

FADEAWAY #19 is a fanzine devoted to science fiction and related fields of interest, and is produced by **Robert Jennings, 29 Whiting Rd., Oxford, MA 01540-2035, email fabficbks@aol.com**. Primary distribution is thru the Southern Fandom Press Alliance. Additional Copies are sent to select individuals. Those individuals may receive the next issues by sending in an acceptable letter of comment on the issue they are holding in their hands. Any person who has not previously received a copy of this fanzine may receive a copy of the current issue for free by sending me your name and address. Subscriptions are now being accepted, reluctantly, at a cost of \$15.00 per year. Better for everyone if you just write letters of comment. Publication, hopefully, is bi-monthly. This is the December-January 2010-2011 issue, for distribution thru SFPA Mailing #279.

ANOTHER TRIUMPH FOR HUMAN STUPIDITY

Actually, thinking about that, I've reconsidered. I was going to make this a regular feature of Fadeaway, but after due consideration I don't think I will. In actual point of fact, human stupidity abounds. It is so commonplace that it doesn't need any headline spotlight on my part to point out the failings or foibles of the human animal.

In addition to that, it also strikes me as being pretty hypocritical on my part to run notices about human stupidity, of which the daily newspapers are forever loaded, when my own life is so full of glaring examples even more ridiculous than anything I might pluck from the pages of the national media.

For example, just the other day I pulled into my driveway, paused a second to consider whether the mailman might have arrived yet, opened the door, and started to get out, when I realized that I couldn't pull the car key out of the ignition. That was pretty odd. I checked again. Nope, wouldn't budge an inch. The key fob has these little buttons on it that electronically open and close and lock various things on the car. I tried all of them. They all seemed to work perfectly, but the key wouldn't move. OK, problem time. And here I was just thinking what a great car this was, how trouble free it has been. Now I'd have to start it up, drive down to the dealership and let them take a look at the situation.

Except the car wouldn't start. Turned the key all the way. Nothing. Nothing at all. More fiddling around. Still nothing.

I finally called the Ford roadside assistance program. After explaining the situation the guy at the other end



opted that he had better sent a tow truck out and have the vehicle towed to the dealership.

Wonderful, I thought, just %\$#&*X wonderful. An hour and a half later the tow truck guy arrived. I explained the situation. He was concerned.

"And the car won't even start?" he asked.

"Nope," says I. "Take a look yourself."

So he did. And then he looked down. He pushed the gear shift up to the park position, turned the ignition key, which of

course started the car, turned it off, withdrew the key and handed it to me.

"You know, these cars won't start unless you have the gear shift in either neutral or park."

My level of embarrassment at the absolute stupidity of my behavior cannot be imagined, much less adequately described here. Obviously, anybody who does anything this absolutely stupid has no reason to be calling attention to anybody else's little errors in judgment. Nonetheless, I have one item from the file that screams for wider attention, so I'm going to pass it along...

The government of Iran, thru their spokesman President Mahmoud Ahmadinehad announced a new policy inaugurated on Tuesday 27 July 2010, to encourage population growth, eliminating Iran's decades of internationally acclaimed family planning as "ungodly and a Western import."

The new policy will pay families for every new child born and deposit money into the newborn child's bank account until they reach age 18. This initiative destroys the decades of work to boost Iran's economy and reduce the country's health and housing problems caused by its once runaway population growth.

"Those who raise ideas of family planning, they are thinking in the realm of the secular world," Ahmadinejad stated, after the inauguration ceremony. Iran's population is currently about 75 million. Ahmadinejad claims Iran could easily support up to 150 million. Foreign observers note that Iran is having a hard time taking care of its current population and warn this new policy will lead to serious problems both in the short and long term. However this new policy is sure to be a hit with the very poorest citizens of Iran, who just happen to be the backbone supporters of Ahmadinejad's regime.

ILLOS FOR THIS ISSUE on this page (3) and in our letter column, are illos by ALEXIS GILLILAND. Pictures on pages 9, and 11 are by ALAN HUCHINSON; while the illo heading up the book review section on page 4 is by JOHN CODY.

This publication is still very much in need of illustrations for all types. If you are an artist, I appeal for your assistance.

And on a related subject, we could use written articles covering a variety of subjects as well. Please contact me by email or regular mail.

And by the way, did I mention yet that we need your letters of comment? Issues of this zine go out free to those folks who write letters of comment. There is a subscription rate for those who do not, but it is every so much easier, not to mention cheaper if you will just take a few minutes and send in your comments about this issue.

