.

As early as 1954 he had played a key role in the team that conducted the initial experiments on LSD-25 as a potential weapon.

Then came early 1967 and Artie first heard about Spacewarp.

**A**s the saying says, when it comes to the '60s you have to have been there to know what it was like — but if you were, then you can never remember it anyway.

J. Arthur Goodbody was there. Top secret hush-hush government agent or not, he was no different from the rest of us caught up in the swirling kaleidoscopic maelstrom of the Aquarian Age. In the beginning — say mid-'65 — Artie smoked a little devil weed. Then, shortly thereafter, he smoked a hell of a lot

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more. He chewed Heavenly Blue morning glory seeds, ingested Mexican mushrooms, snorted Bolivian banana root. At the notorious by-invitation-only BatCaveCon in Pebble Beach in the spring of '66 Artie was the magic man passing out the pink pills at the late night room party where every femme fan present later turned out pregnant even though no one in attendance could remember taking off a stitch of clothing.

But it was that kind that kind of party, that kind of con, that kind of world, that kind of age. And all before Spacewarp happened along.

**T**he way it was told to me, Artie Goodbody was lounging behind his desk in the sixth bottom basement of the Lab late one afternoon pecking out surreptitious stencils for the next *Porcupine* lettercol when a chemist in a stained green smock burst in bearing a powdery cream-colored substance in a glass beaker tube. "I don't know what I've come up with," he declaimed, "but my number one experimental rat just vanished."

"Vanished?" Artie said, peering up from behind the old Underwood standard upon which he had been pecking. "What's that mean?"

"It means disappeared. Vanished. Dematerialized. Discorporated. Gone kaput. I fed him a light 25-microgram dose and twenty minutes later he went *poof*."

"Dead?" said Artie, with a narrow look.

"Oh, no. Just gone."

Artie followed the chemist in the stained green smock back to his work station and when they walked in the door there was the number one experimental rat back in his cage. He lay supine flat on his spine with all four paws sticking straight up in the air.

The rat looked dead, all right. Except for one factor: his paws, the four of them, were kicking rhythmically — as if in time to silent music.

"He looks happy," the chemist observed of the supine rodent

"But he doesn't look vanished," said Artie.

"He must've come back."

"Give him another dose."

"What? How come?"

"Because," said Artie, with studied patience, "the critical determinate of the scientific method is experimental repetition. Give the mouse another dose and see if he

vanishes again."

"He's a rat, not a mouse."

"And double the quantity."

The chemist prepared the syringe, injected the number one experimental rat with fifty micrograms of the cream-colored powdery substance mixed with clear tap water.

It took twenty minutes for the drug to kick in.

Then the rat vanished.

One hour later — the two men studied their watches — the rat came back. He lay supine flat on his spine in the bottom of his cage, all four paws rhythmically kicking as if to the beat of silent music.

"Look, he's smiling again," the chemist said, peering through the wires.

"Rats can't smile," said Artie. He peered closer. No, goddamn it, the damn rat was smiling, all right.

Ear to ear.

"I think he's stoned," Artie said. "By the way, what do you call it?"

"His name's Lester."

"Not the rat. The drug in the beaker. What's it called?"

The chemist rattled off a long complex chemical formula.

"Let's call it Spacewarp," said Artie, on impulse.

**N**aturally, as an actifan, J. Arthur Goodbody was aware of the science-fictional connotations of the term "Spacewarp" as they involved theoretical means of interstellar travel. In addition he was familiar with *Spacewarp's* history as the title of a Fifth Fandom focal point genzine published by Art Rapp, who still used it for his SAPSzine. (Artie was on the waiting list.)

So call it a private joke.

The name caught on. Pretty soon everybody in the Lab was talking about "Spacewarp". It was thought to be a sure future war winner. Spray a weaponized batch on top of a some marauding Viet Cong and, *poof*, the yellow-skinned sons of bitches vanished.

The trouble was, nobody knew where they went or when or where or how they eventually came back.

*Smiling from ear to ear.*

*Looking stoned.*

The number one experimental rat wasn't talking either.

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“We need a human volunteer,” the officer in authority declaimed.

“One who can talk,” added his chief factotum.

Mildew Frappe, the French-born thrice convicted slayer of his own entire family (and serial bigamist ) agreed to give it a go. In return, Frappe’s prison sentence was reduced from 599 to a relatively light nine years.

The chemist in the stained green smock injected Mildew Frappe with a five-hundred microgram Spacewarp dose — to compensate for the greater mass involved. Twenty minutes later, right on schedule, Mildew Frappe vanished.

What happened afterward is classified but I can tell you this much: it involved a significant loss of life.

Less than twenty-four hours after Mildew Frappe’s vanishing, an order personally initialed by Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara went out directing that all current stores and supplies of the chemical compound known as “Spacewarp” be gathered, collected, and immediately destroyed.

Copies of the chemical formula itself were to be burned.

So it was written, so it was done.

Except for one glass beaker’s worth. Weaponized. Which remained secreted in the bottom lower drawer of the desk of J. Arthur Goodbody.

It was at this juncture, apparently, that Artie began laying plans for his special “Summer of Love” anniversary issue of *Porcupine*.

He intended it to be (in his own words) “a fanzine like no other fanzine in the history of the medium.”

He planned for it to change the world.

**I**t was a time of proselytism.

Everybody, it seemed, had their questions but almost as many, it further seemed, had their answers.

Want to know the meaning of life?

Try drugs. (Or chanting, prayer, radical politics, Tantric sex, royal jelly, military board games.)

*Is there a God or isn't there?*

There isn't — He died. (Alternately, there is but He's a She.) (And/or gay.)

*Who won the World Series in 1904?*

No one. The Giants refused to play.

*Why are we in Vietnam?*

Jeez, go figure.

Artie Goodbody had his questions too. Bushels of them. But he also had an answer. It lay secreted like a slumbering serpent in his bottom lower desk drawer.

*Spacewarp.*

On a warm Friday afternoon in late July J. Arthur Goodbody removed the secreted glass beaker from the desk drawer, stuffed it down the bulging front of his leopard skin undershorts, and carried it away to one of several secure locations he called “home.” (Not the one in San Francisco; that had been rented out as a rehearsal space to a well-known local acid rock band — agency budget cuts in the wake of the Mildew Frappe scandal.) There, in the security of the safe house he combined the contents of the beaker — mixing and stirring — with a separate compound.

A black, thick, oily greasy substance.

It was ink.

Mimeograph ink.

A combination which seemingly increased the potency of the original compound to a level where it could now easily infect a person through the air itself.

That same night, laboring on without sleep, securely attired in asbestos suit and breathing apparatus, Artie ran off 120 copies of *Porcupine* #13, the special “Summer of Love” annish, on his Gestetner 360.

Which he then destroyed. Smashing it to micro-bits with a sledgehammer, bathing the fragmented remains in acid, igniting the residual chemical goo in a cataclysmic burst of flame and fire.

He then sat down and addressed twenty 10x13 manila envelopes, into each of which he inserted one copy of *Porcupine* #13, the special “Summer of Love” annish.

He then waited for morning to dawn, tentatively removed the asbestos suit and breathing apparatus, drove to the nearest post office, and mailed seven of the envelopes. Then he drove to the next nearest post office and mailed seven more.

At a third post office he deposited the remaining six.

Then he drove back home to the safe house, changed into one of several pairs of silken pajamas he kept there, and toddled off to bed.

He slept the dreamless sleep of the innocent child.

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**T**wenty copies of *Porcupine* #13 deposited in the United States mails, July 1967.

So who got them?

Well, me for one. (More on which later)

But also — and it's not that hard — I'll try guessing:

Burton T. Arbogast for another. The old school Southern California fan, whose letter of comment in the June 1926 *Amazing Stories* is commonly regarded as the first known instance of genuine fan activity.

His brother Milton, also an occasional fan, then serving out the last of six consecutive prison sentences on charges of committing crimes against nature involving beasts of the field and forest.

Leslie Drummond, the seventeen-year-old New York City femme fan and one-time child model who was said to have teased the pulsating appendages of a good ninety percent of east coast male fandom. (In Leslie's case, by the way, a contributor's copy. Yes, the notorious centerfold.)

Quailmeyer Briggs, erstwhile president and last remaining member of the Interstellar Science Phantasy Correspondent and Pharmacological Society, long rumored to be a renegade Rosicrucianist front.

The psychotic science fiction writer Hapgood Snails, kept in solitary confinement at Napa State Hospital, Napa County, California, following his public breakdown at the last Hugo awards banquet when his story "Revenge of the Space Poop" failed to win in the controversial not-quite-a-novella-but-not-really-a-novelette category.

South Africa's self-proclaimed number one fan, the white supremacist fanatic Phineas Windpipe.

The Negro jazz accordionist and sword-and-sorcery author Sherman Buttermilk whose story "The Gay Barbarian" had edged out Hapgood Snails's in the Hugo balloting. (Think racial and political balance here.)

Flippo J. Dancer, the Seattle actfan and number one finisher in the unpublished 1964 *Fanac* Poll for Worst Fan of All Time.

That's eight. (A ninth was apparently Steve Stiles, his copy refused entry by the military authorities in Vietnam as being "incompatible with military discipline." My guess: that centerfold again.)

As for the remaining ten (deducting for my copy, don't forget), do your own research.

Leaf through the fanzines, apa rosters, and convention booklets of the day. Find a name that seems to be everywhere and then, all at once, isn't anywhere at all.

Take your guess. That could be one.

*The Great Gafia of 1967.*

**I**t was noted at the time.

Here I quote from a private letter from an prominent New York City publishing fan dated October 13, 1967:

*Things sure have been damnably quiet in fandom lately. It may be nothing more than the usual post-Worldcon malaise but I'm starting to wonder. More and more people are not being heard from at all. What about Artie Goodbody for instance? The latest Porcupine — the promised hippie dippie annish — is way overdue. And Leslie Drummond — bless her sweet fannish tush — was supposed to join me at Fillmore East last night to hear the Velvet Underground. She never showed. (The bitch.)*

And so on.

But it was nothing new. Fans come, fans go. Who was it who said the average lifespan of an active fan is three years? And this was especially true during the late '60s when diversions ran particularly rife.

How can you keep 'em down in the mimeo room, cranking that handle, when there's sex, dope, and rock 'n' roll bubbling for free in the streets beyond?

*And me? That copy of Porcupine #13.*

The one allegedly mailed me. What happened with that?

I didn't vanish. I'm here. I've been here all the time.

And it was delivered. It was received.

But I'd just fallen in love for the first time in my life and amid the romantic — and carnal — delights of the moment I'm afraid that like every other fanzine and apa mailing that slid through the mail slot in that halcyon period it got tossed on the pile and the pile soon got shuffled and *Porcupine* #13 ended up on the bottom and then dumped into an apple crate, one of several that followed me around for years and then decades from home to home, city to town, till finally coming to rest....here.

I hold it in my hands now. The sealed, unopened manila envelope. Ten by thirteen. Addressed and postmarked.

I have no intention of opening it.

In time I may burn it.



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Hey, you better believe.

**A**nd the rest. The other hundred copies Artie ran off?

There I've got to admit I don't know. Nobody does — not for certain. Maybe Artie still has them. Maybe he doesn't. Maybe the government got them. Maybe it didn't.

I'll tell you my theory though.

Artie was no dumb bell. More crucially, as a government secret agent, he was cautious to a fault. Those first twenty copies I think he mailed out as an experiment. To see what would happen. And when it worked — when the recipients vanished — then Artie did too.

Not a Spacewarp vanishing though. The other, old-fashioned traditional kind. He skipped town. A new city, a new identify, a new life, perhaps even a new face also. (Artie had his connections in the criminal underground, I imagine.)

As a secret agent Artie would know how and where it could be done.

Whatever, after mailing out those first twenty copies of the *Porcupine* annish, nobody heard from Artie Goodbody again.

Hell, he could be living right next door to you — or me for that matter. And we'd never know it.

And there the story rested. Until last week. When Something Happened. Something both expected and unexpected.

And it's why I've broken silence here.

I admit it: I'm worried. No, hell, more than worried.

I'm scared.

*They're coming back.*

I saw her last week. In the corner neighborhood Starbucks down the block where I commonly sip my afternoon decaffeinated beverage while imbibing a chapter or two from whatever novel — usually something from classical American or English literature — lately it's been Dreiser — I happen to be reading at the time.

She was sitting two tables away. With a tiny white porcelain cup of straight espresso in front of her. A pretty girl. Young. Far too young for me, though I couldn't help looking. She was dressed like one of the hippie girls I remembered from four decades back: bell bottom jeans, peasant blouse and no bra, fringed boots, spangled headband.

She was smiling from ear to ear.

Then something in me clicked. A BatCave-Con photo I'd seen on the internet.

"Leslie," I heard myself saying. "You're Leslie Drummond."

She looked up at me, still smiling. But blankly now.

"You're Leslie Drummond, the science fiction fan," I said, rising to my feet.

There was something else too. Something I only just then noticed. On the table in front of her lay — yes — a fanzine. I instantly recognized the familiar green-tinted, quarto-sized paper.

I crossed to the table and pointed accusingly. "That's *Hyphen*, isn't it?"

"I don't know what you're talking about," she said coolly. She pressed the fanzine, the *Hyphen*, tight against her chest. "And if you don't stop annoying me I'm going to call a cop."

She sprang to her feet.

"But, Leslie, wait —" I reached out to catch hold of her and as I did she spun around, took a frantic step, ran straight into me, bounced back, and then raced out the front door.

By the time I could react further she was off down the street.

Ignoring the curious — and occasionally outraged — looks of my fellow patrons I hurried on out, looked desperately around, saw nothing.

She was gone already.

*Vanished.*

I got into my car and drove home.

When I got there an e-mail was waiting in my computer in-basket. From Robert Lichtman wanting to know if I was willing to again serve as teller in the upcoming FAPA election. At the bottom of the note he added:

"And guess who the hell I ran into in Moe's Bookstore in Berkeley yesterday? Of all people? Sherman Buttermilk. The fan and writer. Tall black guy with a patchy beard. Left fandom in the late sixties, I believe. Anyway he didn't look one day older than when he was hanging around LASFS and playing a hot jazz accordion in the clubs around Venice Beach. The odd part, when I went up and tried to say hello, he got a panicked look on his face and damn near ran over me trying to get away. Maybe he's wanted by the law or something but it sure seems as if his gafia isn't apt to end soon. I'm positive it was him, though."

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*Hell, Robert, I'm positive too..*

**L**et me tell you about the issue of *Hyphen* Leslie Drummond was reading that day in the corner Starbucks and after that I'll fill you in on a few of the high points of my pet theory.

Its masthead I noticed when she first pressed it against her chest. I didn't see a date but I did spot an issue number.

It was *Hyphen* #149.

Now hold on, you say. As every fan knows Willis folded *Hyphen* after the thirty-sixth issue in February 1965. He brought it back in 1987, publishing #37 to mark the fortieth anniversary of Irish fandom. And Shelby Vick did a oneshot he called *Hyphen* #38 in 1999 for the Corflu he hosted that year, with reprints from old issues. No more after that.

I'd seen it wrong. A trick of the light. It was *Hyphen* #19 or *Hyphen* #14. Something like that.

There's only one flaw in that analysis.

I have part of the page.

When Leslie and I collided as she struggled desperately to get away and as I reached out to grab hold of her I ended up grabbing instead and tearing away a part of the front page of the *Hyphen* she was holding.

The part that contained the issue number. (#149 oh yes indeed.)

Also the first paragraph of the editorial.

By Walt Willis.

And the date.

*July 2007.*

Now I know that's going to excite a bunch of people. If that's a joke, it's not a very funny one, they'll say. Willis is dead, has been for some years now, and we all mourn his passing.

As I'm sure we do. I do. Walt Willis is dead, all right.

In this universe he is.

But what about another universe? A parallel universe separate and distinct from this, one in which *Hyphen* continues to be published to this day with Walt Willis — an aged Willis to be sure — still turning the mimeo crank.

A world in which fandom not only perseveres but one in which it thrives.

Let me give you a clue — the title of the Willis editorial, a snippet of which hold in my hands as I write. The editorial is entitled: "The World President Speaks."

*It's written in the first person.*

**W**hat follows is sheer speculation.

Given an infinite number of possible alternate universes, then not only does anything become possible, then everything *is* possible.

Including a world — a universe — in which fandom rules.

I can't draw you a complete picture. I can only continue to speculate. A world war. Maybe several world wars. A devastated and ruined planet. Only one stable institution somehow survives. The paper network established and firmly built among the fellow fans of science fiction. Maybe the only ones who saw it all coming. Who saw and prepared for the consequences.

Out of the rubble and ruin of a devastated planet springs forth... *fanzines!*

Something like that anyway.

And, yes, it's silly. Ridiculous. Absurd as frog's heads in a soup. But...possible.

And with Spacewarp — the drug that makes people vanish — yes, but to where? — a means of going there.

To that other fannish universe.

Leslie Drummond went.

Sherman Buttermilk went.

And so did the other recipients of *Porcupine* #13, the special Summer of Love annish.

They all went.

And now, clearly, they're coming back.

Which is why I'm scared.

Now there may be no reason for being afraid. They took their damnable dope — unknowingly perhaps — and now it's wearing off and they're coming down, coming back, so it's all over

Except if so, then why are they still smiling from ear to ear? (And why have they seemingly not aged a day after a forty-year absence?)

Like that number one experimental rat back in the beginning. Recently returned — I'll bet you — from an alternate universe in which lab rats rule.

And Artie? J. Arthur Goodbody? He's still out there — I'm absolutely convinced. Out there and fully prepared — at long last — for his next move. Does he still possess a store of the original Spacewarp? Does he — and I find this the more likely alternative — happen to have a copy of the chemical formula?

I can again only speculate. But the Artie I knew was not one to deprive himself of any available option.

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And by now he must know as well as I do  
that they're all coming back.  
And that's what scares me.

**S**o there you have it. That's my story. It's  
not the full story of course — since there's  
no end yet and only time will truly tell. I  
don't expect, personally, to be around to see it.  
Once this sees the light of day somebody out  
there — maybe Artie, maybe somebody still  
working for the same secret government  
agency — is going to realize it's not just an-  
other idiotic piece of dumb faaan fiction, that  
it's real, even if the names have been switched  
around here and there.

And they're going to be coming for me.

They'll find me. I suppose I could run.  
But I know I can't hide. So I'm not even going  
to try to run. I'm an old fan and tired. I  
wouldn't know where to go if I did run. So  
I'll wait it out right here in front of my  
computer keyboard where I feel most  
comfortable and see what develops.

Other than that, I can only say wait. And  
fasten your seat belts. The ride's about to get  
very bumpy out.

I'd tell you to keep watching the sky.

But that line's already been used. ■

(from *Trap Door* #26, December 2009)

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# Introduction to Selections from *Wooden Spaceships*

**W**ooden Spaceships, from which these two excerpts have been ripped, is the 115,000 word novel I wrote immediately following my retirement from the postal service after twenty-one years. Not uncoincidentally, it was also my first significant work of fiction in more than a decade. What to write? I'd wondered, on first sitting down at the word processor. Write what you know, responded the hovering shade of Grecian writer Lucien of Samasota. (Or was it J.Z. Eglinton?) But there were only two things I really knew. One was science fiction, the other the post office. Since Charles Bukowski had already done the post office to perfection, that left me with science fiction and its allied fandom. An opening line popped unbidden into my head. I jotted it down. The rest followed. Two years and three drafts later I had my novel.

Wooden Spaceships is told from the first-person viewpoint of Charles Gundy, a onetime teenage sf fan. It takes place primarily between October 1962, when the world nearly ends in the Cuban Missile Crisis, and November 1963, when it actually does end, though only metaphorically. There are flashbacks to earlier relevant events as far distant as the mid-nineteenth American South and the building of the first atomic bombs and a few flash-forwards as well. (One of which climaxes the first of the two excerpts herewith.)

When I had my novel more or less in hand, I showed it to a few people I knew who were knowledgeable with the contemporary publishing business. One read the first hundred pages and pronounced it "enjoyable" (a curse, that) but explained it wouldn't sell enough copies to be worth the binding. Another skimmed sufficiently to declare that science fiction stories about science fiction readers (and fans) were a commercial form of authorial hara-kiri. Any writer who comes up to me with a story idea like that I deliver a swift mad-dog knee to the groin, I was assured. (Or words to that effect.)

So I slunk off, legs cautiously crossed, and tucked the pixelated Spaceships manuscript away in quiet back computer file.

The happy part though: my off and (mostly) on twenty-plus-year writers block — the Curse of the Gray Lensman, as I think of it — had seemingly gone away in the process.

Anyway, no bitter grapes for sale here. As for what there is: two selections from the novel. The first delineates a sort of parallel history of the sf genre, culminating in the seminal flash-forward to contemporary Luxembourg previously mentioned. The second takes place at a science fiction club meeting much like the science fiction club meetings many of us have attended. It introduces several characters who will play significant roles in the story to come and a couple others — the itinerant traveling fan Walter Wunderly and the editor Kingsley Babbitt — who are mentioned only in passing. An additional key character, Philo Botts, is briefly alluded to as well. It's Botts, the basement tinkerer, whose self-proclaimed invention of a faster-than-light battery drive as heralded in the pages of Surprising Science Fact & Fiction inspires the construction of the titular wooden spaceships. The builder is young Charlie Gundy's father, the true protagonist of the story.

None of this is fan fiction in the sense of the other material collected here, all written for the fun of it and published in actual fanzines. Nor does it constitute anything remotely resembling my fan "memoirs." Anybody who says anything like that in my presence is definitely entering mad-dog-knee-to-the-groin terrain. Be forewarned. Don't look back, as old-time fan Milton Arbogast constantly cautioned. That's what science fiction is supposed to be about anyway, isn't it? Never looking back. I'm sure Hugo Gernsback thought so. ■ (March 2013)

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## Wooden Spaceships Selection One

**E**ven now so many years later you could stack the days in neat piles, call them silver dollars, and feel rich counting, controversy swirls like water down the drain when it comes to the (seminal) origins of what we still fondly refer to as the “science fiction” field. (“Sci-fi” is the preferred term de jure among Hollywood rip-off poseurs only; may their tongues rot with grue in the putrescent cavities of their mouths.)

Some academic theorists maintain the sf genre extends as far back in literary history as the second century A.D. Grecian writer Lucian of Samasota, who in his *True History* wrote of voyaging to the moon, engaging in a bit of colonial warfare with the non-Grecian inhabitants, and then returning home again in an entirely better frame of mind. Others favor starting with the renaissance figure Cyrano de Bergerac (as popularly depicted on screen by José Ferrer, who won a 1950 Oscar for his performance, and a long prosthetic nosepiece, which did not). De Bergerac wrote circa 1687 not only of a trip to the moon but also of a second and undoubtedly less pleasant voyage to the sun.

All commentators agree, however, on the crucial date of 1818 when the novel *Frankenstein or a Modern Prometheus* by teen phenom Mary Woolstonecraft Shelley first appeared. Those of us who’ve read the actual book — me in the seventh grade, for instance — urge you to rent the movie instead. It’s a way better time.

The French writer, Jules Verne, loomed leviathan in the nineteenth century and managed in his long career to hit most of the sf basics: not only another journey to the Moon — via cannonball this time — but a trip to the center of the earth (scientifically impossible due to heat and pressure in case you were wondering) and five long dull weeks lost in a balloon. (So how did they pee?) (With their

dicks, say the wags.) Again, those of us who’ve actually plowed through the original tomes agree that Disney did the whole thing better. (*20,000 Leagues Under the Sea*, Richard Fleischer, 1955). Not only does Kirk Douglas sing a sea chantey accompanying himself on ukelele while Peter Lorre supplies nasally keening background vocals but he also develops an odd romantic relationship with a tame harbor seal. (Check it out, bestiality fans.)

Which brings us to the chinless shopkeeper figure of Mr. Herbert George Wells — or “Bertie” to his later literary descendants. Fabian socialist, atheist, one-time apprentice draper, self-proclaimed scientific humanist, and expert at darn near everything then known to humankind. His early novels of scientific romance, all written before he turned thirty-five, include *The Time Machine* (1895), *The Island of Dr. Moreau* (1896), *The Invisible Man* (1897), *The War of the Worlds* (1898) and *First Men in the Moon* (1901). If you haven’t read any of these — or better yet, all — do so right now. Immediately. No cheating either. Books only, no movies, though several are worth seeking out later. No Classic Commix either. I know the ploy already. (See the 1959 Charlie Gundy ninth grade book report subject *Moby Dick*. It got me a D-minus. Miss Hefner was not fooled for an instant.)

While we’re briefly paused here waiting for everybody to come back from their homework, let me ease the tension by assuring those who’ve come this far with the story that precious little explicit sex is projected to intrude on the course of the remainder of these memoirs and that previous narrative descends into such sordid terrain (see the Mitzi Rose revelations) were largely due to the insistence of forces beyond our (that is, my) immediate control. In other words, your memorist



clearly needs to get out more and perhaps get himself laid again after far too many years of self-enforced celibacy. (But that's a another topic for another time.)

Okay, everybody back? Feeling better now? Pretty good books, eh? (Better than this crap here, sez the boy in the back row.) Yeah, good, fine, swell. (And screw you too, funny boy.)

Let's get on with it.

Herbert George Wells. (1864-1946.) It doesn't get any better than that — science fiction, that is.

Which, alas, also constitutes the grim news: *Science fiction reached its zenith as a literary genre before it even acquired its name.*

A huge popular success, Wells naturally attracted imitators like flies to cow patties, a few more adept than most. I particularly commend Garrett P. Serviss, an American journalist whose *Edison's Conquest of Mars* depicts the heroic inventor bringing it all back home to Wells's invasive alien horde, finishing off the whole slimy godless lot of them by melting the Martian polar caps and drowning the no good bug-eyed bastards under a genocidal deluge. (And thus foreshadowing much of American foreign and military policy in the latter part of twentieth century right up to and including the Cuban Missile Crisis (so-called) of October 1962.)

But onward.

In addition to such relatively respectable luminaries as Verne, Wells, and Serviss, science fiction in the early years of the new century, though still without its proper name, came to flourish in the ragged pages of various cheap wood pulp magazines aimed at the tumultuous mass of newly literate readers, many of them immigrants not long upon the American shore. Such as Grandpa Gus Gundy, for example. Though as far as I know he was never much of a reader.

Among the most successful of these pulp writers was the failed door-to-door ladies

underwear salesman Edgar Rice Burroughs, who first gained literary fame with a series of tales concerning the prosaically named John Carter, a Confederate Civil War veteran who found himself miraculously transported to the planet Mars, where upon lived a whole host of various humanoid races — copper red, uppity black, superior white, six-limbed and green — all but the latter no doubt reminding Carter of his native Virginia before the fall at Appomattox. (Burroughs, though a Midwesterner, tended like many poor white men of his day to romanticize the slave-owning Old South. The good old days when those other people knew their right place.) The initial opus in the soon-to-be long succession *A Princess of Mars*, which Burroughs wrote under the penname "Normal Bean," concludes with the titular heroine — the red-skinned Dejah Thoris — impregnated by Carter in a process left frustratingly undetailed — nesting forlornly atop a huge (though white) egg which, in a sequel yet to come, will disgorge her and Carter's love child, Catharsis. (Or something like that anyhow.)

Miscegenation anyone? (Illegal in all forty-eight states.) I mean, even apart from the whole eggy thing, you've got to feel your jaw drop the floor.

Yet the formula worked. Brilliantly. *Argosy* and *All-Story* magazines, where most of Burroughs's tales originally appeared, sold hundreds of thousands of copies weekly. Sex and its big muscled brother, violence — Carter is quite the swordsman in more ways than one—with a taste of exotic racism added in. And it would work even more brilliantly in Burroughs's most famous work *Tarzan of the Apes*, which tosses rampaging gorillas and spear-chucking natives into the already heady brew.

Which brings us to the year 1926. Pause to envision the moment in time: Verne long dead, Wells gone on to writing social tracts, egg-laying red-skinned Martian damsels

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cavorting with sword-thrusting racists on a Mars equipped with a breathable atmosphere, semi-Mediterranean climate, and canals awash in crystal blue water.

Science fiction, no freaking way. If that's science, call me a nutcase.

At which point — *ka-ding, ka-ching, glory glory hallelujah!* — enters one Heinrich Gimmelsbach.

The father of science fiction!

Our hero!

For it is Gimmelsbach who in April 1926 will launch upon the newsstands of America the first issue of the first all-science fiction magazine, *Agonizing Stories*.

It costs twenty-five cents. (The price of a pack of Camel cigarettes.)

Heinrich (I repeat) Gimmelsbach.

Briefly: a forty-two-year-old bird-beaked native of far-off exotic Luxembourg, with a slick-backed pompadour, detachable collar, and the air of a demoted schoolmaster. Who boldly immigrates across the raging Atlantic in the year of Theodore Roosevelt's election, 1904 — Roosevelt being America's youngest president before the advent of John Kennedy, who in October 1962 will instigate the Cuban (so-called) missile crisis threatening my then sixteen-year existence — and settles amid the dizzyingly phallic cityscape of greater Manhattan.

Years slip by like ham sliced from a bone. Heinrich Gimmelsbach eventually achieves some moderate success as the editor and publisher of a series of popular science and electronics magazines: *Modern Experimenter*; *The Electrical Wizard*; *Invention and Science*.

Among dense pages detailing how to build one's own crystal radio set or launch a submersible naval vessel, Gimmelsbach sprinkles the occasional piece of what he quaintly chooses to call "scientifiction" — stories with a scientific slant designed to teach and instruct. Among the resonant titles: "Marriage and the Wireless Companion," "Chemicals Grow Hair," "The Earth as Viewed from the Moon" and (sure to gratify any Burroughs fans in the audience) "How the Martian Canals Came to be Built." The majority of these "stories" Gimmelsbach pens himself, both under his own name and various quirky pseudonyms including (my favorite) "Baron von Saddomann." In one long story *Hugo 124C41+* (you

have to say it aloud to achieve the full effect), Gimmelsbach prophesizes such fabulous futurist inventions as the awesome wonder of something called "tele-vision." (Through which medium, I pause to note, President Kennedy will one fabulously future day address the nation in order to clue them in that there's "a pretty fair chance they're all going to be blown to bits in a few days' time.")

Which brings me to wonder: was Heinrich Gimmelsbach, then a spry retired seventy-eight, watching that fateful night? And if so how did he take the news let alone the manner in which it was being delivered?

Since, after all, atomic annihilation war was yet another science fictional prophecy. Not Gimmelsbach this time but our other old friend Bertie Wells in his 1911 *The World Set Free*. (Look it up.)

But — to untangle the digressions — Gimmelsbach's tales of "scientifiction" prove such a hit with his readers — unduly brilliant urban teenagers, one surmises from a glance through the letter columns, aging tinkers seeking a mental stimulant — that he comes up with the idea of a brand new magazine contain-ing all scientifiction all the time. A monthly. Twenty-five cents. (Camel cigarettes, yes.)

After some hesitation Gimmelsbach selects the title *Agonizing Stories*. Descriptive? I boldly said *maybe*, if definitely on the sensationalistic side.

But the man has to make a buck, doesn't he? He's a true American now — through and through — our Gimmelsbach. Bye-bye Luxembourg.

The first *Agonizing Stories* hits the newsstands with a date of April 1926. The full color cover illustration — in fact, all the artwork throughout — is the work of Paul R. Frank, a Viennese-trained former architect, who paints the world of the future as if standing right smack in the middle of it in his knickers and cloth cap. The man's good — even if he can't draw a decent human figure to put a spacesuit on.

The fiction in the beginning consists largely of reprints from the past masters: Verne (his novel *Off on a Comet* leading off the first issue), Bertie Wells (no one better than), E.A. "Fast Eddie" Poe, even a little Garrett P. Serviss, though not, alas, Edison's Martian counter-invasion. Over time

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Gimmelsbach and his chief assistant, a retired eighty-year-old prep school science teacher T. O'Banyon Sloat, develop a stable of home-grown talent. Let us roll forth the sonorous monikers of these forgotten pioneers: A. Hyman Vertigass; Captain S.T. Funk, USMC; Dr. David H. Peppercorn, DDS; Stanley Amadeus Cobblestone. Not to neglect G. Peyton Wiperblade, said to be all of thirteen years old when his first *Agonizing Story* achieves publication.

From the start the new magazine sells like hotcakes smothered in chocolate beer. Gimmelsbach buys himself a new Pierce Arrow for Christmas 1926. His favorite mistress, a distant ancestor of Mitzi Rose's on her mother's side (or so I like imagining), gets a Cadillac.

In the April 1928 *Agonizing Stories* the first installment appears of that creamiest of seminal science fiction novels *The Condor of Space* by Dr. Elmer Dudley Jones, M.Sc. (in chemistry — his day job was in the burgeoning doughnut industry), which introduces the marvelous sub-genre of space opera — action stories taking place in the infinite star-speckled universe as lately discovered by Dr. Edward Hubble. (As Gimmelsbach will proudly boast in his editorial "Science Fiction Becomes Science Fact!" in the April 1929 *Agonizing Stories*.)

But with that year (1929) also come the first mean stirrings of the economic disaster of the Great Depression slithering serpent-like from under the slimy rock of corporate America to confront a still blithely innocent populace with a vision of future rack and ruin, of hunger and deprivation, of dispossession and despair.

Though somehow in the midst of all this — and the simultaneous emergence of the German Third Reich and the initial Japanese imperial incursions into China — the youthful, ever-optimistic science fiction genre surges on. Its audience remains intact like a baby's clenched fist. As steadfastly loyal as a hungry cat. The fans — teenagers and tinkerers, most of them boys or youngish men still living at home with their parents — they *believe*. In science perhaps. The future for sure. And by 1933 that's something. It marks a genuine leap of faith — believing not only that there may well be a 1934 but even a 2034, a 2134, and so on.

Half science, half faith. In time it's a vision that will shake the world. (And soon threaten to obliterate it as well — those pesky Cuban missiles again I keep bringing up.)

But that's all later. In 1936 Gimmelsbach sells *Agonizing Stories* to one of the remaining pulp chains, which rechristens it *Crazy Agonizing Stories* and promptly abandons any semblance of scientific accuracy in favor of a policy emphasizing E.D. Jones-like space opera.

Meanwhile, across town, a twenty-seven year old, bullet headed, bespectacled MIT graduate and occasional *Agonizing Stores* contributor named Kingsley Babbitt assumes the editorship of another pulp title, *Surprising Stories*.

More on which later.

First I need to try to scotch a rumor: namely that the only way to explain Heinrich Gimmelsbach and his achievement of 1926 is that Gimmelsbach was not in fact born in Luxembourg in 1884, as his biography insists, but rather sometime in the late twenty-second century. Or maybe the twenty-third.

In other words, Gimmelsbach was a man from the future. A time traveler.

Who then journeyed to early twentieth century New York and in his struggle to survive hit on the notion of using his knowledge of the actual future to invent the literary genre eventually known as "science fiction."

Horse manure, I say. Adolescent fantasy.

A few years back I personally spent some forty days traipsing the remaining non-radiated portions of the European continent, principally the rolling pastures and spiraling mountaintops of the Principality of Luxemburg, and in that time I not only pursued and perused all available local documentation concerning the life and ancestry of Heinrich Gimmelsbach but had the esteemed honor of meeting the octogenarian Franz Gimmelsbach, sole surviving nephew of the great Heinrich himself.

Franz claimed to remember his uncle well. "He sent us crap from America," he tells me.

"Crap like what?" I prod in my halting German.

"Better yet, I show you."

And he does — producing one dusty object after another from crates buried in his sub-basement fallout shelter. Gadgets. Devices. American things. A miniature tea kettle that



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whistles “Yankee Doodle Dandy.” A bottle opener in the shape of a Coney Island hot dog. And, lastly — most potently — a six-inch model rocketship. Made of tin. Painted a soft pastel pink.

A tear dampens my eye. It’s a science fiction achievement award — given out at the annual Globalcons — a Heinie — a relic once awarded the man who invented our genre in the first place.

“Your uncle,” I ask, struggling to regain my composure, “how old was he when he went away to America?”

He holds up both hands.

“Ten-years-old?” I say, confused.

He smiles and this time lifts the two middle fingers only.

“Ten times two?” I say.

He nods his head.

*Perfecto.* For history agrees, Gimmelsbach abandoned Luxembourg for the American shore in 1904 at age twenty. When anything and everything would have seemed if not possible then at least conceivable. (In other words, you might as well call it science fiction.)

It’s at this pregnant moment that the front door of the Gimmelsbach cottage bangs open and a blonde apparition in Nordic pigtails, zippered ski pants, and a trailing neck scarf bursts through the gap.

I melt on my feet.

“My grand-niece,” introduces old Franz,

with a leering glint in his eye. “Our Hilda. She knows your American — ” his tongue seems to stick to the roof his mouth — “your persuasions.”

“And does she know that she’s related to Heinrich Gimmelsbach, the Father of Modern Science Fiction?” I ask, avidly.

“Ah, naturally.” she answers, speaking up for herself. “Old Heinie was my” — yet another sticking tongue — “my great grand-ancestor.”

“You speak excellent English,” I say.

“I learned it at the UCLA.”

“Our Hilda, she lived in the Hollywood Hills,” explains Franz.

“At college?” I say.

“Some.” She shyly lowers her gaze. “I also....worked in the art cinema industry.”

“The private movies!” cries Franz, beaming proudly.

At Franz and Hilda’s gracious invitation — as darkness wraps the Alpine slopes in its benighted grip — I consent to spend the night in their rustic home. Huddled beneath a mountain of blankets and quilts I lie poised in wait, naked and supine. Soon enough Hilda joins me. Shortly after midnight. And in my arms she — I — well...enough.

Let the veil of time descend.

But, yes, it’s true what you may have heard: I banged Heinrich Gimmelsbach’s last living descendant.

Talk about your seminal moments! ■

## ***Wooden Spaceships*** **Selection Two**

**I** attended my first meeting of the Rocketeers a week and a half later, the first Thursday night of the month. Of September — 1960. An-older-than-petrified-dogshit Ike still hanging on in the White House, the young Nixon and even younger Jack Kennedy trading tepid verbal blows in the effort to replace him. The Pittsburgh Pirates will win the World Series that autumn in seven over the mighty Yankees, thanks to Mazeroski’s bottom-of-the-ninth blast. (A harbinger, perhaps, of other

upheavals soon to come?)

At the time the Rocketeers met in a dusty rented room on the second floor of the Arcadia Building downtown on Second Avenue between Madeleine and Monroe Streets. That first time I was able to get there by convincing Pop to drive me in and dropped me off in front of the building and then going on up to Dr. Simon’s office and putting in a little unpaid overtime, grinding dentures.

The meeting was supposed to start at

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seven-thirty. I arrived about five minutes before and went in past the security guard, who didn't give me a second glance, and stepped into the waiting elevator.

There were two people already on board.

They both glanced at me curiously.

Then one broke into a quick grin and shot out a hand, which I grabbed hold of before I could think. He was tall, well over six feet, gangly and uncoordinated looking, and wore thick, heavy wire-rimmed glasses and a flannel shirt with a lot of pens stuck in the pockets. "A fellow Rocketeer?" he said, through his grin.

I managed a nod.

"I can always tell by the steely glint in the eye. I'm Yul Mellman. Secretary and Treasurer of the Rocketeers. And this is Eva — our president in charge of vice."

The president in charge of vice was a tiny woman with gray hair wrapped in a bun. The tip of her head barely reached my Adam's apple. "Mrs. Eva Jones," she clarified.

"Pleased to meet you both," I said, in my best winsomely polite adolescent manner.

"You must be the fellow who had the letter in *Surprising*," Yul Mellman said.

"Yes, that was me."

The elevator seemed to be taking an awful long time to rise just the one floor.

As if reading my mind, Yul Mellman reached out and thumbed a button. The elevator jerked, quivered, and started to rise.

"I'm always forgetting that part," he said. "So what masochistic motive inspired you to write a letter?"

"Well, one of the stories...."

"You read the stories?" he said.

"The articles too. I —"

"I just look at the pictures."

"Now don't listen to a word he tells you," Eva Jones said. "I read every word in every issue and so does he. King Babbitt is the only man in America who understands the true state of affairs."

I nodded, not quite understanding.

"So, Charles," she said, with a sudden deep breath, "what's your position on the UFO menace?"

The elevator stopped. Yul reached out a long arm and rattled the door open. We all three stepped out into a bare, dimly lighted corridor.

"This way, Charles," said Eva, bustling on

ahead.

The meeting room was located at the far end of the corridor directly adjoining a well-stocked janitorial closet. Wafting ammonia scented the air, stinging the eyes. During the day the meeting room served as some sort of health food distribution center. There were crates of wheat germ stacked in all available corners.

"Eva found the room for us," Yul explained, as we stepped inside. "She knows the owner personally."

"Finally!" cried a voice from within. "The man who makes the coffee!"

"That's me," said Yul, holding up a paper bag. "Ready and willing."

There were maybe a half-dozen people already in the room, most seated around a long conference table, one couple standing apart against a wall. Eva Jones waved a tiny arm in my direction. "This is Charles, the boy who had the letter in the last *Surprising*. He says he believes in the UFO menace too."

The others introduced themselves in turn. And so it began.

Looking back from today's perspective, it's hard saying exactly what I'd anticipated. Maybe some sort of literary group, a club rather like Herb Philbrick's communist cell where everyone sat around smoking pipes and occasionally talking without using their hands.

The Rocketeers weren't like that. A couple of the men smoked but that was as close as it came. And everyone seemed to be talking. Not necessarily all at once — but close enough.

There was a semblance of an official meeting. Old business, new business, the reading of minutes. The president turned out to be the same man who'd called me on the phone. Budd Champion, a brisk, stocky man with lively eyes and a chin beard. (Not something often seen in those days.) He reminded me a bit of my uncle Phil Snead, Mom's brother, mostly in the way he talked in flat declarative sentences that seemed to pile one on top of another like building blocks.

His wife Melanie sat down beside him. She had a gentle musical voice you had to bend your ear to catch and, like almost everybody else there, she wore glasses.

Which was definitely one other thing that made me feel at home. The glasses. I wore them too. Though only when I had to. Since the beginning of the ninth grade.

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And, of course, we all read science fiction. Though, as Budd Champion had cautioned me in advance, there wasn't all that much talk directly concerning it during the meeting.

Instead, everyone tried explaining to me about fandom. Science fiction fandom, that is. Though that's not how they put it. They just said "fandom." As if it there was only the one, a unique phenomenon.

The Champions, it seemed, had just returned from attending the Global Science Fiction Convention in Pittsburgh, where they had won the Heinie Award (named after Heinrich Gimmelsbach, the father of modern science fiction) for best fanzine of 1959, *Howl of the Rocketeer*.

"So what's a fanzine?" I asked.

Then it was time for everybody to explain that to me as well.

And again all at once too.

Much of it didn't make immediate sense. But enough did that I found myself ...well, intrigued anyway.

A fanzine was an amateur journal produced by fans, written by fans, and designed to be read by fans. A *fan magazine*.

But the contents could include pretty much anything under the sun.

"There are fans all over the world," Eva Jones proudly announced. "England, France, Australia, everywhere."

"Except Cuba," Yul Mellman said.

"How do you know? Castro might be a fan."

"Just because he has a beard."

"Abraham Lincoln had a beard."

"Not to mention Jesus Christ."

"And Allen Ginsberg."

"Not to mention yours truly," said Budd Champion. "And if the rest of you don't like it you can all go row a boat."

"We're supposed to be telling this young man about fandom."

"Well, it started in 1926."

"With Uncle Heinie."

"Gimmelsbach."

And they went on to explain that part to me also.

"The first fan," Budd said, "was Milton J. Arbogast. After him it all just sort of grew."

Milton Arbogast, a teenager living in Glendale, California, had written a letter in response to one of the early issues of *Agonizing Stories* asking other readers to contact him.

In late 1930 Arbogast published the first science fiction fanzine — on a \$1.98 hectograph from Sears and Roebuck.

Its total circulation was fourteen.

"How many fans would you say there are today?" Budd asked the group.

"That depends on what makes a fan a fan," said Melanie.

"Well, more than just readers."

"That still leaves club fans, con fans, fanzine fans."

"And fringe fans."

"So call it two thousand — maybe a little more. And a hardcore of three hundred at most."

"Which is about how many showed up at the GlobalCon," Budd finished up.

They showed me a copy of the current issue of *Howl of the Rocketeer*, the monthly fanzine the Champions produced with assistance from several other club members. It was letter sized, neatly mimeographed on plain white paper, and ran slightly more than forty pages of close type. There were articles, a cartoon cover, columns, editorials, a few drawings, and a long letter column. I glanced over the names and addresses of the letter writers and confirmed they were indeed from all over the world — Japan, Germany, Brazil, though most were American or English.

"In 1939 the first Global Science Fiction Convention took place in New York City over the Labor Day weekend. Attendance was around two hundred."

"So you can see how much fandom has grown. In twenty-one years we've grown fifty percent."

"Which is plenty sufficient," Budd said. "You should have tried to catch a hotel elevator in Pittsburgh."

Besides the Rocketeers in Seamount, there were large clubs in New York, Los Angeles, Cleveland, Detroit, and a few other cities. Besides the yearly global cons, several smaller regional conventions took place in the South, the Midwest, Texas, and California.

"And maybe fifty fanzines," Budd Champion said. "General circulation zines, that is. Ones you can subscribe to, though most people either trade or write a letter of comment."

"Which gets you a free issue."

"Or two."

"I can put your name on a few sample lists," Budd told me "If you're interested."

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Most zines are about the same as *Howl*. A little of this, a little of that.”

“But we won the Heinie,” Yul put in.

Everyone smiled at that.

“Fandom’s not meant to be anything except a goddamn hobby,” Budd explained. “There’s no law saying if you put out a fanzine it’s has to be anything except, you got to hope, it’s good.”

A relatively younger (early twenties, I guessed) dark-eyed man with (of course) thick eyeglasses and a slightly receding chin who had entered the room a bit later than the rest pointed a finger in my direction. “And you, my son, are a neofan. A classic neo.”

“Like Tom here,” said Yul, pointing back at him.

The man nodded. “Tom Powers, at your service.”

“He’s a writer,” said Yul.

“An unpublished one,” said Tom Powers.

“Are there other kinds?”

“Not around here.”

“Budd had a short story published in the January 1958 *Futuristic*,” Melanie pointed out..

“An extended joke for which he received the munificent sum of \$27.50,” said Budd.

“Six months after publication.”

“But that still makes you officially our one and only dirty pro.”

“But, look here,” Budd said, twisting in his chair and gazing straight at me, “you’re the new kid on the block. Tell us what you think so far about this whole crazy thing of ours.”

Everyone else now seemed to be looking squarely at me too. I lowered my eyes automatically to the copy of *Howl of the Rocketeer* I was still clutching. The mimeographed words on the page blurred.

“I — I’d — I’d like to know more.”

“Then good for you,” Budd said. “Like I told you this bunch can use some new blood. Heck, so can fandom. What with prozines dying off left and right these days.”

“So who killed science fiction?” Yul demanded.

“Look,” Budd said, “fans make up at best two percent of the total readership of any magazine. So don’t go blaming us. When things were good, we didn’t get the credit either.”

“Not from King Babbitt we didn’t.”

“He hates fans.”

“No, he doesn’t,” Budd said. “He was at Pittsburgh. He’s got nothing against fandom. Or for it either. It’s like what I said. We’re two percent. We’re not important enough to matter.”

“I found the article in the last issue most thoughtful,” said a gentle voice to my right. With the others I swung my head. Eva Jones.

“That crazy thing about inventing a space drive, you mean?”

“Yes. Philo Botts, I believe his name is.”

“Who invented it in his basement lab?”

“Yes, I believe so.”

“And it goes faster than the speed of light?”

“It appears to have that property, yes.”

I could sense, if not actually see or hear, suppressed glee. But nobody wanted to be the first to laugh. Certainly not me.

“As King Babbitt pointed out in his editorial remarks,” Eva went on, “the Botts Battery appears to be based on a scientific system not yet known on Earth.”

“Or to Einstein,” Tom Powers interjected.

“Well, yes,” she agreed. “But my first thought was of the UFOs. We don’t know what principle propels them either. They certainly appear to travel faster than light.”

“I, well...oh, wow,” said Budd, smacking his forehead with a palm.

Suddenly a finger was pointing in my direction. Eva Jones’s tiny gloved hand. “This young man revealed to me in the elevator that he personally finds the UFO evidence overwhelming.”

“Oh, he did, did he?” Tom said, peering at me with a skeptical eyebrow..

“I did?”

“Well...yes. Don’t you remember? I asked what you thought about the unidentified objects and you told me straight out, very boldly”

“So we’ve got a second flying saucer nut in our crew?” said Yul Mellman.

“I am not a nut,” Eva said stiffly.

“Sorry, Eva. No offense intended. But the rest of us don’t quite see things the same way you do.”

“I know that and I understand.”

“But now you’re saying that friend Charlie here agrees with you,” Tom said. “He’s a fellow saucer...enthusiast?”

Again, I could feel the focus of attention fixed on me. “Well, I don’t really...”

“Of course he doesn’t,” Budd said. “UFO’s,

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flying saucers, bug-eyed BEMs, whatever the hell you want to call them — they've done the worst damage to the science fiction field since Heinrich Gimmelsbach crapped in his own knee pants."

With which the meeting moved on to other topics, none of them dealing specifically with me — or my supposed views. Happily so for me.

At one point Budd Champion said that new fans normally stuck around only three or four years and then drifted off into mundane pursuits. Gafia, it was called — short for Getting Away From it All. Apparently, fandom had a bunch of similarly oddball terms — a private language of its own. BEM was another such word — short for Bug Eyed Monster.

Two things ruined young fans, Budd explained to me. One was college and the other was the army. "For those of us old farts who've been through both and survived to tell our war stories fandom can turn into more of a home, less of a way station."

"So I'm just a way station kind of guy," Tom Powers said. "At least that's what my draft board keeps reminding me."

"Tom came here from back east a year ago," Melanie Champion said. "He's an engineer at Cantrell Air. And a graduate of Cornell University."

And so it went — the rest of the evening. Like a tennis match with a dozen different players, each with his or her own racquet playing far too fast for a poor fifteen-year-old to keep up with.

I loved every minute of it.

I'd found my home at last.

"I'll see that you get put on those mailing lists," Budd said, as I headed out the door to go up and meet Pop in his office.

He kept his word too. Within the month I was receiving blurrily mimeographed fanzines from places like Chattanooga, Tennessee, Blanchard, North Dakota, and Greenwich Village, New York City.

Others later arrived in the family mailbox from faraway places like Belfast, Northern Ireland, and Sydney, New South Wales, Australia.

So now I was a fan — a true fan.

Two weeks after my first Rocketeer meeting there I was right back there again in the health food store on the second floor of the Arcadia Building. This time I didn't need Pop to drive me in since it turned out that Tom

Powers lived only a few miles up the road from Lake Delmore and didn't mind swinging by to pick me up.