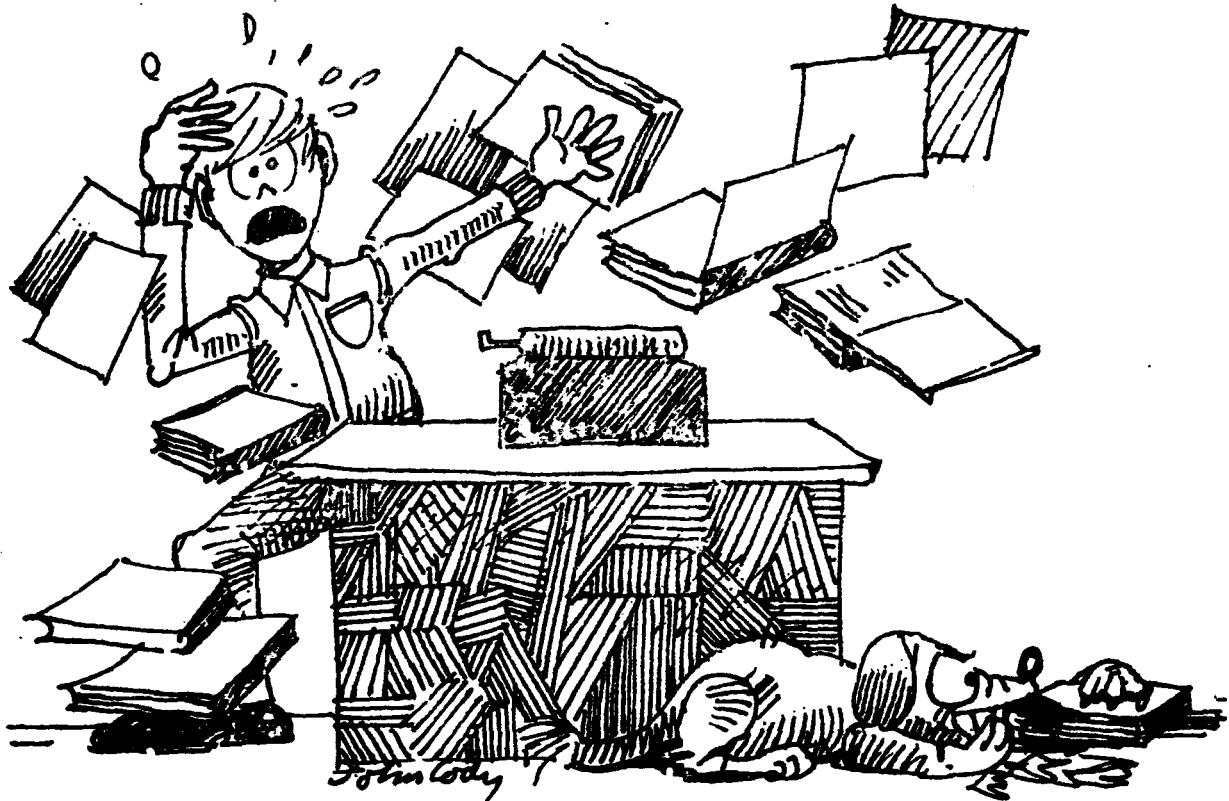
SECRET INSIDE INFO!!! Yes, by now everybody knows that the Post Office is trying to jack up the postage rates yet again, hoping to ram this new series of rates thru by January of 2011. As of this date the Postal Review Board of Cynics & Nonbelievers, or whatever they're called these days, appears to have shot this plan down. However, the Postal People say they will submit a slightly different rate hike proposal which they feel will win approval. Depressing as all that news in, Ye Editor has managed to actually gain some information from a spy inside the postal department which reveals exactly what the Post Office plans to do with all that moola if they actually get their rate increase. Of course as a concerned citizens and an active fan who uses the postal system I am deeply concerned, especially after looking over this secret list---

Top Fifteen Ways The Post Office Is Going To Spend The Extra Money From The Rate Hike