He drove a baby blue Volkswagen with a New York license plate and a *Support Your Local Police* bumper sticker.

"It helps cut down the speeding tickets," he explained.

Though the way the car ran — and the way Tom drove — I didn't see speeding as a significant point of worry.

My second Rocketeer meeting turned out pretty much the same as the first. Next to no time was wasted talking about science fiction. Instead, just about everything else under the sun seemed to get mentioned at least once and the verbal tennis racquets went swishing through the air like moths in a hurricane.

I was the one and only teenage Rocketeer. Next to me in age came Tom, who was probably around twenty-five. (When I asked he said twenty-seven but a couple meetings later somebody else asked and he said twenty-three.) The rest others were all past thirty, including Eva Jones, who was a good sixty or more.

And no girls. Just some older wives — like Melanie Champion — and Eva. In fact, in my years as a fan, I never met a single female fan under the age of twenty.

"It's the science part of science fiction that scares them off," Tom theorized one evening as we rolled sedately toward downtown Seamount on meeting night. "Have you ever known a girl who could tell a logarithm from a log boom?"

"Well, yes," I had to admit.

"Who?"

"A girl I know in school."

"You ought to bring her around then. She sounds like a prospect. She read science fiction?"

"Some," I said.

"Then you definitely ought to bring her to a meeting."

I said I'd think it over. But I didn't — not right then. For whatever reason it just wasn't a subject I wanted to raise with Katy Cross.

The first few times Tom came by the house to pick me up I hurried out and met him in the yard. I wasn't quite ready to introduce him to the family — or vice versa.

"You know, most never come back for a second meeting," he mused, when he came to

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pick me up for my third meeting.

After that I let him knock on the front door. Pop was in the basement working and the kids glued to TV couldn't have cared less. Mom wandered in from the kitchen and looked him over.

"Charlie tells me you read science fiction too," he said.

"Well...some of his books."

"You ought to come to a meeting."

I could feel my Adam's apple topple the length of my body and drop through my shoes.

"Don't ever do that again," I said, as we drove off. "Please."

"Do what?"

"Ask my mother to a meeting."

He laughed.

But he never asked her again either.

It wasn't until what must have been my seventh or eighth meeting — I know it was after the presidential election in November because everybody was making Kennedy jokes already but before Christmas because we always skip-ped the meeting that week — when the door banged open around eight-thirty and the room fell silent as a tomb as in walked the weirdest looking man I'd ever seen in my life.

Up till then anyway.

Budd, who was sitting closest to me, let out a low moan that seemed to emanate from a deep hidden spot within his soul. "Oh, good Christ," I heard him murmur. "It's Walter goddamn Wunderly."

"Budd, be nice," Melanie whispered, from across the table.

Eva Jones broke into a welcoming smile.

"Why, Walter my dear, we've been wondering where you've been."

"And praying," muttered Budd. "And hoping."

"Hush," Melanie said.

The weirdest looking man I'd seen in my life stood barely five feet tall — I was a bone scrawny 5'11" myself and still growing — and he wore...well, not exactly a robe and not really a cape either but something loose made out of red velvet that was a cross between the two. The hemline drooped past his knees. Where it met a pair of dingy long woolen socks. And sandals.

He didn't appear to have trimmed his hair or shaved his beard in at least a year. And nothing was combed. Neither hair nor beard. It was all a crazy thicket, a bristling bush.

And he smelled. Though it was hard to be sure because of the bucket of Old Spice he'd bathed in. I recognized the fragrance since it was Pop's favorite too.

Then he marched straight up to where I was sitting and laid a hand on my shoulder.

And squeezed. Hard.

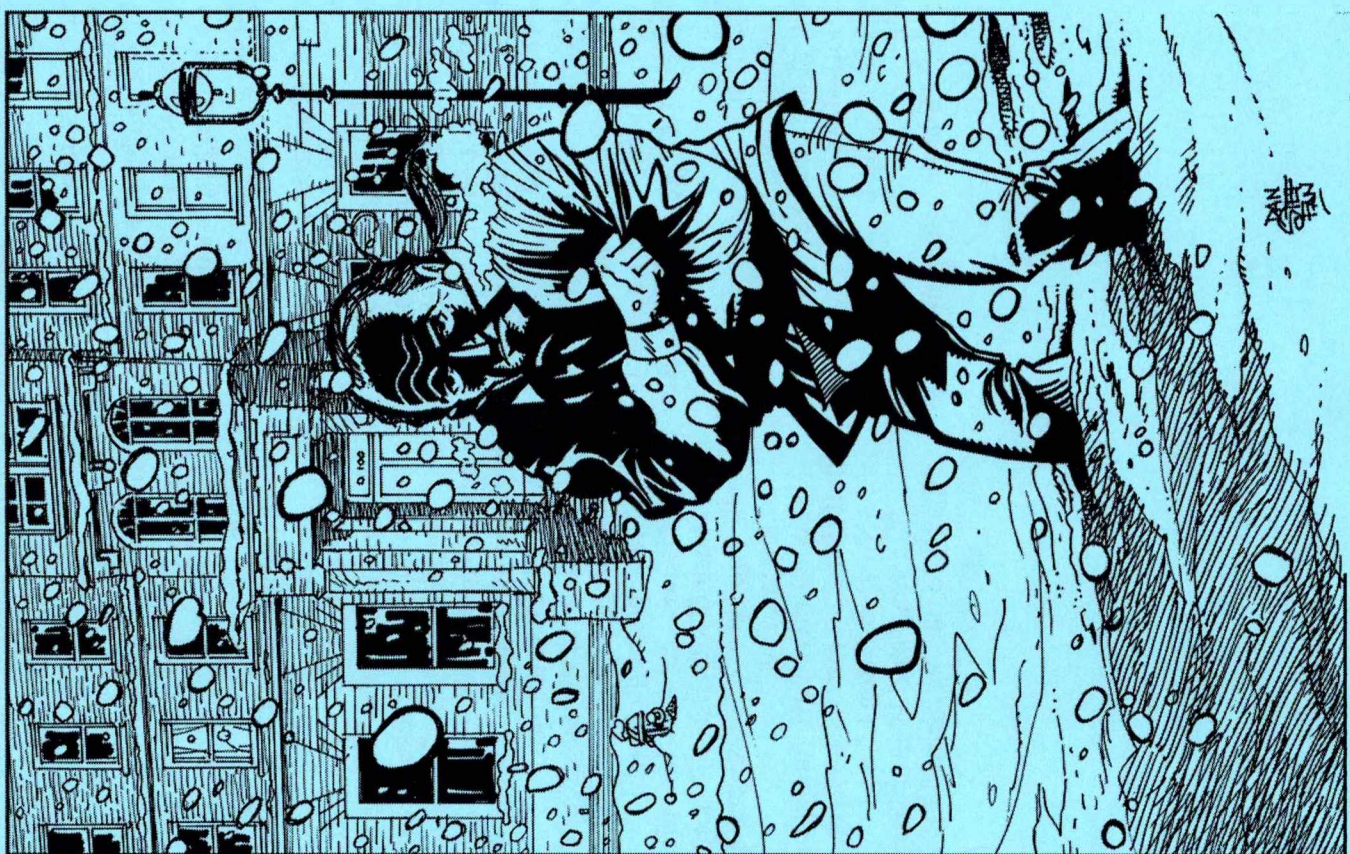
"My boy," he said, his voice as unexpectedly deep as the bottom of an ink well, "you have to answer one question for me."

"I — yes...sir?"

"Wunderly, leave him alone," said Budd, half rising up out of his chair.

"No, Budd, don't."

"Do you," said Walter Wunderly, speaking directly to me, "believe in the cosmic mind or not?" ■



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**I** wrote the first half of this during a three-week vacation from my day job. I always took three-week vacations because it took me that long to get the whole job thing washed out of my brain. I think it was during this same vacation when I gave up serious drinking and ran nineteen miles in 95-degree heat along the Green River where America's most prolific serial killer once dumped the bodies of his victims. The second half of the story took longer to write, invariably the case with me. The first halves are pretty much there at my fingertips when I sit down to write but after a certain point everything turns murky like a sudden descent of fog and I have to feel my way forward by instinct and touch. I did try peddling this to a couple professional markets without success. Too incestuous, I suppose, or a lead character who says "fuck" every fourth word is off-putting or else pro editors either don't get or don't much appreciate the joke. Irony and science fiction don't mix, somebody once warned me. Later John-Henri Holmberg translated and included the story in a Swedish anthology along with more conventional work from the likes of Silverberg, Swanwick and Spinrad. I got paid \$100US. I took the check to the tribal casino just north of here and blew it in less than an hour playing craps. My original inspiration was Michael Moorcock's "Behold the Man." I was going to write a quick little parody and call it "Behold the Fan." Certain characters like Burton Arbogast and Hapgood Snails would reappear in other stories — some written and some not, some published in fanzines, many not. My own private alternate history of the twentieth century science fiction field. I don't maintain a chart on a sheet of butcher paper nailed to a wall like Heinlein and his future history. It's there in my head though.

## Sense of Wonder

### Prologue

"Die, Gernsback, die!" I hiss.

With my guts jammed in my throat like a palsied python I shove my revolver right smack straight into the drooling, slack-mouthed visage of the crazed maniac cowering in front of me, his eyes bugged like frogs in a soup, the lips like two skinned mackerels.

He simpers senselessly back at me, tongue flapping like an eel. Spittle spattles his chin like crocodile urine. I tighten my finger kangaroo-like on the trigger.

"Pussy," babbles Hugo Gernsback, father of science fiction. "Cunt, prick, big hairy balls."

I can't hold myself an instant longer.

I fire at the egg-glazed whites of his eyes.

### ONE

**T**he name's Frap. Charlton H. Frap.

My friends call me Charlie.

Except that I ain't got no friends.

(Not really — that's a gag.)

I'm a fan. A science fiction fan. (Is there any other kind?) Just about ever since I can remember my entire life has been totally wrapped like a bright red bandana around the solitary beaming flagpole of the ever lovin' blue-eyed science fiction field.

I'm in love with it. Literally. More than I've ever loved anything in my life. Girls, gods,

gladiolas, goldfish, (bars of) solid gold. You name it: anything and everything. Science fiction has, I truly believe, provided my life its sole meaning. It's given me a place in the cosmos I can call home and where I know if I crawl inside and pull my legs in after me no mundane clod is going to dare hassle my ass.

How it began: When I was eleven years old my best buddy Dougie Fogarty and I were down at the old Cuyahoga school yard one hot August night, lying flat on our backs in the new mown grass like a couple ducks floating



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in a pond, white tee shirts, rolled-up jeans, smoking Lucky Strikes and staring at the sky. We both saw it at the same time: the orange-white flaming light, bright as the eye of God, zipping nonchalantly through the starry firmament like it had a will of its own, the speed and precision of a bullet fired from a gun.

"What the hell's that?" drawled Dougie.

Me, I knew.

"Flying saucer," I said.

"Don't look like no saucer, Charlie."

"They never do, Dougie"

"From outer space, huh?"

"The deepest, the darkest, the blackest."

"There's monsters inside?"

"Nope. Entities. Real live alien entities."

A split second later, like spit in the eye, the saucer was gone.

I never saw its like again. But from that moment on I knew one thing for sure. We ain't alone in the universe. We got company. And just like us, too. Maybe better than us.

An important thing to know.

After that schoolyard night with Dougie I stopped going to church. (Not that I ever went that much to begin with.) I didn't stop believing in God though. Heck, even Arthur C. Clarke believes in God. I think. Though the one time I met him face to face at a COSFO party in the mid-'60s I didn't have the nerve to ask.

But I'd just found a new way to worship Him. (God, I mean, not Clarke.)

It was called science fiction.

I became a fan.

My half-brother Sidney, who was already in high school and captain of the football team and as popular as a joint at a hippie conclave, took me to see the movie version of *The War of the Worlds*. That's the one, if you don't know it, that's even sort of scary today. On the walk back home Sid kept grabbing my shoulder and pointing at the sky: "There's one there! Look, Charlie! There's another! A light! A meteor light! Eiiiiyeee! Eiiiiyeee!"

Me, I didn't so much as quiver an eyeball. Why should I? I'd already seen the real thing.

Men from Mars — huge fucking deal. Try scaring me with a moose in a see-through penguin suit, why don't you?

After that I went and saw every monster movie that came to Cleveland: *The Thing from Another World*, *The Beast from 20,000 Fathoms*, *King Kong* (revival), *Son of Kong*

(double bill), *Tarantula*, *The Deadly Mantis*, *Them!* (giant ants), *The Mole People*, *Forbidden Planet* (good!), *Frankenstein* (another revival), *Dracula* (ditto), *The Horror of Dracula* (remake), *The Curse of Frankenstein* (also ditto).

And so on.

One thing I want to make clear. Except for (arguably) *Forbidden Planet*, none of these pictures was truly science fiction. In true science fiction it's axiomatic that the science make sense according to present day knowledge. You can't have anything occur that's flatly impossible. Like the giant ants in the movie *Them!* Due to the Law of the Inverse Square as formulated by Sir Isaac Newton (and later Einstein), any ant as big as the ones in the movie would collapse under its own sheer mass. That's how come whales, the largest animal on the face of the earth, live in the deep ocean. So they can float. Like turds in a tub.

I also read a lot of science books, searching for anything I could find that dealt with outer space travel.

One time when I was ten years old I went around all day with bricks strapped to my shoes because I'd read that on Jupiter a person's body weight is eight times what it is on the earth and I wanted to get a feel for it.

In time I got around to reading my first ever real science fiction book.

It was *Red Planet* by Robert Heinlein. You know the one. The kid growing up on Mars with his Martian pet, Willis, who turns out to be a higher form of Martian life in a sort of embryonic phase.

I read all of Heinlein's other books out of the school library: *Between Planets*, *Citizen of the Galaxy*, *Farmer in the Sky*, *Starman Jones*, *Space Cadet*, *Tunnel in the Sky*. I think the last remains my all-time personal favorite.

I found and read other books by other authors in the library too: Isaac Asimov and Ray Bradbury, Alan Nourse and Lester del Rey.

I stumbled upon Arthur C. Clarke's *The City and the Stars* in one of the paperback racks in the big liquor store on Superior where my stepdad stopped on his way home from work every evening. (He was a dental technician and practicing alcoholic.)

That's also where I discovered another whole entire rack devoted to digest-sized

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science fiction magazines: there was *Astounding*, *Galaxy*, *Amazing*, *Infinity*, *Venture*, *Future*, *Fantastic Universe*, and *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction*.

Then I found out about a second-hand magazine shop off Euclid where you could buy old pulps, some of them dating back to the 1930s. The entire store smelled of must and dust and ancient antiquity. It bore a sweet, sickly stench that filled your nostrils and stuck there like a pot of glue. The proprietor was an old man in a green eyeshade and round pink eyeglasses named Pops Shue, who I don't think ever read a word in his life.

Pretty soon I was reading everything I could find anywhere that was remotely science fiction.

I was hooked. Like an addict. With a fat green monkey on my back named Earl. I couldn't budge free.

Most all this took place in the spring, summer and fall of 1957. I wouldn't mention the date except that time is critical in this story. Time is what this narrative is all about.

Now let me skip ahead a bit and tell you about the first time I was ever sexually molested.

## TWO

**D**ecember 17, 1925.

New York City, New York.

Picture it. The President of the United States is Calvin Coolidge, the king of England is George V, the heavyweight champion of the world is Jack Dempsey, the best baseball player alive is George Herman Ruth (even if he did have a shitty year the season before, the Yankees finishing seventh). Valentino is alive, Rockefeller is rich, Jolson is singing, Satchmo is blowing, the stock market is soaring, and Adolf Hitler is a fruitcake with a Chaplin moustache who nobody except a couple prescient foreign correspondents has ever heard of.

A heck of a goddamn glorious time to be alive, you'd think.

Except for the howling blizzard to beat holy hell through which I am presently trudging like a hog in wingtips down the middle of a deserted Manhattan boulevard on my way to the editorial offices of the Experimenter Publishing Company, Hugo Gernsback, president and editor-in-chief.

A little background here: Gernsback, a Luxembourg-born gentleman of forty-one

years, presently publishes a monthly, *Science and Invention*, largely devoted to the still nascent field of radio electronics. As early as 1911, with his own short novel *Ralph 124C41+*, Gernsback has evidenced a genuine enthusiasm for the sort of scientific based fiction originally made popular by Jules Verne and H.G. Wells. On occasion Gernsback has printed such tales — by himself and kindred souls — in his science magazines. These have proven surprisingly popular with his readers and Gernsback has lately announced plans to launch a new monthly devoted exclusively to such fiction. This new magazine will be called *Scientifiction*.

(As a matter of fact, under pressure from distributors Gernsback will soon change the title of his embryonic publication to the more clearly commercial *Amazing Stories*. He may or may not be aware of this yet, hopefully not, that being the main reason why I am here in New York City at this particular point in time nearly twenty years prior to my own birth.)

In the pocket of my plaid jacket I grip, as cold to the touch as a Bowie knife, a camera. (A Kodak Brownie, believe it or not, a good thirty, forty years old, the only camera Arbogast seems to own; this man, Mr. Science fucking Fiction himself, who you'll get to meet formally below, is not exactly what one would call *au courant*. He sleeps in a flannel night-shirt, too, and cuts mimeograph stencils for his fanzine *Blight* on a Royal standard typewriter.)

Taped to my chest, like a tit gone flat, throbs a portable tape recorder.

Or throb it would if I had it turned on, which right now, since there isn't another human being anywhere around and thus about as much life to record in this New York City 1925 as on the ancient seabeds of the dying red planet Mars, would be pretty damn dumb of me.

So on I trudge, my poor frozen fingers, even buried in my pockets and wrapped snugly around the Brownie, threatening to snap off in my fists.

I'm pretty convinced there has to be an icicle dangling from the tip of my nose.

My lips could French a horny snowman and in the process grow warm.

My toes — you don't want to hear about my toes. I can't feel them anyway.

As for my ears — what ears? Feel them,

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heck. I can't even remember what part of my head they're attached to. And no, I didn't think to bring anything with me as sensible as a knit cap anymore than I thought to bring gloves. Who would have figured on a blizzard just because it's mid-December and New York City, New York? You might think the mad genius N. B. Norton (another character yet to come) would have considered that far ahead, flipped through some newspaper files, looked up a local weather report. A fairly basic precaution for everyday time traveling, right? But no, sir, not fucking him. Not fucking us. We're all too brilliant for that.

Do I sound bitter as a chunk of Limburger cheese?

Just then another nasty thought pokes me like a stick in the eye. What if old man Hugo isn't home? What if him and his whole damn Experimenter Publishing Company decided to shut down for a snow day?

I first landed here in 1925 in Central Park right back of the pond. That part we did plan out in advance. It seemed the safest, quietest place to arrive. "A straight shot from there to the E.P. offices," murmured Arbogast, grunting deep in his pipestem throat, gazing down at the Manhattan borough map stretched out on the stovetop between us. "Perfect — absolutely perfect."

A straight shot for him maybe — he isn't here in this blizzard — a frozen cookie ass for me.

I take a glance at my watch — or my chronometer as we chrononauts call it, hooah! — and see it merrily ticking away. Three forty-seven. Christ. Already. Trudging through all this goddamn snow — and, yes, me in my navy blue sneakers — has decidedly slowed me down. I want to be able to get this over with and be back in the park before nightfall.

Even if they haven't invented muggers in 1925, I'm holy goddamned if I'm going to try finding Norton's Way Back Device in the weeds in the dark.

Just then, like a miracle from on high, a pigeon shits on my head.

I lift a bone-frozen hand to wipe away the goo.

And that's when I see it.

The building! Gernsback's building! The Experimenter Publishing Company! The golden pot at the end of my shimmering science fiction rainbow!

I hear church bells toll. Angels from on high sing hosannas of joy. Etc.

I don't even bother wiping off the pigeon shit.

Let it freeze solid like the rest of me.

I'll be warm enough, soon enough. When I'm inside.

Thrusting my chest boldly in front of me, I plunge forward like an aardvark in pursuit of the great granddaddy of all fat plump ants.

I reach inside my shirt and give the tape recorder a gentle thumb flick.

On it comes.

Whirring!

Humming!

Throbbing!

Howdy, Mr. Gernsback, here comes Charlie Frap!

### THREE

**A**rbogast's the name. Burton T. Arbogast. Not mine — his. The guy I said I'd be telling you about.

So you're mumbling to the effect of how you think maybe you know him. The name makes a distant tinkling noise, like a firebell in the night, a cowbell on the moon, only you just can't place it in the here and now. Unless you're yet another died and gone to heaven science fiction fan like yours truly, in which event you know Burton Arbogast better than you know any man alive except for maybe the Pope in Rome, Ray Bradbury, Arthur Clarke, all of the above.

But for the rest of you: Burton. Arbogast. Mr. Science Fiction himself. The Number One Fan Face. The man with the world's biggest collection of everything written, seen, smelled, spat or smoked that might even remotely be called by that term. Where you've probably heard of him is every time *People* or *TV Guide* want to run a spread on "The Sci-fi Cult Phenomenon," usually tied in with the latest popular cable show, they send a stringer out to Cleveland to interview Arbogast so he can tell them some shit they didn't already know they knew.

Like that sci-fi's cool stuff.

Like that it appeals most directly to the wonderment of the adolescent boy.

Like that sometimes those adolescent boys (like Arbogast) (or me) never grow up.

Like that it takes you in your imagination to places where only the dreams of the angels

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could have brought you otherwise.

And so on.

Arbogast first chanced upon the world of science fiction one late night in 1938 when he was six years old and his old man came stumbling into the big white shingle house on the east side of Cleveland that he, Arbogast's mother Pearl, and young Burton the boy shared, clutching in his mitt the August issue of *Astounding Stories*.

Arbogast's father's father had been one of John D. Rockefeller's original partners in the Standard Oil Company and even after the old shark pushed him out the door in the 1880s he hung on to his original stock. So the son — with wife and child — lived off the dividends. Never had to work a lick in his life. And boozed like a salmon.

Which is why I describe him here as stumbling home that crucial 1938 mid-summer's night. Because, quite frankly, that seems to be what he did every night of the week. According to his son, that is. (The same son who, when Pops Arbogast kicked the pail, inherited the pile.)

As for that August 1938 *Astounding* supposedly clutched in the old man's drunken fist, don't ask. That's the part that's got to be taken on faith. Like the virgin birth. But Arbogast insists it's true and who am I to doubt his word at this late date? If I've heard him tell this tale fifty times, I've heard him tell it fifty times fifty. And it never alters. (He doesn't mention the drunken part, though — that's my own embellishment.)

And so old man Arbogast comes stumbling home from some nameless Lake Erie-side saloon, *Astounding Stories* clutched in hand, weaves an unsteady path through the darkened parlor, and plops one drunken foot smack down on top of one of young Burton's roller skates, lying where it has no good right to be.

Picture the rest: Mr. Arbogast shoots straight into the air like vomit fired at a toilet bowl and comes spinning back down to land — smack, blooey! — square on the back of his head, blood puddling in a pool.

That's right: deader than a doorknob. Old Mr. Arbogast.

The *Astounding Stories*, like a descending angel, flutters to the floor beside him.

The following morning an early rising Burton discovers lying on the parlor floor like

fungus on a log both his deceased Daddy and the form of literature which ever afterward would stand as his one true love and devotion in life.

The Freudians among us could untangle one big ball of string over that one, right?

But as for Arbogast — old Mr. Science Fiction himself — the only critical factor in this tale is that issue of *Astounding*. Cover by Hans Wesso(lowski). Lead story, "Who Goes There?" by Don A. Stuart. (In reality, editor John W. Campbell Jr. under a *nom de plume*.)

And so what of Arbogast ever afterward?

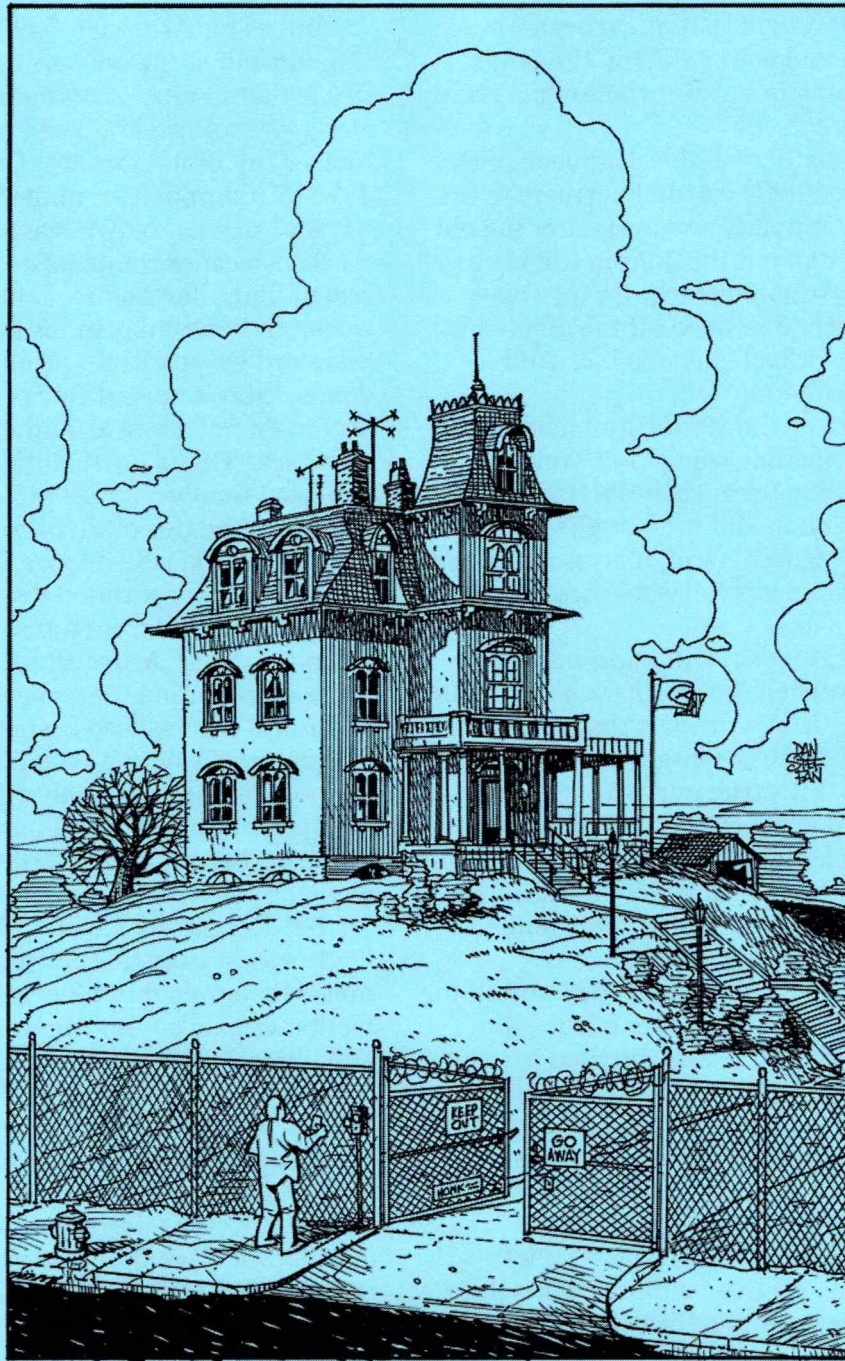
The decades rotate past like sprockets on a reel of film. Burton, like his father, never works an honest day in his life. With that Standard Oil stock still producing fat dividends, there's no earthly need, and Burton is nothing if not about as ambitious as a lizard on a rock. He's a good, dutiful son (Mom Arbogast finally shuffles off this mortal coil in 1961) and the two of them continue to inhabit the big old east side Arbogast manse as the rest of the neighborhood decays like a rotting corpse around them. In 1952 (according to actual receipts) Arbogast installs a chain link fence surrounding the grounds. In 1955 three strands of razor-sharp barbed wire are affixed to the top. In 1958 he electrifies the works. In 1960 he acquires a pair of matching Doberman pinschers, male and female, named Ralph and 124C, to prowl the grounds day and night.

But I'm getting ahead of myself.

It was in 1945 that Burton Arbogast, aged thirteen, founded the Cleveland Ohio Science Fiction Organization. He was already editor and publisher of one of the top science fiction fanzines of the period, *SpaceTime Gazette*, a leading member of both the Fantasy Amateur Press Association and the National Fantasy Fan Federation, and in regular correspondence with other devotees of the genre throughout the world including Forrest J. Ackerman in California, Bob Tucker in Illinois, and Walter Gillings in England.

It was at a COSFO meeting in 1962 at age 17 — me, not him, Arbogast was already an grizzled 30 — that I first met good old Mr. Science Fiction himself.

There'd been an article in the Sunday rotogravure section of the *Plain-Dealer*. Arbogast and his amazing collection of science fiction and fantasy which filled eight rooms of his



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large Eastside home. An address was given for the local SF club. Naturally, I wrote away for information.

At only my third COSFO meeting Arbogast sidled up to me and asked in a hushed, surreptitious tone that sounded like his throat was seeped in phlegm if I was interested in dropping by one afternoon and examining his collection.

I'd just got out of high school. My stepfather wanted me to join the Navy. My mother said I needed to find a job and, goddamn it, right away. They didn't have any programs back then to pay your way through college. My life seemed stretched like a flaccid rubber band ahead of me, like frog shit mixed with yesterday's black gravy.

So I told Arbogast, sure, I'd see him Sunday at ten.

And thus, bus transfer clutched talisman-like in hand, there and then I appeared at Arbogast's electrified gate, tinkling the bell.

The man himself emerged from inside the white shingle house, a bone-thin, already graying man with the skinniest lips I've ever seen on a human and a patchy goatee beard to conceal his lack of chin. (A "beatnik beard" we would have called it back then.)

"Have any difficulty finding the place?" he inquired throatily, escorting me through the gate. ("They don't bite," he added, meaning the two dobermans. "Down Ralph! Down 124C!")

"Ever seen so many Negroes in your life?" he inquired as we maneuvered through ankle-deep dead grass to the door. "They really taking over everything anymore, aren't they?"

A quarter-hour later we were huddled like bugs under glass in the open basement where Arbogast maintained the most valuable elements of his collection: his original Lovecraft Arkham House editions, his Edgar Rice Burroughs memorabilia, his complete files of *Weird Tales* and *The Thrill Book*. I was seated on a big plush red velvet couch that struck me as something out of an A. Merritt fantasy novel.

Arbogast laid his hand on my knee.

I was clutching in my hands an original chapbook printed for the premiere engagement of the original Tarzan serial starring Elmo Lincoln.

His hand edged up to my thigh. "You'll like this, Charlie," he whispered, loosening

my belt.

I let him slide my zipper down.

He gave me a pinch.

Not that I did. Like it, that is. Or dislike it either. My personal agenda of the moment concerned itself not with matters of like or dislike. But I was no dummy. Since birth I'd always been able to sense another person's need the way a shark can scent blood.

"I'm going to call a cop," I said when he finished.

"No — please."

We came to a quick understanding.

Two days later I moved into Mom Arbogast's old first floor bedroom, shoving aside enough duplicate issues of *Startling Stories* and *Captain Future* to make room for me and my bedroll.

I had a job. My first. Mom and Stepdad were as proud as buttons on a clown's waistcoat. (And damn glad to get me out of the house.) I was now the newly proclaimed Assistant Curator-in-charge of the Burton T. Arbogast Special Collection of Science Fiction, Fantasy, and Related Memorabilia.

In payment Arbogast picked up my room and board and slipped me \$5 a week pocket money. Hey, I should complain? It was a living.

Theodore Sturgeon wrote a series of stories in *Galaxy* back in the 1950s about what he called Synergy. Symbiosis. That was how me and Arbogast related. Each of us making use of the other to obtain something he could not have acquired on his own.

For me: shelter from the shit that was life.

For him: no pulling of hard time at a state prison.

It was a relationship founded upon mutual want and need. (Like all relationships.)

And it continued on pretty much right up to the point where the story I'm herein relating commences.

#### FOUR

**T**he doorman looks Irish.

Shanty Irish.

His wart-encrusted nose in a wood block face glistens as shiny and bright as Rudolph's snout come Christmas Eve.

He smells of cheap whiskey, the stem of a jug protruding from his uniform pocket like a thumb from a fist.

"Elevator working?" I ask, giving a snap of

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the chin.

"Self service, lad. Boy went home early today."

"Anybody home upstairs?"

"A few hearty souls."

"Experimenter Publishing?"

"Ah, the lunatic kraut?" He beams and weaves, then shakes his head. "There's somebody up there, I believe."

"I'll just go up and see, then."

"Fourth floor. But aren't you a tad young, my lad?"

"I am?"

"For the kraut's unholy wares."

"You mean, science fiction?"

"Call it as you will."

"Someday we'll all be living in it, pal."

"Perhaps, lad," he says, his lowered eyes taking on a dreamy haze. "Perhaps rightly so."

The elevator doors glide softly shut like a glove around a hand.

Moments later the elevator lifts me on high.

## FIVE

**T**ears bunched in the corners of his eyes like wildebeest on the African veldt and trickled down his face like midget waterfalls. "We're broke, Charlie," Arbogast gasped. "As broke as two promises at the end of a fat lie."

"What are you talking about? What about the Standard Oil?"

"Sold," he hissed.

"What? When?"

"Over the years. Not all at once. Starting — I don't know — starting around 1970. I knew I shouldn't have voted for that thief Nixon. It all began with him. First there was the oil shortage and then the oil glut and the stock kept declining in value. I was frightened, Charlie, frightened like a seahorse. I pan-icked. I told you from the beginning I was never meant to live in this horrible, dreadful mundane world."

"If you're telling the truth, you may not have that much fucking longer to live anyway."

"Charlie, please. Show some compassion. I meant no harm. I only wanted us to continue to live in the style to which we'd grown accustomed."

I couldn't help myself. I swung my head and took a long hard look at the tangled piles of moldering pulp paper surrounding us as there we sat, chatting away like two magpies

in what was supposed to be a kitchen. Except you couldn't see the stove for the stacks of *Famous Fantastic Mysteries*.

"Some goddamn style."

"And now we're broke. I...I...Charlie, what are we ever possibly going to do?"

"You can get a job."

I knew that would throw him for a big fat loop: "Me, Charlie? But who would ever hire me?"

"McDonalds, Burger King, maybe the corner gas station. I think it's a Chevron. Tell them about your great-grandpa and the Standard Oil Company."

"Charlie, you're jesting."

"I've never been more serious in my life. Either you get a fucking job or else — " I waved an arm " — you'd better start selling some of this crap."

"Crap?" he swung his head like a lost child. "What crap?"

"Your stupid collection."

"But, Charlie, don't you believe in science fiction anymore?"

"Sure, I do. But I believe in being able to eat, too."

"Charlie, I — I have a confession to make." His voice grew hushed again. I saw him swallow hard, like python digesting a brick. Momentarily, I was tossed back in time to my first visit ever to the house, when he'd given me that first dose of molestation. "I've already sold off the majority of the duplicates. It's — it's what's supported us the last two years. I tried to do it surreptitiously, a few items at a time, without your noticing. But they're gone, Charlie. There's nothing left to sell."

"I wouldn't be so damn sure about — " Just then the telephone rang.

## SIX

**T**he office stinks.

But it's a stink I know well, a scent which has long pervaded my life like an all-encompassing fog.

The smell of wood pulp paper.

There's a girl in the anteroom seated in back of a wooden desk. A good-looking girl too, with cobalt black hair, eyes like a pair of baby blue marbles, lips as red as a baboon's bottom, a round pert smooth chin.

She looks incredibly like the silent film actress Louise Brooks. One of Arbogast's favorite videos is something called "Pandora's

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Box” with her in it. (Needless to say, he’s a huge fan of the silent cinema. His all-time favorite movie is *Metropolis*. I swear he jerks off (in private) to the false robot Maria.)

“Good afternoon, sir. May I help you?”

I fight for words. Let me tell you something: hanging around science fiction fans all these years I haven’t seen many girls as gorgeous as this one. If any.

So who gives a shit if — looked at from one angle — she’s a half-century older than me?

I plop my rear end as delicate as a fawn on a corner of her desk and meet her gaze head-on, like a bull rhinoceros. “That depends, Sweetie,” I drawl.

“Depends upon what, sir?” Her voice is like the moan of an ostrich in heat. (Or what I’ve long imagined such a cry would be.)

“Depends on what your name is.”

“I’m Misty LaTour.”

“And I’m Charlie Frap.” I put my hand out to shake. “So what are you doing for dinner tonight, Misty baby?”

Her touch is a jolt of electricity. I gasp.

”With this dreadful storm, I’ll likely eat in.”

“Mind if I join you?” I leer. “Maybe we can eat together, both at — ”

There’s a sudden loud noise from the back. As if somebody has just dropped an unabridged dictionary on the floor.

Thud!

Misty LaTour doesn’t blink a gorgeous blue eyeball, though.

The noise jolts me back to reality. A dinner date? Who am I kidding? Christ, this is 1925. And it’s getting damn late.

Misty’s wearing a perfume that tickles my nostrils with the scent of an Arabian mare. Me, I’m as intoxicated as a stallion.

I struggle to restrain my brute animal instincts. There isn’t time. “I’m here to see the editor-in-chief,” I manage to blurt out.

“Oh, you don’t mean Papa?”

“Papa? Hugo Gernsback? I didn’t know he had kids.”

“I’m adopted.”

“Well, I’m, uh...” — the cover story the three of us, me and Hapgood and Arbogast, concocted between us starts coming back to me — “I’m a writer. And I heard about this new magazine of his, this *Scientifiction*. I think it might be straight up my alley. I’m a big fan of Wells and old Jules Verne.”

“I’m afraid Papa isn’t in,” she says softly. For some reason the baby blue glow has gone out of her eyes. She looks sad as a lost caribou.

“Because of the storm?”

“I’m afraid...afraid Papa won’t be in for...for some time.”

There’s another loud noise from the back. Another dropped Webster’s.

Thud!

I swing my head questioningly in that direction.

“Dr. Sloane,” she says, by way of explanation.

Sloane! T. O’Conor Sloane. Gernsback’s managing editor on *Amazing Stories*. “He’ll have to do,” I say, springing up from the desk and darting toward the door in the wall. After all, I remind myself, it’s not Gernsback personally I’m after. It’s his latest creation.

“Wait, Mr. — “

But she’s too late. I’m through the door like an angel entering heaven.

On the other side, T. O’Conor Sloane — or who I assume must be Sloane — a tall, stiff as an arrow, straight-backed man with a full gray beard, peers at me blearily from behind wire-rimmed spectacles.

He’s standing next to a big wooden desk.

Between his hands he grips a large book, what I recognize as nothing less than Webster’s Unabridged. Standing there, staring at me, Sloane drops the book on the floor.

Thud!

“Huh?” I manage.

“Scientific experiment.” He stoops down to pick up the dictionary. “What I hope will be the lead piece for our new magazine.”

“*Scientifiction?*”

“What’s that?” He gives me a sudden quick glare.

“Your new magazine.”

“Oh, that’s been changed.”

He lets the dictionary go again.

Thud!

“But Gernsback — “

“Gernsback?” he says, cocking an eyebrow. “The poor sad fellow. Bonkers, I’m afraid. Totally bonkers.” He stoops down to retrieve the dictionary. “So what would you say? Six-tenths of a second? That’s what I make it as. Did you know that Galileo himself once dropped a grapefruit from the top of the Leaning Tower of Pisa?”



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Bonkers? Gernsback? But that he can't be. "But I came here to see Mr. Gernsback."

"Then try the asylum. In Brooklyn. He's been confined there nine months now. Mad as a blue banana. A hopeless case, it appears."

Sloane dumps the dictionary on his desk and picks up a sheet of paper from another pile. He holds it up to me.

"So what do you think, young man?"

I stand there with my mouth wide open in an oval as big as the moon.

It's a magazine cover proof. I immediately recognize the sturdy, archaic, quasi-Germanic style of Frank R. Paul.

The cover depicts a view of the Leaning Tower of Pisa.

Squinting, I can make out the shadow of a round object spiraling toward the earth below.

A grapefruit?

The title of the magazine reads: *The Practical Experimenter*.

"So what do you think, young man?"

Sloane repeats. "Don't you agree this ought to thrash that *Scientifiction* tomfoolery all to Hades and back? Voyages to the moon indeed. On a day like today when we can't even manage to get to the Bronx."

And he giggles.

It's only then that I realize the old geezer's drunk as a bull moose.

His expression suddenly stiffens. "Say, what do you want here anyway? You're not with the police, are you? We paid you fellows off last week."

"No, I — I'm a writer."

His eyes narrow. "What kind of writer?"

"Fiction." I almost say *science fiction* but catch myself first. There is no science fiction here — not yet. "Stories."

"Then you've come to the right place."

He's back at his desk again, holding up yet another cover proof.

This time my jaw damn near hits the floor.

*Sexology*. That's what the cover says. And the illustration: I recognize Misty LaTour.

Naked. Stark naked. Limbs akimbo on a red velvet couch.

And, yes, it's Frank R. Paul again.

"We've got a 5,000-word gap in next issue," Sloane says. "Quality fuck fiction is always welcome here at the Experimenter Company."

## SEVEN

As I was saying earlier, just then the telephone rang.

Now I know that sounds way too convenient to be true and I wouldn't necessarily buy in on it myself if somebody came up to me and said hey, this was utter fact.

But that's the way I remember it happening.

The telephone rang.

*Riiiiing, riiiiing, riiiiing.*

(Oh, sure, it might have been an hour or two later — maybe even a whole day — but that's not the point: the telephone did ring. Honest Injun.)

*Riiiiing.*

Arbogast crossed over and plucked the receiver off the left front burner of the gas stove, shoving aside the August 1949 issue of *Fantastic Adventures* and an A.L. Burt illustrated edition of *The Beasts of Tarzan*. "Hello."

His voice altered instantaneously. "Hapgood," I heard him gasp. "Hapgood, how are you?"

And he made it sound as if he really gave a fat flying fig.

And in this one particular instance I knew he did.

The Hapgood on the other end of the line was none other than the Man Himself, Hapgood Snails. Yes, the very same. The Hapgood Snails who: author, painter, poet, actor, musician, producer, composer, director, carpenter, plumber, etc. And otherwise all-around genius. The most renowned graduate in history of our very own ever-lovin' blue-eyed science fiction field and (believe this or don't) also (like me) a one-time protégé of good old Mr. Science Fiction, the Number One Fan Face of All Time, Burton T. Arbogast.

The two of them had kept in touch over the intervening years since Hapgood, unlike most other successful escapees from the field, never saw fit to conceal his original scientific roots, though ever since the Worldcon incident in the middle seventies he stopped attending public fan functions.

(You've probably heard one version or another of what allegedly took place there. As an actual eye witness, I can confirm the following: a enormous waddling blonde femme fan dressed as an alien warrior huntress complete with brass brassiere and

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antlered helmet — and also, inexplicably, a pair of Mr. Spock ears — forced Hapgood into a freight elevator and there attempted to commit an act of physical violation upon his person, the instrument in question being a hard rubber dagger which she most violently wielded.

(And which was one hell of a sight to behold, believe you me, even after a group of us fans managed to break down the elevator door with a fire ax and rescue Hapgood from the proverbial fate worse than death. In any event, without meaning to brag, I was the cool-headed one who actually pulled the crazed huntress off her chosen prey. It turned out later she was an L.A. area costume fan who'd gotten hold of some of the bad acid that was making the rounds of the room parties the night before. "I thought he was a bull hog," she told anyone who would listen. "I really truly honestly did. A bull hog. Really.")

(And, no, please don't ask me what a bull hog is. Or why an alien huntress would want to violate one. With or without the rubber dagger.)

In any event, Hapgood turned more reclusive after that.

In the beginning, though, years back, the then thirteen-year-old Hapgood Snails had materialized like a gift from heaven at his first meeting of the Cleveland Ohio Science Fiction Organization in response to a mention of the club in Rog Phillips's fanzine review column in *Amazing Stories*. (The same magazine which, two years later, would publish Hapgood's first story.) They tell me that even then there was something about Hapgood the boy, something indelible that set him apart from the multitude of other teenage SF fans: a spark, a flame, a fierce gold glint in the eye.

Whatever.

Once when I'd been sneaking maybe a bit too hefty a dose from one of my hidden peach brandy flasks (I haven't mentioned those, have I? — well, go figure: anyway, there's got to be plenty of places to hide a bottle in a house filled with 17,500 books and magazines) I asked Arbogast straight out if he'd ever tried to fool around with Hapgood as he'd done with every other Cleveland boy fan including, as previously related, one Charlton H. Frap.

"Oh, my God, no!" he said, throwing a hand in front of his face in sheer abject dread. "For the love of all that's holy, no, no, no!

How can you even suggest such a thing? Laying a hand on Hapgood, that would be like — like soiling the Mona Lisa."

And, again, I believed him.

By the time he turned eighteen, Hapgood had published his fourteenth professional science fiction story, this one a lead novelette in *Galaxy* entitled "Erupting Centaurus," which not only brought Hapgood his first professional Hugo (he'd already won two for his fanzine *Blight*) but which is nowadays regarded as a breakthrough piece in adult-themed SF, the first story ever to deal realistically with alien/human sex. And I repeat for emphasis: Hapgood was then eighteen years old. I also repeat: he hadn't been molested by Arbogast. (That's a gag. Alien, human sex. Get it?)

And have I mentioned that he was as beautiful as a Grecian god? And an exact spitting replica of the movie actor Warren Beatty. From a very early age too, according to Arbogast. "Hapgood looked like Warren Beatty before anyone had ever even *seen* Warren Beatty," he confirmed.

By the time he turned twenty-five, Hapgood had left the science fiction field behind, propelling a swift orbit through the literary universe with the relentless velocity of a meteorite piercing the earth's ionosphere.

The rest is history.

For the past couple years Hapgood has been holed up in Los Angeles, where he now mostly resides when he isn't hanging out in Paris or Berlin, working on a screenplay for his remake of the D.W. Griffith silent masterpiece *Intolerance*, a four-part historical epic (with one far future segment) which he intends directing himself and which has been rumored to star Leonardo DiCaprio, Carrie-Anne Moss, Brad Pitt, ex-porn actress Annie Sprinkles and rock star Trent Reznor of the band Nine Inch Nails. The tentative budget is supposedly in the \$300 million range with Paramount, Fox, and Disney pooling their resources to pick up the tab.

And yet here he was now. On the phone. With Arbogast.

Who was saying (as I listened in): "Yes, Hapgood...yes, I'm very well indeed...thank you so very very *much* for asking. And how is the *Intolerance* project coming?"

I heard a murmur from the other end of the line: Hapgood no doubt. It gave even me

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a tiny little tingle to know I was actually hearing his voice.

"You've changed the title?" Arbogast again. "*The Human Condition*...yes, I like that...oh, I agree totally...it's much, much more contemporary. And sexier. And how's the weather out there, Hapgood?"

Another murmur.

Arbogast: "Yes, I know that's not why you called...a fan?...a fan is stalking you?...from Cleveland?...by phone?...Norton...N.B. Norton?...No, I'm afraid I don't...it's a new name to me, Hapgood."

More murmuring.

"Of course, Hapgood...I'll be more than happy to...you have an address?"

Arbogast made a scribbling motion in mid-air. Pencil and paper. Like an obedient armadillo, I hastened to fetch.

He jotted: *1814 Aldrich Avenue.*

Beneath he scribbled: *N.B. Norton*

"He's not a COSFO member, Hapgood. I'd know him if he were."

Murmurs.

Arbogast: "Certainly we'll take care of it...Charlie and I. Yes, Hapgood, I'll give him your best...I know you feel you owe him for the Worldcon thing...yes, I'm enormously pleased to hear from you, too...if there's anything else, I'll be sure to get back to you. Yes, good-bye. Good-bye, Hapgood. Talk to you again soon?"

*Click.*

He hung up the phone.

"That was Hapgood Snails," Arbogast said, his eyes rolling circles in his head, his cheeks and forehead as damp as washrags. "He'd like us to do him a personal favor."

"Did you tell him he could kiss my ass?"

Arbogast blanched.

"Hey, just kidding," I said.

## EIGHT

"So what favor?" I didn't bother asking. Show come, considering our most recent topic of conversation — that is our own precariously lousy finances — he hadn't hit up Hapgood for a loan. I knew his reply: something to do with the soiling of the Mona Lisa.

He said: "Some local fellow, apparently a fan of some sort going by the name of Norton —"

I shook my head in ignorance.

"— got hold of Hapgood's private phone

number and keeps calling him day and night. Even when he has the number changed, this Norton character uncovers the new one and starts the phone calls all over again."

"Hapgood say what about?"

"Something to do with a device this Norton claims to have invented and which only Hapgood can properly evaluate."

"Perpetual motion?" I guessed. "Another Dean Drive?"

"Not this time. It sounds more like a variant on the classic Wellsian time machine. Norton calls it his Wayback Device."

"I saw the show, too."

"Show?" Arbogast looked blank as a paper bag. (If it wasn't hardcore science fiction, the chances were he hadn't a clue. Mention *The Iliad* and you'd draw a blank, too.)

"Mr. Peabody. And Sherman. From the old Rocky and Bullwinkle show."

Arbogast still looked blank as a fig leaf. I let it ride.

"So what's Hapgood got to do with this Norton and his Wayback Device?" I asked.

"Hapgood says Norton keeps trying to bring up the old Time Rebels series Hapgood had in *F&SF* when Avram Davidson was editor. You remember, classic time travel pieces but with a surreal twist. Norton thinks they were the best, most realistic writings ever on the theme of travel into the past."

"They were. The novelette Silverberg had in *Galaxy* about the same time with the dinosaurs and shit, that was good too. But Hapgood's was hipper, which a lot of fans missed."

Including, I was sure, Arbogast.

He nodded anyway. "But pure fiction."

"Well, sure. Norton thinks otherwise?"

"I guess that's what we have to find out.

First that and then get him to leave Hapgood alone once and for good:

"What you mean 'we,' white man?" I inquired.

Arbogast didn't seem to get that reference, either — early comic book *Mad*.

I let it ride.

The next morning, pooling our resources like a couple racetrack touts with a line on a hot nag, we boarded a crosstown bus.

## NINE

Like baby marsupials cuddled in a pouch, Arbogast and I sat up front, taking up between us the whole of the sidewise seat

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directly in back of the driver in frail hopes that our proximity to authority would convince the various thuggish types on board to let us eventually disembark with our lives and sacred fortunes intact. (Hey, if you want to meet a bunch of folk you never in your life wanted to meet in the first place, take a trip on your local crosstown bus.)

The way the two of us dressed may have helped some to keep the riffraff at bay. Arbogast was making his usual fashion statement of chinos, broken-soled sandals, and a 1978 Midwescon souvenir teeshirt. Me, I wore my dingy blue work shirt, hacked-off-at-the-knee Levis, and matching blue sneakers.

Did I forget to mention? Arbogast was as bald as a beet. Me, I wore my frizzy black locks coifed in a banded pony tail.

Somehow intact and utterly unmolested, the two of us staggered off the bus at a corner dead across the street from the pile of soot-streaked shingles and boarded-up windows that appeared to be the home of one N.B. Norton. The address fit anyway. It wasn't the first time it had been brought home to me that there were neighborhoods on Cleveland's east side that made the one Arbogast and I inhabited look like the hills of Beverly by comparison.

Wishing I had a third eye in the back of my head like the alien in the bar in the famous Damon Knight story to keep watch on the pack of lounging crackheads on the corner, the two of us skirted a zigzag path through the piles of broken glass and rusty beer cans, the million or so crumpled up cigarette packs, the scattering of discarded condoms that looked recently used.

When we at last reached the front door of the alleged Norton domicile, Arbogast rang the bell.

It didn't work.

So I knocked.

There was a long wait.

Something thudded on the other side of the door.

I knocked again.

A bone-thin woman in a pink-and-purple flour sack dress hurled open the door. She could have been on either side of eighty years old. Rivulets of sweat puddled her skeletal physiognomy like pools in a forest.

"What you want, white trash?" she asked, amiably enough and despite being as white as a fresh carnation herself.

"Norton?" I managed to squeak. "N.B. Norton?"

"My little boy!"

"Your son?"

"Grandbaby." She swept suddenly aside, moving with the grace of a matador teasing a bull. "Come on in, fellows. One of you this Hapgood white trash he's been waiting for?"

"Well, we represent Hapgood Snails," I said.

"Don't say nothing 'bout the buck teeth thing, though. The child's a bit sensitive 'bout that part."

## TEN

The old lady guided us lemming-like through a veritable maze of dim, narrow, dust-choked, low-ceilinged, vaguely diseased hallways to a unexpectedly open, sun-splashed room at the rear of the house. And there on the floor knelt what I assumed had to be N.B. Norton.

He was damn near as bone skinny as his grandmother and dressed in a set of bib coveralls that closely matched her flour sack dress in both color and fabric. And when he lifted his head to gape at Arbogast and me a pair of dirty yellow buck teeth protruded walrus-like from his mouth.

Otherwise, he looked like a pretty average guy. If your idea of an average guy is the banjo-playing kid from *Deliverance*. All grown up and moved to the big city.

I half expected to hear him to say, "Yuk."

But he didn't. He didn't say a thing.

He just gaped at us.

In one knotty palm he clutched a big heavy crescent wrench, in the other a pair of needle-nose pliers. There were a couple of long-necked screwdrivers sticking out of the bib pocket of his coveralls.

It was Arbogast who finally snapped the silence. "Mr., ah, Mr. Norton, my colleague and I represent Hapgood Snails and we —"

Norton cut him off with a brisk head shake. "You ain't him." His voice was like a reedy snort.

"Ain't — aren't who?"

"Snails."

"Ah, no, but —"

"Ain't either of you look a fucking thing like that Clyde fellow in the movie."

"You mean Warren Beatty," I put in.

"That's the fellow. The one that looks like



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Snails.”

Norton had something clasped between his long bony knees. Something mechanical, a machine. I couldn't help trying to get a better look. It resembled a spider's web of black and red wires held together by nuts, bolts, and screws. The whole contraption glistened with a silvery sheen.

Norton saw where I was looking. “My Wayback Device,” he confirmed.

“I know. I saw the show, too.”

“What show?”

Arbogast took a tentative step forward, holding out both hands in front of him. “Mr. Norton, we're here to represent Hapgood Snails and to request that you kindly refrain from disturbing him further in the future.”

Norton lifted one albino-white eyebrow. The hair on the top of his head grew in tufts, a patch here, a patch there. It was impossible to guess at his age. “Snails told you to come down here and say that, did he?”

“Why, I — yes, yes as a matter of fact, he did.”

“Then tell him to come here and say it his own fucking self.”

I could see that a direct approach was getting us nowhere. I decided to try to try the opposite tack: indirection

“So what's the N.B. stand for?” I asked, in what I hoped was an amiable tone.

“It stands for No Bullshit,” he said. “And that means you, too, chubby boy.”

“Look, friend, we're just a couple of local science fiction fans who — “ Arbogast chose to try to put in at just that point.

“Fans.” Norton spat on the floor as if he'd just uttered a dirty word. “Pack of fans make a circus of geeks look cool as a sea breeze,” he observed.

I decided to let that one pass since I couldn't necessarily disagree.

He rose to his feet, all six feet, five inches of him. It took a while. He stooped to pick up the Wayback Device and then marched across the length of the room to where the hazy afternoon sun streamed through mottled window panes like urine through a sieve.

He set the machine down on top of a card table and gaped at us again. “Don't think it'll work, do you?”

“Well, I wouldn't — “

“Built the whole contraption in two nights, using nothing but an erector set and the brains

the good Lord blessed me with. And you and fucking Snails don't think it works.”

He was starting to make me feel guilty. “Hapgood's a busy man.” (And if you don't know what an erector set is, ask a guy over fifty; he'll tell you.)

“Want to see it work?” he asked.

“Why — “ I looked at Arbogast. “Why, sure.”

“Then don't shut your eyes.”

*Bingo!*

And he was gone.

Vanished.

Disappeared from the room.

*Ker-poo!*

And the Wayback Device had disappeared right along with him.

I tried to do what he said. Not shut my eyes. But I did blink. One time.

*Bingo!*

He was back again.

The Wayback Device, too.

There was something tucked underneath his arm..

He held it up to the sunlight.

A newspaper. *The Cleveland Plain-Dealer.*

Arbogast and I crept closer.

We read the headline.

### ***KENNEDY SHOT IN DALLAS***

“You old farts know when that was, don't you?”

Like puppets on strings, Arbogast and I both jerked our heads.

“November 22,” I said, “1963.”

“You got it on the button,” he said.

The *Plain-Dealer* was as fresh as the day it was printed.

“He could have had it hid in his pants,” Arbogast whispered.

But we both knew better.

“So it does — “ I began.

“ — work,” Arbogast finished lamely.

“You bet your sweet fucking buns it works,” Norton said. “You think I'd hassle a bright boy like Snails if it didn't?”

### **ELEVEN**

**O**f course that meant we had to go back home and think things over and since this isn't the main thread of the narrative but rather what Hapgood Snails writer-types would call the background exposition, let's

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squeeze up tiny up like a toad tonguing a fly and herewith quickly summarize a few basic facts for the record:

! We tell old No Bullshit Norton not to tell anybody else about his Wayback Device — please, oh pretty please — we'll be right back just as soon as we phone Hapgood Snails out in California to give him the general lowdown.

! We phone Hapgood and let him know this crazy turkey Norton really has invented a working time machine. No shit, sez Hapgood. I can hear female giggling in the background and a gush of running water. Well, keep in touch, fellas, sez Hapgood, clicking the phone.

! Arbogast and I put our heads together. Me, I'm imbibing peach brandy; him, he's sucking on a stogy-sized joint. (I didn't mention that either, did I? Burton Arbogast, pothead. Hey, think about it. It does sort of figure.)

We thereby arrive at a certain set of mutual conclusions.

These conclusions entail to wit:

1. Norton's Wayback Device works like a clockwork fucking orange. (Previously established, I acknowledge.)

2. We're flat fucking broke, me and him (Arbogast) both (ditto).

So take point two above and divide it by point one and what you end up with is yet another future possibility, namely:

*A method for achieving wealth beyond both our nuttiest dreams exists.* (Italics added for emphasis.)

Another fact I throw out at this time for whatever it's worth: All Arbogast and I really know from shit and a tree is science fiction.

You then take all the above, datum and possibility both, roll it up into one huge ball of earwax, hit it hard with a hammer, stand back, and let the shattered pieces topple to the floor.

So what it all means is:

The next morning finds the two of us, me and Arbogast, again riding that crosstown bus on our way to visit the brilliant, brain-big, bursting-with-talent genius of an inventor, Mr. N. B. Norton.

## TWELVE

**N**orton gave us a short lesson on how it worked.

"It's so dang fool simple even a couple of sci-fi nerds —"

"Please don't call it that," Arbogast broke

in softly.

"Don't call what what?"

"Don't call it sci-fi. We fans hate that."

Norton tossed his shoulders. "Okay, then, let's just say the Wayback Device is so goldarn simple even a couple scientific devotees like yourselves ought to be able to figure it out. What you do first is you pick it up and hold it in your hands. Then you press this lever here. The one painted fire engine red. Hold it down and count to five.

One...two...three...four...five... and — *zippo!* — you're gone. Like that. Then you just keep holding it down — the red lever, not the green, remember — and whatever you do, don't let go too soon because you're traveling through time and you don't want to accidentally blow up into a couple zillion pieces —"

This was where I broke in. "Excuse me. Blow up?"

"You don't want to land some time you already are. Two of the same body cannot occupy the same place at the same time. It's basic physics. What year were you born in?"

"1932," said Arbogast.

"Then you can't go back any later than that. And you, hoss?"

He'd taken to calling me "hoss." I hated it but thought it wiser not to immediately object.

"1945," I said.

"The same thing there with you."

I nodded.

"The Wayback travels at a rate of one day back through time for every ten seconds that passes for the fellow using it. So if you wanted to go back, say, one week — and you wouldn't 'cause you'd blow up if you did — then it'd take seventy seconds for you to get there. If you wanted to go back one year, it'd take 3,650 seconds or a shade over one hour. So you can figure on that: one hour for every one year."

"So then what you're telling us," Arbogast said, "is that yesterday, during your demonstration, it took you some forty hours to travel back to 1963."

"Right. And then another forty hours getting back here."

"Yet Charlie and I noticed nothing. For us it was a matter of microseconds."

"Sure. But you were here. I was there. Different places, different times."

"And you didn't get hungry?"

"It doesn't seem to work that way. Or

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thirsty either. I don't think you even get older."

"And there's no way of doing this any faster?" I put in.

"Oh, maybe," said Norton with a shrug. "But I'd have to tinker. And stopping the machine would be tougher. Unless you've got a few seconds lead, it can be hard getting the Wayback to stop right when you want it on an exact date."

"And how does that occur?" Arbogast asked. "The stopping, I mean?"

"Take your finger off the lever. What do you think?"

"And the green lever?" I chimed in. "What does that do?"

Norton gaped at me. "That's for the return trip. Coming back. Just push it down — the same as the red lever — and count to five. You don't have to hold it down this time. It'll get you back where you belong."

"What's the power source?" I asked.

"Power? I don't get you, hoss."

"What make it run? You know, fuel."

"Just batteries."

"What batteries?"

"The ones it runs on. Eight flashlight batteries. Evereadys. I got them from the Wal-Mart on sale."

I looked at Arbogast. And he was looking at me. Neither one of us was logically believing a single word. But we'd seen it. With our own eyes. We'd seen the newspaper from 1963. And the headline — crisp, clean, clear as a butterfly on a mountaintop.

Arbogast said: "What about travel into the future?"

"Come again," said Norton.

"Suppose one wants to visit 2199."

Norton grinned from ear to ear. "Are you goddamn crazy out of your head or what?"

"No," said Arbogast stiffly. "Not that I'm presently aware."

"Then what gives you the goofy idea you can visit some place that don't exist? The future ain't real, pal. It's still out there ahead of us. In a state of flux — pure temporal flux. Like kangaroos in a pickle jar. You can maybe picture it in your head. But it ain't real. It ain't happened."

Arbogast and I shrugged our shoulders. So much for a thousand and one science fiction tales from Wells's original *Time Machine* onward. Bye-bye, Morlocks.

I looked at Arbogast.

Arbogast looked at me.

"So when can we go?" I said.

"What you mean 'we,' white man?" said Arbogast.

### THIRTEEN

So it was just going to be me. I should have figured. Arbogast, like Asimov and Bradbury and Stanley Kubrick, to name three other visionaries of the future, refused to set foot aboard an airplane. Not surprisingly, a time machine didn't strike him as any more practical a means of travel.

I spent a lot of time talking to Norton, trying to get the whole thing down pat in my head.

Geography was also a major consideration, it turned out. The Wayback let you travel back through time but not through space. So let's suppose you wanted to visit the pyramids to watch them being built due to the fact that, like me, you were a big fan of the movie *Land of the Pharaohs* and you wanted to take a gander at what it had been like back then. Now the matter of boredom aside — having to stand there with the Wayback in your hands for fifteen years, just waiting to arrive — when you finally did get there you still wouldn't see much of anything except maybe a forest and a sparkling blue lake and, if you were really lucky, a tribe of Indians squatting around a fire, roasting a squirrel. Because you'd still be in Ohio — in what eventually was to become Cleveland. And the pyramids were nowhere near. Instead, they were off where they were meant to be, namely in Egypt, getting built. And so in order to see that you'd have to go there first — to Egypt — and then travel back through time.

So it wasn't going to be easy. Nothing really tremendous ever was, it seemed to me. And traveling back through time — since nobody had figured out how to do it pre-N.B. Norton — well, that had to be a pretty tremendous event.

For our first planned trip through time I had no need to leave good ol' Cleveland anyway. It was going to be a fairly lengthy jaunt though. All the way back to December 1929 to be precise. Arbogast and I had picked out the date between us.

So how come December 1929, you probably want to know.





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That was something Arbogast and I had decided that first night after we'd visited Norton and discovered that his Wayback actually damn well worked. Take all of history — and all of prehistory too for that matter — and put it at one's personal disposal. What to do? Fulfill a need, of course. But what, really, was our single greatest mutual need? Money. That was as brutally honest as we could put it. We were flat, full out, fucked up, totally, completely, entirely broke. Busted. So money it had to be. For the time being at least, forget historical research. Forget sight-seeing. All that was fine and dandy as a duck in mink but if you were in serious danger of starving to death, it was also a luxury, like a gold mine in the sky. Now science fiction — that was our game. It was the one and only thing either of us really knew diddly shit about. So we travel back through time. To the earliest days of science fiction. To when certain publications now worth hundreds, even thousands of dollars can be plucked hot off the press for a handful of pennies each. Arbogast was already a renowned collector. No-body would think twice if he started selling off an occasional valuable item. They'd just figure it was a duplicate.

I've got to admit the dollar signs like angels on wing fluttered through the firmament of my wild, maddened dreams that night. Arbogast's too, I'll bet.

We decided to start with the first, January 1930 issue of *Astounding Stories of Super-Science*.

Now we both realized a number of early SF books were worth even more than the first few magazines. To name just one, H.P. Lovecraft's 1939 posthumous collection *The Outsider and Others*, published in an original limited edition, could fetch upwards of \$2,500 on the open market. But Arbogast pointed out something I hadn't thought of. Limited edition meant just that — limited. Every single one of those copies of *The Outsider and Others* had eventually belonged to somebody. What if by going back in time and buying up, say, twenty copies of the first Arkham House edition Arbogast and I thus deprived twenty real people of copies they ought otherwise to have owned? Now chances were, if we did that, no big deal. But what if, just say, we grabbed a copy of *The Outsider and Others* that was otherwise destined to be owned by a man

named Horton Finkletter and this Horton Finkletter had a son named Buddy who needed an operation to cure his failing liver, and in 1954 Horton Finkletter reluctantly unloaded his personal copy of *The Outsider and Others*, then valued at \$500, to pay for the needed surgery and little Buddy lived and thrived and grew up to become president of the United States or maybe just shot one in the head but, anyway, did something important to alter history in a significant way.

Time travel was risky business. As dangerous as a snake in a seersucker suit. But I'd already read enough science fiction to know that. History could be changed, altered, rearranged like the pieces of a kaleidoscope. Norton fully agreed on the possible problems. Hell's bells, he mused, maybe it already had been changed. There'd be no sure way of knowing. It was like chaos theory. Kill a butterfly in Australia and cause a hurricane in Florida. It was as scary as a hyena on a bad drunk when you thought about it.

So I tried hard not to think.

But we forgot about *The Outsider and Others*, even though it would have been an easy snatch.

We set our sights instead on that first pulp *Astounding*, cover by Wesso, a single copy of which in tiptop condition might fetch upward of a cool \$1,000 in the current collectors market.

"Let's try for fifty copies," Arbogast ventured.

I did the math in my head: fifty copies! Fifty times one thousand equaling fifty thousand!

In the end without anybody along to help with the load twenty-five copies was the most I could tote back.

Twenty-five copies at twenty 1930 and earlier cents each (pennies surreptitiously acquired from various coin dealers around town) and you still had one hell of a sweet profit: twenty-five thousand bucks!

Give or take a few.

Now another thing you're probably wondering is how come Norton, a real Grade A asshole as I've painted him here, was so accommodating in letting Arbogast and me make use of his Wayback whenever and however we pleased.

Well, it was because of Hapgood Snails. Norton still wanted to meet the man. He was

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that much of a fan.

I guess you could say we strung him along. We assured him — like a spider blowing kisses at a moth — that we remained in continual intimate contact with Hapgood and the very minute he finally finished the first draft of his *Intolerance/Human Condition* script he'd be birddogging it to Cleveland to meet up with Norton and shake his hand and see for himself what a wonderful incredible marvelous invention the fabulous Wayback Device really was.

And on and on. All pure murky bullshit. We actually hadn't said another word to Hapgood. He was rich enough already. We were the ones in dire need of dough. We figured we'd save it up for a surprise.

"You know, hoss," Norton said, that last night as I was preparing to leave, "I ain't made mention of this before but I've written a few stories of my own."

"No shit," I said. "SF?"

"Why, sure."

"Time travel?" Arbogast guessed.

"Nope. Space adventure. Action stuff. But realistic. Like Doc Smith crossed with one of those New Wave weirdos like Ellison or Spinrad. You know, it sure would mean a lot to me to have Mr. Snails's opinion."

"And I'm sure he'll be only too happy to give it," I dissembled. "When he's got the free time, that is."

"And then maybe help me with finding a publisher. Or an agent maybe. I ain't been having much luck on my own."

"That too," Arbogast agreed. "I'm certain, knowing Hapgood, he'll be pleased to help."

Norton? A writer? Like the man said: everybody wants to get into the fucking act. (And his maiden aunt too.)

"We'll be sure to mention it to Hapgood when we next talk on the phone," I lied.

For those twenty-five January 1930 *Astoundings* we ended up raking in a total of slightly more than \$28,500 after costs and expenses, enough for the two of us to live on for a year.

I looked at Arbogast. He looked at me.

We were both grinning.

Backwards in time went I again. This time a shorter jaunt. To the late winter of 1940. The first issue of *Captain Future*. Arbogast's second all time favorite magazine. (His first: *Planet Stories*.)

Being as it was a largely sentimental trip,

we ended up clearing less than \$2,000.

So for my next trip it was back to 1929 again and another armload of twenty-five first issue *Astoundings*.

This time we barely made \$9,700.

The price was dropping like a fat toad on a lily pad.

"They're catching on," Arbogast said, when he returned from the latest Midwescon in Cincinnati, a glum look on his face as if he'd swallowed a horse turd.

"Who, what, when, where?" I asked.

"Other collectors. They're starting to wonder where I'm getting all these January 1930 *Astoundings*. The word's getting around I've got an closet full of them squirreled away."

"But that's not true."

"One dealer from Detroit told me the second issue of *Astounding* was now worth more than the first. He said it was thanks to me."

"Then I'll go back in time and snatch a bunch of the seconds," I said.

"No, Charlie. That won't work for long, either. We need something else, something different."

"Like the first *Amazing*? Or how about *Weird Tales*? You know how few of those are still around. You can get four or five thousand per copy for the first issue easy."

"No, not that either. It would just depress the market all over again and we'd be right back where we started. No, we need something better. Something truly rare. Something unique." His voice dipped in tone as if he were speaking in a cathedral. "Something truly one of a kind."

"Like what?"

He folded his hands in his lap, beaming like a toaster.

"You've got something in mind?" I said.

"Charlie, I do indeed."

"Tell me."

"Something that'll make us rich forevermore. Something that'll set us up for life."

"But what?"

"*Scientifiction*," he said.

#### FOURTEEN

Which was how it happened.

Arbogast quickly filled me in on the skinny, a fabled bit of science fiction lore, how Hugo Gernsback when he'd first come up with the idea of a separate magazine entirely de-

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voted to the sort of fiction he'd been running in his scientific publications wanted to call his new mag *Scientifiction* in honor of the term he'd personally concocted for such tales.

He'd even done up a dummy issue.

But then someone — presumably a distributor — had objected to the title, saying it was about as commercial as dog manure in a jar. "Nobody knows what the hell *Scientifiction* is," said this man, whom I envision with a black cigar jutting out of the corner of his mouth, lips fastened around the stub like a hankie around a wet nose. "Nobody gives a shit. You need to call it something that's going to interest people, Hugo — that'll intrigue them."

"How about *Amazing Stories*?" said Gernsback.

And there you have it.

But there was still the matter of that dummy issue of the original *Scientifiction* title.

"According to what Gernsback confided to Moskowitz when Sam was editing *Science Fiction Plus* back in the fifties," Arbogast said, referring to Gernsback's final, belated venture into science fiction magazine publishing, "and what Sam told me himself at the Clevention in '55, there was only the one single dummy issue and one dummy copy of that. There was a full color cover by Frank R. Paul — not the same cover that later appeared on the first *Amazing* — and an entirely different line-up of stories. Supposedly, there was something by Burroughs too — not just Wells, Verne, and Poe — but Gernsback couldn't remember what the story was, whether it was a reprint or an original."

"And only the one copy," I mused.

"Which ultimately vanished. Pulped and destroyed, said Gernsback. But you, Charlie —"

"Me, traveling back through time —"

"You could recover it."

"Steal it."

"Snatch it. And bring it back here."

"To be sold for —"

"Tens of thousand," he finished dreamily.

"A truly one of a kind item to fetch a one of a kind price."

"If we could find a buyer."

"I'll find one," Arbogast said, his voice as grim as a horsefly at a ball game. "You can trust me on that, Charlie. I give you my bonded word."

I took it from him, exuding trust. Arbogast may have been a shit and a moral crud but he knew the science fiction collector's market like nobody's bare behind.

So I made a whistling sound.

Arbogast summarized: "You go back to early 1926 — or perhaps late 1925 — visit Gernsback's office, locate the dummy issue of *Scientifiction*, and spirit it away. It's the one best chance the two of us have, Charlie, of setting ourselves up comfortably for the rest of our natural lives."

I agreed. Unhesitatingly. (And thus I share his guilt.)

"First thing," Arbogast said, "you have to go to New York."

"I hate New York," I said. "All those feuding fans."

"Forget the fans. It's where Gernsback is."

"Was," I corrected.

"Precisely," said Arbogast with another of his nova-like beams.

## FIFTEEN

So we bullshitted Norton some more and in the end, ultimately, he ended up agreeing to accompany me and the Wayback Device to NYC via an Amtrak out of Chicago. (Like Bradbury, Asimov, Kubrick and Arbogast — giant figures four in the history of futuristic speculation — N.B. Norton refused to fly. "Till somebody can show me with evidence good enough to satisfy my own two eyeballs what it is that keeps a plane from falling out of the sky like a wet turd, then, no sir, count me out. I'm taking the train.")

We took the train.

Norton spent the time catching up on antique issues of *Startling* and *Thrilling Wonder Stories*, fabulous gifts bestowed from the Arbogast collection. (Yes, you could say we were bribing him with his own favorite reading matter.)

New York City bound! 1925!

We picked out a spot in Central Park in back of the pond in between some thick weeds and shrubbery and made that our jumping off point. Not only were we concealed from casual view but it would provide quick and easy egress to the midtown offices of Gernsback's Experimenter Publishing Corp once I arrived in 1925.

And so there I went, there I saw, there I did not conquer.

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Hugo Gernsback, the Father of Science Fiction, as nutty as a chipmunk! Grey-bearded managing editor T. O'Connor Sloane, PhD, running the show! A porno magazine, the Brooklyn loony bin, a blizzard to beat all holy hell!

As previously narrated earlier in this document.

When I got back, my ears frozen like popsicle slabs, my toes as numb as rock candy in a box, my eyeballs protruding from their sockets like eggs from a hen's asshole, I shakily filled Norton in on everything that had occurred as we knelt among the dank stentorian weeds of Central Park. My chest heaved like hungry snake. I knew I was only inches from bursting into a waterfall of hysterical tears and snot.

Norton gazed at me languidly, glancing up now and then from his 1948 issue of *Thrilling Wonder Stories* with a Leigh Brackett Mars story on the cover.

"So what you're saying, hoss, is that this Experimenter Publishing Company ain't all that it's cracked up to be."

"It's a front — for a goddamn pornographic publishing ring."

"And old Gernsback himself?"

"Insane," I confirmed.

"So these other folk told you."

"No," I corrected. "I visited him myself. In Brooklyn. Why do you think it took me so long to make it back here?"

"Can't say that it did, truth to tell."

"Well, it did, goddamn it. I had to walk there. All the way across the Brooklyn Bridge. The whole damn way. In a snow storm. A blizzard. I didn't have enough 1925 money for a taxi, even if there'd been any running. The Murgatroyd and Malloy Psychoneurotic and Resting In Facility, it was called."

"Now you're putting me on, hoss."

"Do I look like I'm putting you on?" I held up my hands so that he could see them shake. "I got them to let me in to see him. I said he was my uncle. Gernsback. Hugo Gernsback. With my own two eyes. He was just the way Sloane said. Crazy. Mad as a mutton. They had him penned up in a padded cell. I..." — I held up Arbogast's Kodak Brownie — "I've got a photograph."

"Sounds serious." He looked suddenly sly. I could see the gears whirling behind his pearly white eyes. "So you gonna tell Hapgood Snails about this?"

"I suppose he might want to know."

Norton slammed shut the pulp mag. "And high goddamnit time too. Sounds to me like you really done went and screwed the pooch this time, hoss."

"Me?" I exclaimed.

"You."

"How the fuck do you get that, you dumb hayseed?"

"You went and changed history."

"I did not!"

"It's changed, ain't it?"

"Well...yes."

"Then who did it?"

"I...I...I..."

"Damn straight, hoss. You screw, you pay. That's life."

He went back to his *TWS*.

And we went back to Cleveland.

When we got there I let Arbogast have it all. It turned out to be a real first for me: I'd never before seen a man turn literally white as a sheet.

But Burton T. Arbogast did.

He flopped back into the nearest chair.

More precisely, his body folded into one like a goose seeking a gander. He ended up perched on a stack of the first twelve issues of *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction*.

And he didn't seem to care that he was crushing the shit out of them.

His voice, when it finally came, was like the last rasping wail of a dying caribou.

"We'd better call Hapgood," he said.

"Well, if you really think —"

"You don't realize what this means, do you, Charlie?"

"It means we're out one hell of a lot of fucking money."

"It also means the end of science fiction as we know it."

"Huh?"

"History, Charlie. It's been altered."

"Not by me, damn it. I was careful."

"Not careful enough, apparently. If you had been, this — this corruption would not have occurred."

"Goddamn it, I didn't drive Gernsback loony!"

"Then who did?"

"How should I know?"

"Think, Charlie, think. You need to recall. What specifically was it that you — or someone — did that brought about this — this

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dreadful horror?"

Norton, who'd been sitting silently the whole time, gazed up from his 1949 *Startling Stories*. "It's a hurricane in Florida," he said.

"What?"

"And you ain't never going to find no Australian butterfly."

"Chaos theory," Arbogast said grimly.

"You got it, pal."

Arbogast nodded, rising from his chair on knees as wobbly as marmalade crutches. "I'm calling Hapgood now."

"What are you going to tell him?"

"That it's the end of the world, the end of everything."

"The end of science fiction, you mean."

"There's a difference, Charlie?"

## SIXTEEN

**L**ess than twelve hours later, Hapgood Snails was there. Like a cavalry colonel leading a charge, he came blazing into Cleveland-Hopkins at the controls of his own private jet plane. The bulk of his travel time, he later explained, was expended trying to entice a cabby into driving him to a neighborhood as seedy as ours.

Dawn was piercing the eastern sky like a straw penetrating a drink when the taxi hurtled up to the curb, disgorging its lone passenger like a dog vomiting into a bag.

It was Hapgood, all right. Hapgood in his customary black leather fringed jacket, designer blue jeans, pineapple-and-pink-sunset Hawaiian shirt, and filter cigarette in a long ivory holder.

Hapgood Snails, reigning King of Hollywood!

Hapgood Snails, former boy genius of the science fiction world!

Hapgood, alive and well and in person in Cleveland goddamn Ohio!

I raced out to meet him in the street and guide him through the front gate. There was a denim baseball cap perched on the crown of his head, the bill pulled down low, almost concealing his fierce black eyes.

"I didn't want anybody at the airport to recognize me," he explained.

I nodded. "Down, Ralph," I said. "Down 124C."

"Or think I was that talentless *schmuck*, Warren Beatty."

I nodded again.

"So," he said, as we swept through the front door, knocking over a huge stack of World War II bedsheet *Astoundings* as we did, "the end of the world as we know it or what? Well, let's see what we can do to change that, eh, Charlie boy?" He reached up and slapped me on the back.

I grinned down at him. His can-do all-American fucking optimism was infecting me like a virus of hope. Hanging around Arbogast and Norton all night had dropped me about as far down the ol' totem pole as a pile of second-day doggy-do. But with Hapgood now on the scene I was already feeling a thousand percent better. He was the kind of person who could do that to you. It was his particular charm. One of them anyway.

We marched into the cramped kitchen. Arbogast and Norton waited, faces about as long as the slow freight out of Youngstown.

Hapgood ground out his cigarette on the linoleum floor and then pitched himself forward into Arbogast's waiting embrace. It gave me a warm feeling like pissing my pants on a cold day seeing the two of them reunited like that. A couple veritable giants — each in his own way — of the ever lovin' blue-eyed science fiction field.

That is, assuming that such a field still existed outside the dirty, badly lit interior of our dank little home.

I hastily dried my eyes as the two of them broke apart.

Norton was on his feet now, gaping like a giraffe who'd swallowed a whistle.

"Goldarn it clear to my daddy's grave," he remarked "but you sure do look just like that Beatty fellow."

Hapgood twisted his head, looking a bit grim. I knew it wasn't something he liked being reminded of.

"The genuine spitting mirror image," Norton rubbed it in.

I'd spotted something clutched in Norton's fist as he edged nearer to Hapgood. A sheaf of papers. A manuscript.

"No, goddamn it," I whispered, sidling up to him, "Not now, for Christ's sake."

But there was no more stopping Norton with his story than a hog on slippery ice. "I was wondering, Mr. Snails, sir," he cajoled, "if you'd mind looking over this little tale of mine and telling me whether you think it's got a possibility of selling?"

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Hapgood's eyes darted evasively from side to side. "Is it science fiction?"

"You bet your buttons it is."

"Then maybe," said Hapgood, evading the proffered script with a sudden, artful feint, "we ought to first be sure that science fiction still exists."

That stopped Norton cold in his tracks.

"You have to figure," Hapgood said, smiling sweetly, "you can't sell the story if there's no place to publish it."

Norton jerked a thumb over his shoulder back at me. "It's all that little jack straw's fault."

"Now we don't know that for certain," Hapgood said smoothly. I appreciated the defense. "And does it really matter anyhow? Isn't the important part to set things right again?"

Norton looked unconvinced. "Ain't going to be that easy to pull off."

"No," said Hapgood, "I'm sure it won't be. But you've got to keep one point in mind: if we fail, if science fiction falls into some kind of limbo of non-existence, then there won't be anywhere anyplace to publish that story of yours."

"Guess not." Norton nodded ruefully.

"And now, Burton," said Hapgood, turning and calling Arbogast by his rarely used given name, "how about putting on some coffee so we can all sit down and thrash this thing out?"

Arbogast put on the coffee. The rest of us found places to sit. I ended up perched on the edge of the stove as far from the one lit burner as I could get.

Looking at Hapgood, I was struck by an errant thought; if Warren Beatty had only been half as self-assured and debonair and downright cool as Hapgood Snails he would have been elected president of the United States long ago, no problem whatsoever.

But you've got to remember at that time I'd never met Beatty.

"Okay," said Hapgood once he had a cup of coffee in his hands. He lit a cigarette to go with it. (He was the only person Arbogast ever let smoke in his house — with all that paper, the combustibility level was frightfully low.) "Let's brainstorm. Anybody got anything they want to contribute? Ideas, concepts, questions, anything?"

There was a long loud silence like an opera singer with a furball caught in her throat.

I was the one who finally broke it. "Don't you want to hear the tape first?"

"What tape?"

"Charlie made a tape," Arbogast said, "of Hugo Gernsback. You can, ah, hear him pretty clearly."

"Sure, Charlie," said Hapgood, "play it."

I played the tape. At first there was just a lot of hissing. Then Gernsback came on. The sound was far from clear — it wavered like a beach ball full of sand. But you could hear him

"*Pussy,*" said Hugo Gernsback, the Father of Science Fiction. "*Cunt. Prick. Big Hairy balls.*"

There was a moment of silence. More hissing.

Then he said it again.

"*Pussy. Cunt. Prick. Big Hairy balls.*"

"That was Gernsback?" said Hapgood, when I shut off the recorder.

"Yes."

"And he didn't say anything else?"

"Well, sometimes he said shit. Or fuck. But mostly it was just what you heard. I've got a photograph, too."

"Never mind."

Hapgood looked suddenly thoughtful.

There was one thing that was still bothering me. "If history really has been changed," I heard myself blurting out, "then how come none of us knows anything about it?"

There was yet another long silence.

Hapgood broke this one: "Good question, Charlie. Mr. Norton, you have an answer?"

He was slow in replying. "Ain't nothing about time travel ever for sure" — I noticed he was still clutching his manuscript — "but one thing might maybe explain it. You got to think of a pond in a forest. You toss in a rock. The rock goes *kerplash* in the middle of the pond. Ripples spread. But slow. Gradual. Like a mule hauling a hippopotamus. In concentric circles. It may take a hell of a time for that first circle to lap the farthest shore."

"Which is," Hapgood said, "us?"

"It's right now," Norton agreed.

Hapgood nodded, as if this were something he'd already thought out. "In other words, Mr. Norton, what you're saying is that history doesn't necessarily change all at once. It's more a gradual process. Which means that we may well have — if you'll excuse the term — time. Time to sort things out. Time to make a

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correction.”

Norton nodded slowly. “I guess so.”

Hapgood beamed. “I was hoping you’d say that.”

“But Charlie doesn’t know what he did wrong in the first place,” Arbogast put in. “So how can we correct what we don’t even know?”

I started to raise an objection, saying it hadn’t been proved that any of it was my fault, when Hapgood shushed me silent. “I think I’ve got an idea,” he said softly.

“You — you do?” For an instant I didn’t even recognize my own awestruck voice.

“Yes. First, we need to go back to 1925. You and me, Charlie. The two of us this time. I believe we need to revisit the Gernsback offices.”

“And then what?”

“And then,” he said, dragging the words out, “together we’ll fix everything.”

“But — but how?”

He shook his head slowly. “I’d rather not get into that right now.”

“Oh,” we all said in unison.

I was reminded of an old Warren Beatty movie I hadn’t seen in years, one from his early pretentious phase, *Mickey One*. That’s the one where Beatty plays a nightclub comic on the run from some hoods and if that movie ever makes the slightest sense it’s something I must have missed.

But it makes a good movie anyway. It’s worth sitting through. You can’t hardly pull away.

That’s pretty much how it was with Hapgood and his idea of us going back in time again and making everything okay. On the surface it didn’t make a hell of lot of sense. But I couldn’t pull away.

Only later did I discover he’d been lying through his teeth the whole time.

## SEVENTEEN

**T**hat same evening the three of us — minus Arbogast — and of course including the Wayback Device — piled into a taxi and headed out for Cleveland-Hopkins airport and Hapgood’s waiting plane.

We were New York City bound!

1925! (Well, eventually anyhow.)

I sat up front next to Hapgood, strapped comfortably into the co-pilot’s seat. Norton slithered into the back. Ten minutes later,

when we were airborne, Hapgood turned and looked at me quizzically. “What’s that funny sound?”

I’d been hearing it too. “I think it’s Norton,” I said.

“What’s he doing?”

“He’s murmuring.”

“Murmuring? Murmuring what?”

“His prayers, I think.”

“Oh.”

Neither of us look back. “He’s afraid of flying,” I explained.

“But he’s here.”

I shrugged.

“And that’s something. It means he cares enough about what we’re trying to accomplish to push aside his own cowardice and go along with us anyway.”

“I think he just thinks you’ll help him get that story published.”

“Well, maybe I will,” said Hapgood.

But somehow I didn’t think so. Somehow I thought the story stunk so bad that nobody — not even Hapgood Snails — could force some-body legitimate to publish it.

But I could have been wrong.

Norton’s murmuring grew softer.

Ninety minutes later we were in New York City.

On the way Hapgood really only talked to me once. It was a conversation afterward that I was never totally able to put out of my thoughts. It reverberated, like a crack on the forehead.

He was talking about the science fiction field, about how much it had meant not only to him and me and Norton and Arbogast but to every other person of our time. It was a perspective I’d never thought of before.

“You need to try to conceive it, Charlie,” he said. “Picture it. A world without science fiction. More importantly, a world where science fiction not only isn’t but where it never has been. You know what truly makes science fiction important, essential? It’s not the stories themselves. Most of them, including mine, stink like day-old owl shit. Oh, there are some good ones — Sturgeon and Wells and Alfie Bester — but compared to the world of literature as a whole they’re like worms crawling up slopes of Everest. That’s why I sometimes end up feeling sorry for you fans. Not for kid fans like I used to be, where it’s just a phase, like masturbation. But for all you



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grown-up lifetime fans. It's not because of anything inherently wrong with the in-group itself but because of how much you end up missing in the outside world."

"But the outside world sucks," I said.

"Well, maybe so." He shrugged. "I won't argue with you on that. But as I was saying, the real question is, what makes science fiction essential, why is it something we dare not lose? I'll tell you what I think. I think it's because science fiction is the stuff of our dreams, of our collective dreams, and it has been ever since Gernsback. It's been the stuff that's kept us plunging ahead."

Through the plane's sloping windshield I could glimpse nothing beyond except the sheer blackness of the nighttime sky. There may have been a thick blanket of glittering, gleaming stars somewhere out there, but if there were I couldn't make them out. The weather had seemed clear when we left Cleveland. But apparently no longer.

All I could see was the blackness, darker than a sunset on Pluto.

From the back of the plane Norton's murmured prayers echoed distantly. The sound had taken on an oddly reassuring air.

"What kind of dreams are you talking about, Hapgood?" I said.

"All dreams, really. The good dreams, that is. The dreams of progress. The better angels of our gentler nature, you might say. Scratch a successful scientist and nine times out of ten you'll find a science fiction fan lurking beneath. I don't mean a fan like you or Arbogast. Not somebody who breathes and sweats the stuff. I mean somebody who used to read it when they were a kid and moved on. But it's all still there, Charlie. It's implanted in the brain, embedded in the subconscious. Some things don't fade. We all dream on. And without science fiction — given the condition of the world the last eighty years — since Gernsback — you tell me: where would we be? I think it's only because of those magical collective science fictional dreams of ours that we haven't all committed mass suicide and turned this planet into a smoldering ember."

"Isn't that kind of a bleak way of looking at it, Hapgood?"

"You follow the news, don't you, Charlie? You tell me."

I was looking through the windshield again. At the blackness beyond.

"So you're a science fiction reader," he said, "right? You've read it since you were a kid?"

"Since I was eleven."

"Then tell me something, Charlie. Which has to come first? The image or the thing itself?"

The conversation was turning unexpectedly philosophical. But I tried to answer anyway. "The image, I suppose."

"Yes. Sure. That's the way I write, for instance. First I see the story in my head. In terms of images. Then I put those images down on paper, translating them into words and phrases. I imagine that's the way God must have gone about creating the universe. First the thought — the image — and only after-ward, the thing itself, the universe."

"But what if there is no God?" Like most fans, both Arbogast and I were stone cold atheists.

"It doesn't matter. There is a universe. And what I said holds true for it and for everything in it — including the whole of the human race. Until we can somehow picture it — I mean, space satellites, atomic energy, television, electric toasters, travel to the moon — until that happens, it can't happen."

"You're saying science fiction predicted all these things."

"No. It dreamed them. There's a difference, Charlie, a distinction. And if science fiction does die, if it ends, then everything else, everything that grew out of it, everything I just got through talking about — that may well die with it."

"Television?" I said.

"And toasters."

"But none of it's died yet," I said.

"Are you sure?" He smiled slowly. "We've been up here an awfully long time."

Twenty minutes later we landed at Idylwild.

The first thing I did when I got to the terminal was look around desperately for a TV set.

I didn't relax until I'd found one. Playing CNN, of course. The world of our collective dreams.

## EIGHTEEN

**H**apgood signed the three of us in at the Chelsea Hotel in Greenwich Village. He explained as he did that the hotel occupied a particularly exalted place in science fictional history.

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"This is where Arthur Clarke stayed when he and Kubrick were writing the screenplay for *2001*."

"And it's also where Mr. Bob Dylan wrote his 'Sad Eyed Lady of the Lowlands,'" Norton put in.

*Bob Dylan? Norton?* I stood there a moment with my mouth hanging open but didn't utter a word.

What the hell. You go figure.

So we went upstairs to our individual rooms. Since I hadn't slept in about thirty-six and one-half hours, I was out like an albatross with an arrow through its neck the instant my head hit the pillow.

I didn't even bother putting out the light.

I didn't dream a single dream that night either, in case you were wondering, collective or otherwise.

The next morning, after breakfast, the three of us set out by taxi for Central Park. I could sense the cabby, the usual black bearded Sikh with a purple turban, staring through his rear view mirror at the tangled mass of the Wayback Device squatting in Norton's lap.

"It's a sculpture," Hapgood said. "My friend's an artist. We're taking it to a gallery on Central Park West to display."

"Appears much like my little boy's erector set," the driver observed.

"Well, it's, ah, it's supposed to," Hapgood said. "That's the point of the work. It's about childhood."

The cabby looked unconvinced. On this point I had to agree with him. But modern art wasn't exactly my cup of elderberry wine, either. Science fiction forever! you know.

Central Park was more teeming with people than seemed common for a Tuesday morning but the bucolic spring weather may have played a part. We were stopped twice before we managed to wind our way to our established jumping off point in the high shrubbery back of the pond. Both times by tourists. The first spotted Hapgood Snails, the famous writer and Hollywood director, and demanded an autograph. The second recognized Warren Beatty and wanted his, too.

Hapgood scribbled both names without the blinking of an eye.

In the shrubs Hapgood and I stood with the Wayback Device between us, our hands cupped beneath. Norton for some reason I couldn't at first figure kept glancing at his

wristwatch.

Then he started a countdown.

"Twenty...nineteen...eighteen..."

I thought of ignoring him. But what the hell.

At *zero* I popped the red lever.

And away we zipped.

*Bingo!*

The trip back through time to 1925 was as uneventful as ever. The long tedious hours seemed (as always) to pass without actually passing. I figured that was just as well. Seventy-five hours spent staring at the puckered physiognomy of Hapgood Snails could get old for just about anybody.

Not to mention the vice versa part of it.

The idea was for us to set down precisely on the day prior to my previous trip back to December 1925. That way, whatever I might originally have done that had turned poor Hugo Gernsback into a slobbering lunatic would end up being set right by our current activities.

At least that was the plan.

I didn't buy it myself. Not totally. But then I didn't buy that I'd done anything wrong in the first place, either.

We weren't carrying any cameras or taping devices with us this time either. Hapgood had insisted. He wanted to be careful with what we carried back and forth through time. Anything and everything might be the culprit of change, Norton's Australian butterfly.

The good news was, when we arrived in December 1925, it wasn't snowing.

The bad news was, it was raining

To beat all bloody holy hell.

And while we'd been smart enough to bring along mufflers, gloves, even overshoes, neither us had possessed the necessary foresight to bring an umbrella.

We left the Wayback Device sheltered as well as we could manage in the somewhat thicker foliage right down next to the pond. Considering everything, it didn't seem likely it would be readily damaged by a bit of bad weather. I was really only concerned about the possibility of rust and that mostly because I didn't want to have to listen to Norton whine when we got back.

I knew he took great pride in the physical appearance of his stupid goddamn time machine. (Excuse my attitude but it really was raining like a son of a bitch.)

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Already about as soaked as bath towels at a pool party, Hapgood and I set off at as quick a pace as we could handle for the offices of the Experimenter Publishing Corporation.

Twenty minutes later, drenched past the bone, we hopped off the self-service elevator and went barging through the door.

Seated primly behind her big wood desk, Misty LaTour, as radiant and sparkling and Louise Brooks-like as ever, gaped at the two of us as if we were a pair of uninvited black rhinos crashing a wedding ceremony.

"We — we're writers," Hapgood managed to gasp. "We'd like to see Mr. Hugo Gernsback."

"I'm afraid you must — " She stopped suddenly, staring at Hapgood, jaw slack as a sturgeon in a lake. Her big blue eyes zipped past me without a flicker of recognition, not surprisingly, since the only time we'd previously met was tomorrow. "Why, sir," she said to Hapgood, "aren't you just about the prettiest young man I've set eyes on since I left my daddy's home in old Alabamy. Tell me, aren't you in the motion pictures or something?"

Not the goddamn Warren Beatty thing again? I thought. But no, of course not. That was being silly.

"No, miss," Hapgood said politely, doffing his denim baseball cap and sprinkling the carpet even further with rainwater. "You must have me mixed up with somebody different."

"But you could be in the movies, you surely could, I'm telling you."

"Gernsback?" I managed to butt in. "*Hugo Gernsback?*"

"Oh, that's just what I was just about to inform your gorgeous friend here about." I didn't recall her thick Southern drawl from my previous visit and got the impression she was putting it on for Hapgood's benefit. "We don't have anyone by that name."

I started to wheel triumphantly in Hapgood's direction but he beat me to the punch: "This is the Experimenter Publishing Company?" he demanded.

"It most surely truly-dooly is," Misty LaTour confirmed. She put her chin on her fist and stared openly at Hapgood, batting her eyes. I mean that literally. She genuinely did-so bat them.

"And you have no Hugo Gernsback here at all?" he persevered.

"No, sir, we don't." Grinning like a tuna fish.

"He's not the president and publisher?"

"Well, I guess he used to be, way back before — "

"Who's the publisher now?"

"Oh, that would be — "

From the back office came a loud *thump!* The unabridged dictionary again.

"Sloane," I said. "Dr. T. O'Connor Sloane, PhD."

"Uncle Tommie," she finished.

*Thump!*

So nothing had changed — nothing! Just as I'd insisted all along, it hadn't been me who'd screwed things up. Here we were in 1925, one full day ahead, and Sloane was still in charge, Gernsback presumably still in the Brooklyn loony bin, and all else otherwise right and well with the world.

No! Wait a minute. I had that backwards. All wasn't right with the world. All was wrong. Totally, completely, thoroughly, abjectly *wrong*.

This wasn't just a world where science fiction was dead; it was a world where it had never been born.

And it was the real world! The world was as it was!

While I stood there, reeling like a dervish on a whirl, Hapgood grabbed my arm in both of his. The expression on his face, when I turned to look at him, was — to my utter amazement — one of total complete unmitigated triumph.

"I knew it!" he was saying. "I knew it all along!"

"Well, I did try — "

"Enough!" His grip on my arm was like the bite of a shark. He dragged me toward the door. "We've got to get out of here. Charlie, come on!"

"Come on?" I tried putting up a futile resistance. "Come on where?"

"To Brooklyn! To Gernsback!"

"But we don't need to see that old crazy coot!"

"It's imperative, Charlie. There's no time to waste!"

By then he had me halfway out the door. The last thing I remember is poor Misty LaTour's plaintive blood-curdling whine: "But when will I see you ever again?"

In about thirty-five years, I could've told her. Try keeping yourself together that long.

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You can see him in a movie called *Splendor in the Grass*.

But too late. The door flopped shut behind us. Just as it did I heard one final fleeting echoing *thump!* from in the back.

Hapgood hustled me onto the elevator. The Irish doorman eyed us suspiciously as we dashed across the lobby like two bulls escaped from a china closet.

A stupid tune was playing in my head. I decided to put words to it.

*Charlie Frap is my name  
Science fiction is my nation  
Fandom is my dwelling place  
The nuthouse my destination!*

## NINETEEN

**H**apgood hailed a cab. How he was intending on paying for it I didn't have a clue but it had to beat hell out of another thorough drenching.

Less than fifteen minutes later — crosstown traffic, 1925-style, a gentle jewel you wouldn't believe — and we were there. The same sign I recalled from before (or was it after?) engraved in the same dirty gray stone wall, strands of barbed wire curled on top like a hair weave:

**Murgatroyd & Malloy Psychoneurotic  
& Resting In Facility**

It had stopped raining, too.

Hapgood paid off the cabby with what looked like a clean, crisp twenty dollar bill. "Keep the change."

The cabby looked the bill over front and back, our overall appearance still pretty scruffy from our earlier trek through the rain. Apparently satisfied, he tucked it away in a vest pocket. "You want me to wait around, bud?"

"I don't think that'll be necessary. We may be awhile."

"Not too long, I'm hoping." He lowered his voice. "I don't know if they told you but this is a cuckoo bin."

"Oh, we know. My colleague's uncle" — Hapgood made a spinning sign next to his ear — "crazy as a coot."

"Too bad."

"It doesn't seem to run in the family, though."

"Well...good."

"So he tells me anyway."

Hapgood gave the cabby a farewell wave.

As we passed through the asylum's big iron front gate and entered the rolling green lawns beyond, I leaned over and asked Hapgood, "How in hell did you get away with that?"

"With what?"

"With giving him that twenty."

"It's perfectly okay — a 1921 series."

"You brought that along?"

"And three more just like it. In my wallet. The trouble with you, Charlie, is you don't realize the critical nature of always being prepared."

Words to live by, I thought, just like the goddamn Boy Scouts. (My sole regret now is that I didn't listen better at the time. To the words. Hapgood was warning me. I genuinely believe he was. And I let it go fluttering right past me like a fart in the wind.)

There was a different — though if anything uglier — nurse manning the main front desk from what I remembered. There was also — naturally — no record of my previous visit (tomorrow), so we had to start over from scratch, talking our way in to see Gernsback.

Luckily, this time we also had Hapgood's gift for gab. And his good looks. I was only happy he hadn't given Misty LaTour as hefty a dose of his personal charm as he was giving the old bat nurse.

It might have killed her, poor thing.

Am I sounding jealous here? Well, maybe so. But I'd seen Misty Latour first. (Or had I?)

Ten minutes later and the nurse was escorting us personally down the dark, dank-as-a-swamp-with-mildew-encrusted-walls corridor to the cell containing the shattered remnants of the man who had once been Hugo Gernsback, father of science fiction.

Just like my visit before (or after, depending on your view), the smell was like the a pig ranch on gelding day.

Gernsback squatted in a heap in a far corner of the cell, chewing on the edge of his frayed, filthy mattress. His slick mop of gray-blond hair lay matted across his forehead like a dirty kerchief and his pale blue, piercing, Germanic eyes darted crazily in his head like fornicating fire flies. Vaguely, I could hear him muttering, "Cock, piss, cunt, pussy."

His vocabulary of choice, it appeared, had not notably altered.



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"Do you mind if we have a few moments alone with the patient?" Hapgood said. He'd handed the old nurse that same dumb story about Gernsback being my uncle and she'd bought off on it, wholesale. Rack up another for the benefits of charm. "Say, ten minutes, fifteen?"

The nurse glanced over at Gernsback as if he were a misplaced bag of manure. "You're sure you'll be all right?"

"Only if you're nearby," said Hapgood.

"I'll be waiting right at the end of the corridor."

"That'll be wonderful. Then if something happens, if he makes any kind of nasty move, we'll just give a yell."

"And I'll come running." She showed us her doubled-up fist. It was a big doubled-up fist too. "And see to the patient."

"I'm sure you will. My name is Hapgood, by the way. It would please me no end if you'd call me that."

"And I am Hannah."

"What a lovely name!"

"Until the quarter hour then... Hapgood."

"I'll be counting the minutes... Hannah."

We listened as her gentle footsteps like the tread of a tiptoeing moose faded down the corridor. "Did you really have to pile it on so goddamn thick?" I asked Hapgood in a whisper.

But he didn't seem to be listening to me. Instead, he was gazing intently upon the cowering, trembling, babbling mass of Hugo Gernsback.

"Tits. Cum. Asshole. Prick."

Hapgood took a deep breath, pulled a gun out of his pocket and shot Gernsback through the chest.

It happened that quick. *Driing*. He just shot him. It wasn't that big a gun either — maybe a .32 — silencer equipped.

Hapgood advanced on Gernsback, shooting him three more times. The sound echoed in the confines of the cell like the ringing of a faulty telephone. *Driing! Driing! Driing! Driing!*

The last shot caught Gernsback dead between the eyes.

I swear I saw a last, sad, fleeting, expression of total incomprehension wash over his face.

Then he was dead.

Like the proverbial fucking doornail.

Hugo Gernsback, father of science fiction,

deader than that roasted mackerel you ate for lunch the day before yesterday.

## TWENTY

**H**apgood raised the gun to his lips and coolly blew away the trail of smoke.

I looked over my shoulder, waiting for the nurse — or somebody — to come charging in on us.

Nobody came.

"It's the best silencer on the market today," Hapgood explained. "It's what the CIA used during their glory days."

"You killed him," I said.

"Well...yes." As if it were obvious — which, I guess, it was.

"You killed Hugo fucking Gernsback."

"Lower your voice, Charlie."

"But I —"

"Lower it. Please."

I lowered it. Actually, I didn't say a goddamn thing. I just glared fiercely at him.

Hapgood glanced at his watch. He made a clicking noise with his tongue. Then he shook his head. He chewed on his lip.

Then he wiped a thin film of perspiration off his forehead.

At last he looked at me again. "You do understand why I did what I did, don't you?"

"Because you're a — you're a..." — I searched for the exact right words — "because you're a fucking nut case."

"No, Charlie. I did it for one reason: because I happen to care. Not just about science fiction. About the world. The human race, I did it because I wanted to save us all."

"You *are* nuts."

"Lower your voice. Let me explain. It'll only take a minute. I promise you."

I let him explain. "This better be fucking good."

It was good, all right — goddamn good — but it wasn't the kind of good I wanted to hear.

It took longer than a minute, too. It took longer than five minutes. In fact, it took a good full ten minutes. But that was because I kept interrupting him. The reason I kept interrupting was he still sounded about as daffy as a rogue duck.

"I'm afraid there was simply no other way of pulling this off," he finished at last. "No other way at all. I'm telling you, Charlie, I've thought this thing through. All the way from L.A. to Cleveland, I thought about it. And all

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the way here, too — the seventy-five hours we stood there, holding that machine, that whole time I was thinking. And I'm telling you, Charlie, this is what you were born to do. You can't back away from it. It's your fate, your destiny as a man, as a human. It's your heritage."

"The hell if it is. Find yourself another sucker, Hapgood."

"Who?" He waved a hand around the cell, encompassing the three of us — me, him, the dead Gernsback.

"That's not my problem."

"Then you're telling me you never noticed the resemblance before?"

"Never."

"You never looked in the mirror, combed your hair a different way, thought about how you would look without the beard and moustache?"

"No, never."

He turned away from me for a moment and stared at Gernsback. Then he looked back. "Why don't I believe you, Charlie? For God's sake, you could be father and son."

"Well, we're not." I folded my arms across my chest. "And I'm not going to do it."

"Even for the sake of science fiction?"

"No."

"The thing you've devoted your entire life to?"

"No."

"This is your final decision, Charlie?"

"Hell, yes. My final and absolute." I took a step toward the fallen Gernsback. "Now we both better figure some way of explaining —"

That's when he sapped me.

The dumbest thing I ever did in my life had to be turning my back on Hapgood Snails. I can't explain it even now. Call it fate, I guess, call it destiny.

Hapgood would.

I figure he must have used the gun butt to conk me with.

Whatever. A couple bare nanoseconds after he clipped me, I was out like a porcupine trying to steal home.

A big pool, black as doom, opened at my feet. I dove headfirst down into it.

## TWENTY-ONE

**H**apgood fixed everything. He came up with a cover story and then got them to buy off on it.

Don't ask me how. I suppose it had to be that notorious charm of his working overtime again.

Even after I came to, it took me a while to figure out what Hapgood's cover story had been, but the way it came together was this: Gernsback (or Uncle Hugo) had somehow managed to grab the gun out of my pocket and tried to kill himself with it. (The reason I had a gun was that I was a jeweler's assistant and often carried big bags of diamonds around with me.) (Don't ask me to explain any of this: like I said, it was Hapgood's cover story. And anyway they bought it.) There was a fierce struggle. In the course of the struggle Gernsback managed to rap me over the head with my own gun. Then he turned the weapon on himself and put three bullets through his chest. Then he finished things off with a fourth and final bullet between the eyes.

All this while, Hapgood was screaming for help.

By the time the nurse reached the cell it was too late to do anything.

Gernsback was dead and his nephew (me) unconscious.

I woke up flat on my back on the floor of the cell with the old hag nurse and three or four others who could have been her sisters (or maybe brothers) standing around.

There was also a little man with a Hitler moustache, holding a clipboard and fountain pen. Some kind of administrator, I gathered.

He was the one who kept tossing asinine questions at me. "Your uncle's occupation?"

"The father of science fiction."

"Excuse me?"

I tried to swallow a breath of air. With all the people crammed into the tiny cell, not to mention the carcass of Hugo Gernsback, it was a struggle. "Publisher and editor."

"His place of birth?"

"Germany. No, Switzerland. I think it was Switzerland."

"Date of birth?"

This was one Arbogast had made me memorize: "1884."

"You can't you be more specific? You must know your own uncle's birthday."

"Uh, make it April 1."

And on and on.

After enough of this, it finally hit me: nobody really gave a shit that Hugo Gernsback was dead. Why should they? He was a crazed

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lunatic without a friend in the world and his only known relative (me), a nephew who didn't even know his own uncle's birthday. (Or the country he was born in. Luxembourg, not Switzerland.)

Which helped explain the incredible ease with which Hapgood's equally incredible cover story had been bought and paid for.

Speaking of which...

I sat up suddenly, as wide awake as a zebra at dawn. "Hapgood? Where the hell is Hapgood?"

"Who?"

"Hapgood Snails. The man I came here with?"

"Oh, he said he had an appointment. In Manhattan. At the Central Park, he said it was."

"Oh, my fucking God!"

I was more than wide awake by then. I was on my feet and racing for the gate. Incredibly, no one made the slightest move to stop me. Not even one of those big bruiser Amazon nurses.

Like I said, Gernsback was dead and nobody cared.

Sad when you thought about it. Really truly goddamn sad.

But not half so goddamn sad as my own personal plight.

Do I need to fill in the tragic details? My frantic race (on foot — no 1921 twenty-dollar bills in my wallet) through the drenching rain to Central Park. My discovery, upon arrival, of no fucking Wayback Device to be seen. My admission then of the truth of what I had feared all along:

Hapgood had stranded me. In 1925. There was no way for me to get home.

For I don't know, let's call it five minutes, I stood there among the weeds and shrubbery, the azaleas and the bonsai trees, the ferns and the flowers, and I bawled my eyes out like a baby deprived of its rattle.

Baby rattle, my white ass. I'd been deprived of my whole entire life. By that no-good son of a bitch Hapgood Snails.

I wept on and on.

Luckily, with the rain, nobody could tell. And I had the place all to myself anyway.

And back home it was spring! Wonderful, bucolic, all-embracing, all-entrancing spring!

That was the kind of thought that only got me to crying harder. Spring, wonderful spring, I was never to see spring again.

Wait a minute. That was stupid. Another four or five months and it would be spring here, too. An April 1926 spring, to be sure, but still spring.

That was when I got mad.

That son of a bitch! Hapgood Snails! There was only one explanation for all this.

Hapgood assumed that stranded here in 1925 I would have no alternative but to carry out the fullness of his designs.

Well, fuck him, I thought. I won't do it. I'll find something else to do instead. I'll become a bootlegger. A fandango dancer. I'll make a million bucks betting on Tunney over Dempsey. I'll make another million buying Coca-Cola short and selling the day before the market collapses.

Hell, there were a million possibilities. All I had to do was pick one of them and go for it.

I spent the night in a lice-ridden bunk at a Salvation Army flophouse in the lower Bowery.

In the morning I managed to borrow a razor, a bar of soap, and a pair of scissors from my fellow flophouse denizens.

I shaved my face and trimmed my hair.

Then I borrowed a jar of pomade and a comb from the sergeant in charge, telling him — half-truthfully — that I planned on going out and looking for a job.

I couldn't do anything about my clothes. But at least they were dry now.

In fact, it had begun to snow.

A blizzard was on its way, they said. Yeah, I could've told them. I know. Been there, done that.

I hung around the Bowery till late afternoon, swigging free coffee. The one thing I didn't want was to run into my own other self. Not that I could have. Or else I would've remembered.

Right?

Still, I hung around.

When I figured it was safe I started walking.

It was hardly any more fun than it had been the time before. If anything, the snow was deeper, the wind colder, my toes and fingers more brittle and numb.

But I made it where I wanted to go.

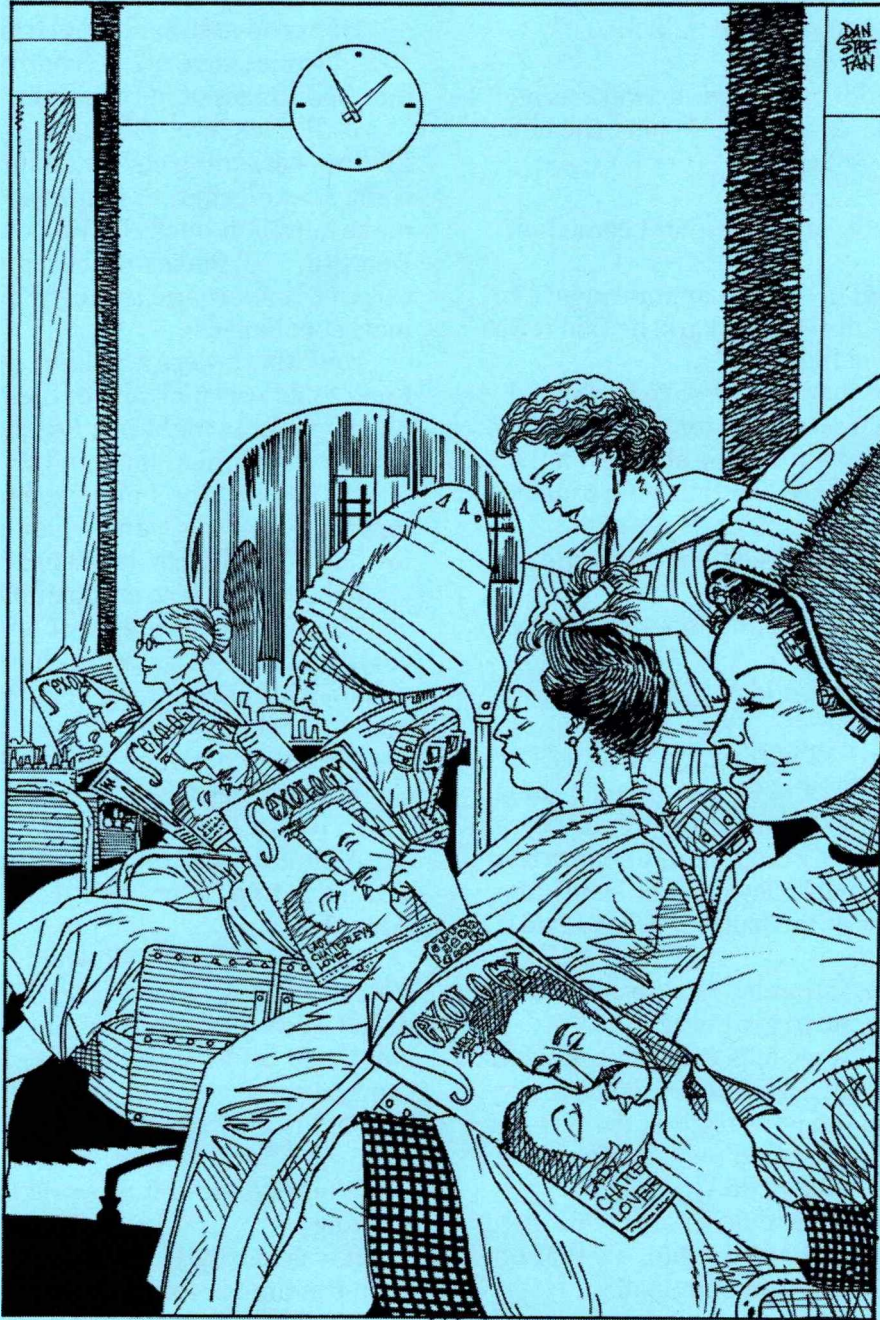
The Experimenter Publishing Corporation.

I rode the self-serve elevator upstairs.

I walked through the door.

When Misty LaTour saw me, her jaw dropped six inches toward the floor. "Mr —





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Mr — ” she sputtered. “Uncle Hugo, you’re cured!”

From the back I heard *thump*.

“That’s Mr. Gernsback to you, young lady.” I let just a faint trace of a German accent waffle over my tongue.

“Yes, sir.”

“And that upstart, Sloane? Where is he to be found lurking?”

“Uncle Tommie — Dr. Sloane — he’s in his office, sir.”

“That’s *my* office, you mean,” said Gernsback/me, marching straight ahead.

I hurled the door open and barged forward. And so on.

Hapgood Snails had won the day, his well-prepared plans carried forward by me to final fruition.

Hell, a guy’s got to eat, don’t he?

And, tell me, what’s so goddamn bad about being Hugo?

## TWENTY-TWO

**A**nd so it came to pass like flies lighting on a turd.

In April 1926 the first issue of *Amazing Stories* hit the newsstands. For a while I’d intended calling it *Scientifiction* but a distributor with a big cigar clenched between his teeth talked me out of it.

“Nobody knows what the fuck that means, Hugo,” he kindly said.

But with the second, May 1926, issue I started using the subtitle *Science Fiction* just to prepare the public for it.

And with each subsequent issue the subtitle increased in size.

With the April 1928 issue, the one carrying the first installment of Doc Smith’s *Skylark of Space* and also the first ever Buck Rogers story, I dropped the *Amazing Stories* part and went over to *Science Fiction* as a my main title.

Then I registered the title with the U.S. Patent Office as a legal trademark.

Ho-ha!

Circulation climbed past the 150,000 mark.

In 1929 my main competitor, the notorious health nut Bernarr MacFadden, tried to force me and my company into bankruptcy, but with the cash reserves I’d accrued betting on the Dempsey/Tunney fights and with the additional support of my considerable holdings of Coca-Cola stock, I was able to thwart his nefarious designs and hold on to my assets.

Meanwhile, I purchased two radio stations, WBHG and WBML. On one I broadcast nothing but what was then called “race” music. (I’d decided to invent rock ‘n’ roll.) On the other I created talk radio.

In due time, I would be awarded New York City’s first television broadcasting license.

In the spring of 1930 I successfully brought suit against the Clayton publishing chain for infringement of trademark over their new magazine *Astounding Stories of Super Science*. In settlement I was awarded all rights to the title, including its complete backlog of stories.

I tossed the stories in the trash bin, re-named the magazine *Analog*, and folded it after one more issue.

The following year, I removed Frank R. Paul from his position as *Science Fiction’s* premiere cover artist and replaced him with a young man named Norman Rockwell.

I editorially assisted another bright young fellow, a writer I discovered working for the post office in Oxford Mississippi named William Faulkner, in putting together a four-part serial based on the concept of using fissionable Uranium 238 to build a bomb capable of flattening entire cities. I had to prune a lot of his long sentences but the story caused a sensation.

I sent copies of the pertinent magazines by registered mail to Albert Einstein, President Herbert Hoover, and Army Chief of Staff Douglas MacArthur. (In case they didn’t have their own.)

In March 1933, with the Great Depression at its lowest ebb — an economic crisis which, thanks to my insistence upon preparation above all else, had impacted me little — I launched a new magazine. I called it *Sexology*.

Rockwell did the first cover illustrating the lead serial, an unexpurgated version of D.H. Lawrence’s *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*.

It was the first all-color cover on a nationally distributed magazine to show a woman’s pubic hair.

Not to mention a penis erectus.

(But you had to look close.)

The magazine was banned in Boston and seized in Salt Lake City.

But it also sold 450,000 copies nationwide.

A sexual revolution has begun, I announced in issue number two. By then I was in contact with a promising expatriate

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writer in Paris named Henry Miller. Eventually, he became a top contributor to both my magazines.

In May 1935, I wed Misty LaTour in a simple civil ceremony performed at New York's City Hall. In keeping with the stated theme of sexual freedom, the bride was an obvious seven months pregnant.

In July Misty gave birth to twin boys whom I named Burton and Hapgood.

The April 1936 tenth anniversary issue of *Science Fiction* featured a special cover by Salvador Dali and stories by Faulkner, Hemingway, Thomas Mann, E.E. Smith, H.G. Wells (*Return of the Invisible Man*) and Edgar Rice Burroughs — *Tarzan in Heat*.

It sold in excess of one million copies.

*Time* magazine ran a cover story entitled, "Hugo Gernsback: The Man Who Sees Tomorrow."

And so on.

All of which is just ancient history now.

But what about Burton T. Arbogast? What about the ol' Number One Fan Face?

Glad you asked that

So what about nothing?

Arbogast was alive. On his birthday — December 8, 1932 — I'd made it a point to check our mutual home town newspaper the *Cleveland Plain-Dealer* to be sure.

He was there, all right. Seven pounds, four ounces.

But he never became a fan.

He couldn't have. There weren't any.

I'd seen to that.

By altering the essence of the genre, I'd made science fiction instantly acceptable. And in the process I'd deliberately obliterated its traditional appeal for the lonely and isolated, the introverted and dispossessed.

To the Burton T. Arbogasts of the world.

Who the hell needed them?

I was doing plenty goddamn all right on my own.

In 1939 I checked the *Plain-Dealer* once again. Hapgood Snails, eight pounds, two ounces.

No fandom for him either.

Ho-ha!

In the meantime *Time* did a second cover story on me: March 11, 1940: "The Man Who Makes the Future Work."

The April 1941, fifteenth anniversary issue of *Science Fiction* contained tributes from

world leaders as diverse as Hoover and Gandhi, Trotsky and Mussolini.

Oh, by the way, thanks to my efforts at promoting atomic energy, World War II didn't start until 1943.

But that wasn't what worried me.

What worried me was me.

I was about to be born.

As the critical juncture approached — 10:37 a.m. Eastern Time, October 29, 1945 — I put my affairs in order. On the day itself I left my Scarsdale home shortly after dawn, telling Misty, who had put on a little weight over the years but was otherwise the same Louise Brooks lookalike as always, that I needed to swing by the office early. I then had my driver drop me off at a secluded corner of the estate where I had taken the precaution of constructing an underground air raid bunker. I assumed it would be the safest possible place for whatever was going to happen to happen.

Was I ready? I'll answer that the only way I can: no. Hell, no. I wasn't ready to die.

But I didn't want to inadvertently harm anyone else when and if I did.

Norton's law, remember: two of the same body cannot occupy the same space at the same time.

But the time came — 10:35...10:36...10:37... 10:38 — and the time passed.

Nothing happened. I didn't blow up.

Later, I checked the AP wire and found a story about a mysterious explosion in the maternity ward of a Cleveland hospital. Four dead, including a doctor and two nurses.

Five, I felt like saying. You forgot the baby. Your forgot me.

I was dead, yes. But it was the other I, the original.

I shed a brief tear.

Hugo Gernsback lived on!

Three days later President Dewey ordered the atom bomb dropped on Paris and we won the war.

## TWENTY-THREE

**S**o how did it happen?

I know you want to know. Coincidence is coincidence, you say, it can occur, but even Charles fucking Dickens wouldn't have tried to get away with this shit.

Hugo Gernsback and Charlie Frap, spitting images of one another, identical twins,

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brothers in blood under the skin. Put one in the other's place and nobody can tell the difference. Except Hapgood Snails. Who also spots the resemblance from the very beginning and makes it a key part of his nefarious plot to save the world of science fiction and so on and on and on.

Yeah, right, you say. Bullshit. You ain't buying it.

Welcome to the crowd.

I don't buy it either. Yes, me, Charlie Frap/Hugo Gernsback himself. Fuck, I thought, staring into the mirror in my Scarsdale bathroom, if I look like Hugo Gernsback, then former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger looks just like Bozo the Clown.

And I happened to know that he don't.

Well, not that much anyway.

And so?

So whatever will be will be. *Que sera, sera.*

You've heard that, right?

Guess fucking what?

It's true.

There was no corruption in time. There was no changing of the past. Time was always what it was and history was as it is.

Charlie Frap and Hugo Gernsback are one and the same person. They never were any-

thing else. Charlie Frap was born in 1945 and lived until 2003 and then traveled back through time (twice) to 1925 and that was when he became Hugo Gernsback Number Two (after Hapgood Snails had plugged Hugo Number One) and that's just the way it was and is and always will be.

Time is like a rock. It's never changing, never altering. What is, is. What was, was. What will be — well, as Norton said, there ain't no will be. Not yet anyway.

Being Gernsback was not simply my destiny, my fate. Being Gernsback was always what I was. And from the very beginning too.

Wait a second, you say. Where does that leave free will?

Where the hell do you think it leaves it?

In the great big shit can in the sky.

So hooray for me, hooray for Hugo Gernsback, and hooray for the ever-loving blue-eyed science fiction field.

If you don't like this story, then go out and write one of your own. Hell, if it's any good, I might even publish it.

As long as it's got that good old sense of wonder. ■

(from *Trap Door* #22, May 2003)



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**B**ased on no one particular individual but maybe a piece of this person here, another piece of that one there, and so on. The sixties are something I've been trying to get over ever since, well, since they were over. I'm hardly alone. Funny in a way because as the Peter Fonda character in the movie "The Limey" remarks, the sixties were really only 1966 and part of 1967. Blodgett also concerns the people who play significant roles in the narrative of our lives and then just aren't there anymore. No telling what's happened to them. They vanish — disappear. As another character in another movie — Jack Nicholson in Antonioni's "The Passenger" — notes when apprised of how people sometimes just up and disappear — "Yeah, I know — every time they leave the room." When this story originally appeared more than a few people who weren't there at the time assumed it must be for real. I wasn't trying to fool anybody but took that as a compliment. Same with Robert Lichtman's additional take on the subject also included here. Who knows? Maybe it could have been. Real, that is.

## Blodgett Recollected

I realize I haven't been as active in fandom the last few years as I might prefer. And one of the unfortunate side effects of such lacktivity is one's inadvertent failure to re-pond to comments directed at one's own personal self. (Which is a shade impolite — let's face it.) An example: at least twice in the last two years FAPA members have taken time out of their busy lives to inquire directly of me in their zines as to the present circumstances and/or whereabouts of the sixties fan Harvey Blodgett. I know for sure one of the two who asked was Robert Lichtman and the other I'm less sure about without going back and Look-ing It Up — Dave Rike maybe or else probably Don Fitch or Arnie Katz — they all knew Blodgett pretty well through the Cult. But who it was who wanted to know is less important than that I never got around to answering and I'm afraid that may have left the wrong im-pression, either that I didn't know or didn't care to reveal Blodgett's present status and position in the universal cosmos. Well, I do know. Not only were Blodgett's and my fan careers hopelessly interwoven (intermingled, some might even say, to the point where even now I run into people who still have us con-fused) throughout the decade of the 1960's when we were both at our most active but we kept I n touch later on too when neither of us (Blodgett more than me because I was still writing science fiction professionally) had much of anything to do with fans or with fandom.

So where is he? Good ol' Harvey Blodgett?

What's he up to anyway? (I'll wager even Harry Warner'd like to know.)

Well.

Let me put it this way: the long passage of years (more than thirty for all intents) has, I hope, given everyone who was around back then (which is a significant chunk of FAPA) much perspective and some detachment and blunted emotions and all that addled shit (and I know it has for me and, hell, I was Blodgett's best friend) and thus I hope I'm not irretrievably spoiling anybody's day because the news, guys, is not good.

Harvey Blodgett is dead. (Molderin' in the cold, cold ground.)

Actually, he died in 1984, the year Reagan got reelected whipping the sad shit out of Walter Mondale, the year of the LA Olympics, the year Orwell's book coincided with reality and we all realized it could have been worse and was. Blodgett was living down there too. (In LA, I mean — we were all living in 1984.) In an apartment near Venice Beach. He was working as a clerk in a record store that also rented skateboards. He lived alone. He looked like an aging hippie. And he was dead three weeks before anybody found the body and then only because he hadn't paid his rent on time. He'd been murdered. Somebody'd stabbed him in the left arm, right thigh, face, and stomach and he'd basically bled to death as he lay naked on the floor of his bathroom. The authorities said it was probably a prowler looking for money or dope or both. I don't

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know who buried him, if anybody. Blodgett would have been thirty-nine years old, the same as me.

The two of us had a hell of a lot in common actually.

Let's see: We were both born the same day in the same exact year in the same city and state in the middle of the same world war. Sunday, July 24, 1945, in Seattle, Washington. Different hospitals, though, and we went to different schools, too, and never met till the fall of 1960 when I walked into my first Nameless Ones meeting and sitting there on a wooden folding chair with a cup of coffee and two sugar cookies in front of him was Harvey Blodgett.

You couldn't miss him. (Most especially I couldn't miss him.) There were probably a half-dozen to a dozen various fans sitting around the meeting room — I think it was in some old office building on Second Avenue downtown — a long metal table and wooden folding chairs and a pot of coffee and the sugar cookies — and the fans were a fine bunch of people — Wally Weber and Jim Webbert and Burnett Toskey and the Busbys — I still see at least some of them now and then. But I was just fifteen years old and the others were all seemingly ancient by contrast — way up into their thirties anyway. For a moment I felt kind of all alone. But then there was Blodgett. Skinny. A nerd. Big thick teeth, big thick glasses, a dumb grin that looked like it had been turned with a pick and a shovel.

*My brother in blood*, I thought at once.

We made immediate eye contact — Blodgett seemed to be thinking pretty much the same as me, scrutinizing — but during the actual meeting he kept silent. As did I. (It was my first meeting ever after all and as a kid I was shy as a ghost.)

Afterward, though, Blodgett came straight up to me and handed me a fanzine (it was the third issue — out of four total — of his genzine *Ripsnort* and featured an article by Dick Lupoff on the cartoon character Crusader Rabbit) and asked if I was the same Gordon Eklund who was in the N3F and writing letters to *Fanac*. I said I was and he asked who my favorite writer was. I said I didn't know, Heinlein probably I guessed, maybe Asimov. And he laughed and said not that sci-fi garbage. (He always called it sci-fi too — in that reedy, sneery voice of his that always made me think

of a firehose wound too tight — no matter who got pissed off.) He meant real writing, he said. Like what? I asked. Like this, he said. And he pulled out a copy of Henry Miller's *Tropic of Cancer*, Olympia Press edition. I quickly asked to borrow it (I remember Elinor Busby watching us the whole time with an expression as blank as a sphinx and I've always meant to ask her what she could have been thinking) and he said oh sure and get both of us thrown into federal prison for life. Then we went off into a corner together and talked about fans and fanzines for the rest of the night.

Both Blodgett and I were fan crazy in those years when we were in high school — fanzine simple as we used to call it.

For him there was *Ripsnort*, the long delayed fourth and final issues of which finally came out in the summer of '61 just before the SeaCon. There was a funny piece by Willis about an Irish fan who'd drowned and a reminiscence of wartime newspaper life in the forties by Warner but it was the Ted White article that got everybody's attention because in the course of it Ted managed to denounce just about everybody who was anybody in the fandom of the time and then at the end stated flatly that he was quitting fandom for good and joining the Charles Mingus Sextet as an alto saxophone player. The only trouble with the article was that Blodgett had made about half of it up, including the apocalyptic ending — he later told me he'd gotten bored while typing the article onto stencil and begun to improvise. White's supposed to be a big jazz fan, he told me, and he of all people should've understood.

Nonetheless, it was a shitty thing to do and later at the SeaCon Blodgett publicly apologized to Ted and the two shook hands in front of witnesses but they were never friends again and in the early seventies when Blodgett tried his hand at serious "sci-fi" (he was still calling it that) writing and sent a couple short stories to Ted, who was then editing *Amazing* and *Fantastic* for Sol Cohen and publishing a lot of my stuff, they were promptly rejected. I read them myself and thought they weren't all that bad but then nobody else ever bought them either. (If Blodgett ever submitted them elsewhere.)

The SeaCon was a good kick in the ass for both of us, our first worldcon, but more so for Blodgett than me because I was still a neo in a

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lot of ways and he knew everybody who was anybody that was there (funny in a way considering how sporadically he is remembered today) but he'd also already begun to drink heavily and was drunk for most of the con and not always a lot of fun to be around. (Yes, at age sixteen, and don't ask me where he got the stuff, especially in alcohol-tight Washington State, but he always seemed to have a bottle of something at hand. His family was loaded though and maybe that had something to do with it. His dad was a doctor of some kind — a podiatrist, I think it was — and his mother was back east somewhere running a big museum in Boston or New York. His father had remarried his secretary who was blonde and beautiful and twenty-five, and Blodgett was always sneaking around the house trying to catch a glimpse of her naked. I remember one night in Heinlein's suite when he played poker head-to-head with Harlan Ellison all night long and lost his stupid drunken ass.)

But he stayed fan active. In fact, I'm trying to remember for sure now but I'm fairly positive that at one time or another Blodgett belonged to SAPS, OMPA and the Cult, and was high on the FAPA waiting list as well though he either never actually got in or just did minac for a year or two and then dropped. He may have belonged to CRAP also but was no longer around there either, I'm pretty sure, before it evolved into the original Apa X. And he published for all of these groups. Often — usually — invariably — prolifically. (I remember one eighty-page SAPS<sub>zine</sub>, almost entirely his own mailing comments, and he published a *Fantasy Rotator* for the Cult which was the largest of all time up to that time.) And he corresponded. Often with the biggest of early-sixties BNFs. And he wrote locs. To every-where. From *Warhoon* to *Xero* to *Void* to the neepest of neozines. The only thing Blodgett seldom did was write for other people's zines but that was solely, I think from lack of time — even Blodgett couldn't do *everything* — not from any scarcity of editors willing (and eager) to use his stuff. (He did write something for what would have been *Innuendo* 13 — I know because I saw a carbon of the original article — along with a few scribbled editorial comments and suggestions from TCarr himself — it was about 1950's Seattle fandom and Blodgett saw it from a

totally different perspective than anyone else ever had — including everyone else I ever knew who was actually there at the time — and it was an utterly *hilarious* perspective too — I mean, you really had to be there to believe it — G. M. Carr as a sort of paleolithic Roseanne Barr. But what became of the article I have no idea. I dropped Lichtman a line to ask if he'd happened to come across it among Terry's papers and he hastily wrote back to deny it. So who knows.)

And then everything changed. For me, for Blodgett, for fandom, for the world. Or so it seemed at the time. I guess you had to have been there but how it went for me was one day it was still Back Then — it was 1962 and 1963 and the only things I had on my mind besides fandom was girls and jazz and the possibility of nuclear war and then there was the Kennedy assassination and the Beatles and the civil rights stuff. And that was when — *wham-o* — it all took place. Suddenly it wasn't just Back Then any more. It was — *tralalala* — it was the Sixties! (Or so it seems now. To me. The sixties just came into being all at once. One day they weren't there yet, the next they were.)

Was it like that for Blodgett, too?

I guess you'd just have to ask him. (Which — of course — you can't.)

So now it was the sixties.

I left Seattle in July 1963. I'd graduated from high school in June and a month later went into the Air Force. They sent me to Texas and then to Mississippi and then eventually to Travis AFB, which is in Northern California only a short hop skip and jump from what was then fabulous Berkeley fandom. The strange part was that Blodgett was already there ahead of me. His father had enrolled him in Stanford University. (The old man was a graduate of Oregon State, so it was a truly great leap forward for him if not for Blodgett who seemed not to give a shit one way or the other.) We bumped into each other at a Little Men's meeting at Ben Stark's house where Tony Boucher spoke on the best science fiction novels of 1963 (he particularly admired *A Clockwork Orange* as I recall) and after the meeting I went up to Blodgett and tried to talk to him about books, about fandom, about the Air Force, about life. I couldn't get through. It was like trying to talk to the Statue of Liberty. The few words he did utter made no sense to



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me at all. I finally assumed he was just drink (like half of Berkeley fandom in those years) but it turned out he was actually high on a combination of marijuana and dexedrine. (Like half of Berkeley fandom — including me — in ensuing years.) But Blodgett was always well ahead of his time.

Too much ahead of his time for a lot of people. (He was the first junkie I ever knew personally for instance.) I saw him maybe four or five other times in 1964 and once or twice in 1965 and again in 1966 but by then we weren't even trying to talk. And he always seemed to be stoned totally out of his head and after a while so was I (different drugs though — Blodgett was already sampling heroin which I never touched) and that was pretty much that. He boycotted the 1964 Pacifcon (not because of Walter Breen — he had his own personal reasons which by now I've frankly forgotten) and it was as if whoever he'd been in Seattle he'd left behind and now in the Bay Area he'd become somebody else entirely different only just with the same name. And he had no interest in fandom. *Ripsnort* was dead and buried — and soon enough, alas, forgotten as well — there were just too much good fanzines coming out in those years so that the only ones anybody recalls now are the few truly great ones — and he dropped all his apas. (I remember that Busby proposed him for lilapa membership early on but he never got enough votes to get in because we mostly figured — rightly, I guess — that he wouldn't be particularly active.)

He quit Stanford too. (If he ever really attended classes at all. I'm not really sure on that one.) And he moved up to San Francisco, into the Haight, I suppose, though I never really found out for sure. He was around during all the early hippie stuff. I used to run into him and Lichtman and Donaho every time I turned around and we'd smile and wave and then largely go our own ways. Donaho told me he saw a lot of Blodgett too — at the Fillmore and Avalon and such like. One thing I remember: there were always girls with Blodgett. Incredibly good looking girls. Especially at first. Thin and blonde and wearing short flowery little dresses. And tiny bare feet. I was envious as hell. At first. As time wore on the girls got uglier. And dirtier. Their hair matted. Their teeth yellowed. I think that was probably the heroin factor at work. The last

time I saw Blodgett in San Francisco was January 1967 at the Human Be-in in Golden Gate Park. And that was only from afar.

Then in the spring of 1970 he called me. He was already somewhere down in LA then. He wanted to borrow \$500. I told him I was a husband and brand new father and trying to establish myself as a science fiction writer and I was lucky to have enough money to keep myself in cigarettes. He said I should quit and he was writing sci-fi himself and he'd send me some carbons and would I let him know what I thought. Then he hung up. A year and a half later he called again but said nothing about borrowing money. Which was just as well. I wasn't any less broke than the year before despite selling three novels in six months. Blodgett just wanted to talk about fandom in the early sixties. So we did. Later he asked me how FAPA was and I said boring except for a few people and he said good, that was one thing that hadn't changed. Another time when he called I asked about his parents and he said his mother and father were both dead — his mother from cancer and his father in a car wreck on the Lake Washington floating bridge. He said his little brother was dead too, killed in Vietnam by a land mine, which was weird, because I'd never even know he had a brother. He said his ex-stepmother was now living in LA in the building next door to his. I heard from him a few more time after that as well — always on the phone late at night. (Luckily I never went to bed before one.) I noticed that he had a different way of talking than before. A different tone of voice. Slower. More careful. Cautiously alert. It was as if he wanted to find out what you were going to say in response before he'd willingly risk saying anything himself. One time when I got off the phone with him I turned to my wife and said he reminded me a lot of Nixon.

He visited me once in Berkeley either in 1976 or 1977. He showed up at my door and the first thing I spotted were the needle marks, the scabs and the abscesses. To make matters worse he was wearing cut-off jeans and you could see the tracks even along the veins in his calves and thighs, like dots on a map. I muttered something about calling up Lupoff and the Benfords and maybe all of us getting together for dinner somewhere but he said the only person he wanted to talk to was me.

Then he sat down on the couch and fell

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asleep.

And I never did find out why he'd come.

He stayed all day, sleeping most of the time, barely saying a word when he was awake, and about ten o'clock he just left. He had some kind of old beaten car and he got into it and drove off and I never saw him again. I think there was a blonde woman in the car with him. It sounds weird — had she stayed out there all day alone while he was inside the house? — but I think I'd swear to it.

And now he's dead. I don't even remember how I first found out. I think somebody sent me a newspaper clipping but I can't think of who. Bill Rotsler maybe. If he even remembered Blodgett. Or maybe it was Greg Benford. I know he reads the *LA Times* and I think that's where the clipping's from. It's not very long: *Venice Man Stabbed to Death*. I guess that pretty much sums it up.

As for a point to this exercise in memory, a summation, you're going to have to look somewhere else. Harvey Blodgett was a teenage fan and a talented person and then he got caught up in the swirling winds of his time and

they pretty much sucked him in and killed him. It's an old sad fucking tale — too old to dog through seeking a message at this late date.

I can remember a moment in fandom in the early sixties when a lot of us would have told you the very best minds and talents of a generation were concentrated there. We were wrong. None of us that I can think of has done anything especially exceptional since. Maybe we weren't hungry enough. Maybe we got so much adulation in fandom when we were young that we never had the need to venture out into the bigger world seeking it there. Or maybe we all just caught up each in our own individual fashion in those swirling winds of the nineteen sixties and they sucked us in.

Frankly, I'm not sure that I really give a shit. Maybe we could have done better. But we could have done worse, too. Blodgett did. In that sense at least he is an example.

So farewell, Harvey Blodgett. Rest in Peace.

Hey, you did have to ask. ■

(from *BLAT!* #4, December 1994)

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## Dear Gordon:

February 24, 1995

Dear Gordon:

I was pretty surprised when I opened up *BLAT!* No. 4 and found your article about the surprising tale of the decline and fall of our old mutual friend, Harvey Blodgett. You see, from what you say here I may well have been the last fan to see Harvey prior to his untimely demise in 1984.

I was pretty new to fandom myself when Harvey Blodgett appeared on the scene in late 1959 — or perhaps it was early 1960. As you say, Harvey was living in Seattle at the time. That was during the height of the *Cryera*, and like many young fans I felt quite close to the *Cry* crew — Buz, Elinor, Wally and the others — and I was a new member of SAPS, which many of them also inhabited (as they do again today). With my now long-gafted coeditor, Arv Underman, I was publishing my first genzine, *Psi-Phi*, on a schedule a helluva lot more frequent than yours or mine these days. Harvey had seen Belle Dietz's "Fannotations" column in the February 1960 issue of *Fantastic Universe*, in which our fourth issue was reviewed. She wrote that *Psi-Phi* was "...A slick (paper) production which simply cried out for reviewing... The contents, in my opinion, are too esoteric for the real newcomer to sf fandom but a treat for those in the 'know'... The letter column rounds out the issue nicely, with many interesting, well-written, edited and answered letters from some of the best writers in fandom... The whole fanzine reads smoothly and pleasantly." (No, I didn't memorize this review back in 1960; I have a copy of that issue.)

Harvey decided to write to see if we would trade for the first issue of his *Ripsnort*,

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and sent copies to both me and Arv. I have to admit I don't recall being all that impressed with his fanzine itself. In blurry hindsight, I associate it with the early efforts of other young fans of the time such as Vic Ryan and Mike McNerney who also went on to do far better things; it "showed promise," as some of the reviewers of the time had said of *Psi-Phi*. What struck me was the short letter he secreted inside the fanzine. In it he recounted where he'd gotten my address and that he was interested in our zine because the review had said it was "esoteric." He added the other items reviewed in the same column that he was sending away for were *Fancylopedia II* and Guy Terwilleger's *Best of Fandom 1958*, an early fanthology. This guy has taste, I thought to myself, and sent a short, encouraging letter of comment on *Ripsnort* No. 1 along with *Psi-Phi* No. 4.

This began a period of intermittent correspondence and, of course, trading of fanzines. But he never wrote a letter of comment on any of the issues of *Psi-Phi* we sent him; I remember that. Instead he sent *Ripsnort*. He also began showing up in a few of the apas I was in — you mention the Cult, SAPS and OMPA. But he was never in FAPA, Gordon. I remember he climbed up to maybe No. 3 or 4 on the waiting list, and then got dropped for failure to write to the Secretary-Treasurer; that was when FAPA had almost as many people waiting to get in as were on the roster, and one had to acknowledge receipt of at least every other *Fantasy Amateur* plus pay a subscription fee to get it. (But no, he didn't publish in CRAP before it changed into Apa- X; he was an early member of the latter, however, though an "associate" (non-publishing) one and wasn't one of the more active members.)

Throughout all of this, we never met. I didn't go out of town very far to conventions in those days, though I did get to the Bay Area for Westercons. Blodgett and I wrote about meeting at the Oakland Westercon at the Leamington in '61, but something happened at the last minute and he wasn't able to make it. We finally met in 1965, under rather unusual circumstances, not long after I moved from Los Angeles to the Bay Area immediately upon getting out of UCLA. It wasn't at one of those Little Men meetings or on Haight Street, though it was near Haight Street. In 1965 I was seriously backing down on my print fanac. I'd folded *Frap* the previous fall when the fallout from the Breendoggle made it difficult to find enough of the right types of contributions to keep it going; people just weren't in the mood for light faanish humor just then. I'd also dropped out of SAPS — having dropped out of many other apas earlier — and was headed towards total minac in FAPA, where I did manage to retain a membership until 1970 with a series of 8-pagers.

In 1965 one of the other groups of people I knew besides fans and friends from college was publishers of small semi-pro poetry magazines and in particular one Drew Wagon who with a couple of fellow poets (whose names I've forgotten) put out a poetry zine from Salt Lake City called *Wild Dog*. *Wild Dog* was 8½ x 11, mimeo'd, and looked very much like a fanzine (except it was printed on only one side). A month or so after I moved to Oakland, Drew and his coeditors moved to San Francisco, to a huge flat on Downey Street — a few blocks uphill from Haight Street — across the street from beat poet Michael McClure as it turned out. They began holding frequent large parties where poets like Gary Snyder, Philip Whalen and on one memorable occasion Allen Ginsberg and Peter Orlovsky would show up.

So did I, and so as it happens did Blodgett. This was about a year before the "hippie" phenomenon hit San Francisco, but Harvey already had fairly long hair — longer than the Beatles — though at that time he was still clean-shaven. (I still had short hair then.) I didn't have any idea he was there, and I don't remember just what happenstance caused us to be thrust into conversation together, but when we introduced ourselves to one another, if it had been quieter in the room I swear you could have heard our jaws drop. He was with one of those cute girls like you describe. This one was about six feet tall, slender with long straight red hair — classic hippie look, though, as I said, this was before hippies — and her name was Rosebud. I asked her if it was from "Citizen Kane," and she looked blankly at me in non-recognition (which lowered my opinion of

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her before I even knew her at all). We all sat down on the floor in an empty corner, then, and Harvey got out a huge joint and lit it up. A few other people joined us while it was going around, but after we finished we were by ourselves — after a few minutes Rosebud got up and joined another group of people across the room — and talked.

Unfortunately I don't remember *what* we talked about; after all, it's been thirty years. But I do remember it wasn't much about fandom. What it was about fandom was simply acknowledgment from him that he'd received all the *Frap*s I'd sent him, read and enjoyed them, but hadn't been able to bring himself to write a letter of comment on it or any of the other fanzines he was still receiving. He said he'd "burnt out" on fandom and wasn't going back. He didn't seem bitter, just resolute. We saw each other a few times that year and spoke by phone a few more times, but time passed and when I called his number one day I found it had been disconnected. I sent a postcard to the last address I had for him inquiring after his whereabouts; it never came back, but I never heard from him again either. (I was at the Human Be-In in Golden Gate Park in early 1967, where you saw him from afar; but I didn't spot him myself — nor you for that matter. I *did* see Donaho from a couple hundred feet, but wasn't able to make my way through the dense crowd to talk with him.)

Then years passed, more than a decade. I went to Tennessee and lived at a commune called The Farm, got married and had four kids, did a whole bunch of wild and crazy things for "work" while I was living there — all rightfully the subjects of future articles and perhaps eventually a book — and kind of forgot about Harvey Blodgett. In June 1980 I left The Farm and moved to Glen Ellen at the invitation of Paul Williams, who needed someone to work with him on his Entwhistle Books publishing venture. Since at that time I had three years of experience with The Farm's publishing house, I fit right in.

One of the things I did was go on the road selling Entwhistle Books directly to bookstores. I would load up the back of my Datsun station wagon with books and "hit" a town or an area and visit every bookstore, offering attractive discounts for immediate cash payment (or the usual billing for those who preferred that). This was a generally successful approach and Entwhistle's sales spiraled upward. On my first bookselling trip to Southern California in the fall of 1980, I arrived at my first stops in Venice Beach. Going to Venice first on a Southern California trip was a "tradition" from my 1978 stint as West Coast sales rep for The Farm's publishing company, based out of Richmond (near Berkeley). There's a good natural food store in Venice where I would get a snack, several decent bookstores to visit both there and in nearby Santa Monica, and of course the Pacific Ocean and white sandy beaches. There were hippies and other strange people, all of whom tended to center on the area where the final block of Windward Avenue meets the Ocean Front Walk. It was on that block of Windward where Blodgett worked in that record cum skateboard rental store.

But I didn't know that when I walked into the store late that afternoon after exhausting all the book-selling opportunities in Venice and Santa Monica for the day. (I always stopped trying to sell books when it got much past five; store managers would either have left or would be very busy with an after-work burst of business.) Earlier in the day I'd spotted the record store, noted that it sold used as well as new records, and decided to revisit it later to see if I could find several items I was then looking for: the Beach Boys Christmas album and a 45 rpm single of Les Paul and Mary Ford's "How High The Moon," a big hit in 1951, which I wanted for its flipside, the haunting and beautiful instrumental, "Walking and Whistling Blues."

The guy behind the counter looked familiar to me, but I didn't think too much of it. After all, *all* aging hippies have a certain family resemblance. He was wearing Flojos sandals (Mexican flip-flops), purple and black striped beach shorts, and a tie-dyed Grateful Dead teeshirt with a couple of small holes on the lower front where it draped over his protruding waistline. His hair was thinning but still long, with little hints of gray here and there, and he had a scraggly but pretty full beard and moustache. I had

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long hair and a beard at the time myself. We gave each other the eye in a friendly manner as I walked past the counter and headed towards the record bins, which were behind the skateboard rental area.

After a time Blodgett walked over. "Can I help you find something?" he asked. I told him I was looking for the Beach Boys Christmas album and he looked at me kind of funny. "Uh, you don't look like the kind of dude who'd be into the Beach Boys." Well, I explained, I grew up in Southern California and surf music happened the year after I got out of high school. I kind of ignored it at the time, but years later, I continued, my friends Ted White and Paul Williams persuaded me otherwise.

"Ted White?" Blodgett said, rather loudly. His eyebrows raised precipitously. "You mean the Ted White who used to write jazz reviews for *Downbeat* back in the '50s and '60s?"

"Yeah, that one," I replied, rather surprised at the association, "but I mostly know him through the science fiction subculture."

Harvey's mind blew at that. "Science fiction subculture! You mean fandom? Who are you, anyway?"

I told him and he told me, and both our minds were blown. How far out, we both exclaimed, that we'd run into one another this way fifteen years after our last meeting and in another city. The store was closing at eight, he said — it was around quarter to seven — and suggested that perhaps, if it was possible, I could hang out and we could go have dinner somewhere afterwards.

I agreed, and we did, and in the end we stayed up until around two in the morning, when we both agreed we had to get some sleep. He told me he'd kicked a serious drug habit in the late '70s and now he only smoked pot — and good stuff it was, let me tell you. He lived alone in a tiny one-bedroom apartment in the Canal District of Venice, not too far from where he worked, and mostly kept to himself. No girlfriend, though he alluded to one in the recent past with some hope of getting back together. Also no interaction with Los Angeles fandom, though he was aware that somewhere out there LASFS probably still met on its resolute weekly schedule. He said he thought he saw Bruce Pelz once walking down Santa Monica Boulevard when he was book-shopping up in West Los Angeles, but he didn't approach him to check it out. (He liked to go browse in Papa Bach's, one of my old favorites as well.) I told him I'd seen a few current fanzines through Paul Williams — this was around when *Pong* was first coming out — and he asked after various people, but I don't remember who specifically.

And that's about it. We traded addresses and I visited with him a few more times on other book-selling trips. He always talked about coming up to Glen Ellen to see me and our "doing the Haight" together, but it never happened. Then the Reagan Depression of 1982/83 struck and the Entwistle Books sales curve went down, down, down. I was unemployed and there were no more trips to Los Angeles for me for a few years.

When I did finally go back in 1986 for a visit to my aging parents, I of course headed immediately for the record and skateboard rental place on Windward Avenue. It was gone; the building it was in had been torn down and the vacant lot was "protected" by a tall chain link fence with razor wire on top. I tried calling Blodgett's number and got someone else who spoke no English. Information had no new listing. I didn't feel comfortable going to check out his little apartment in the Canal District, knowing that a lot of dope was dealt from that neighborhood and not wanting to walk into something unpleasant or downright dangerous.

So I was glad to read your reminiscences about Harvey in *BLAT!* No. 4. They filled in a lot of detail about him that I hadn't previously known. I hope this letter, which has gotten somewhat out of hand admittedly, does the same for you.

Best wishes,  
Robert Lichtman

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