- 15 Hire consultants to figure out how to plan the next rate hike
- 14 Pay Lance Armstrong another billion bucks to post the new 48 cent stamp on his butt
- 13 Clear up the massive debt incurred when their Broadway musical "Anthrax On Ice" bombed
- 12 Hire Santa to deliver all those tax forms overnight on April 15th
- 11 Special stamp glue that gives you a two hour buzz
- 10 Goodbye boring old uniform caps, hello festive new sombreros
- 9 A new thousand stamp commemorative set featuring Liz Taylor and all her husbands and lovers
- 8 Replace those dorky boxy carrier trucks with cobalt blue Batmobiles
- 7 Lobby Congress for new laws requiring all envelopes to cost as least seventy-five cents so the new forty-eight cent stamp will look like a huge bargain
- 6 Secretly breed whole new race of dogs who will genetically attack people in Berger King uniforms instead of people in Postal uniforms
- 5 A special program to wean Mr. Zip off vodka jello shots
- 4 Replace postcards with Folgers' Crystals
- 3 Replace Folgers' Crystals with crystal meth
- 2 Pay Iran as soon as they finish developing their atom bomb to lob the first one at UPS headquarters
- 1 Make 'Going Postal' a national holiday



BOOK BENDER



Honey, have you seen that signed 1st edition I bought at the convention last Saturday?

Book reviews of stuff I have recently read, and book reviews from others who care to contribute are a regular feature of this fanzine. I read a lot of different books on a lot of different subjects. While I buy most of the books reviewed herein, I certainly do not buy all of them. I make full use of the local public library, and I suggest that you do likewise. My experience is that the folks who operate libraries are very interested in what their customers want to read, and if they do not have a particular book you want in stock at the moment, they might well be inclined to buy it. At the least they will get you a copy to read thru inter-library loan. No book is too obscure, or too specialized, or too esoteric to be tracked down. Your comments on these reviews are always appreciated.

THE NIGHTMARE AND OTHER TALES OF DARK FANTASY by Francis Stevens; University of Oklahoma Press; Trade Paperback; \$17.95

I don't know how I missed this book when it originally came out back in 2004. I must have been snowed under with other things to read because I normally would have grabbed this the minute it rolled off the presses.

Francis Stevens was the pseudonym of Gertrude Barrows Bennett, a woman about which very little was known until relatively recently. She was one of the earliest female fantasy writers to gain notice in the pulp magazines of the twentieth century, even though she was writing under a male pseudonym. She produced three very strong novels, along with a flurry of novelettes and short stories, and then by the middle 1920s she stopped writing

completely. Her reputation was fixed in the memory of those older fans who had been privileged to originally read her material in magazines such as All-Story and Argosy when they came out in the teen years of the century, but her work was not well known among the newer generation of science fiction fans.

Fortunately her name and reputation was redeemed when Mary Grandineer, editor of Famous Fantastic Mysteries decided to reprint her story "Behind the Curtain" in the Jan 1940 issue. This was followed by the reprinting of her lost world novel, "The Citadel of Fear" in the February 1942 issue.

Those appearances in FFM led to a reawakening of interest in her work. A few other stories were reprinted here and there, and finally her science fiction novel "The Heads of Cerberus" came out as a Polaris Press hardback in 1952. Over the following decades all three of her novels have been reprinted in both hard back and paperback. While her shorter fiction has been reprinted only sporadically, that situation has finally been remedied with this volume.

The title is a bit off-putting. The term "Dark Fantasy" carries unpleasant connotations, at least so far as I'm concerned. It's sort of akin to other boundary-pushing adjectives such as the word "Extreme." These days when 'Extreme' is coupled with other activities, as in "Extreme" hockey, or "Extreme" kick boxing; or even "extreme" soft-ball, the images conjured up are not always pleasant or harmonious. So when I first opened this book I was almost expecting an "Extreme" version of fantasy story telling, perhaps a collection of grizzly horror stories rampant with gore and graphic violence. Fortunately the reality turned out to be something completely different.

The stories in the volume clearly demonstrate Ms Stevens prowess as a writer. There are a wide variety of stories here, and most of them are not specifically pure fantasy, or pure science fiction. In a few of these stories the fantasy or science fictional elements seem relatively minor even tho those elements always become important ingredients to the story plot as it unfolds.

Ms Bennett was an accomplished writer with a very fertile imagination who knew how to create stories that would attract the attention of both editors (all important), and readers (also important, but not as important as impressing editors, who, after all, bought the stories and sent out the payment checks).

She has a remarkably versatile and modern writing style. Most of these stories were published in the years between 1917 and 1923, a period when much of the popular writing seems a bit stilted by today's more informal style, but Ms Stevens stories move and flow with modern language that carries the reader along and pulls him into the heart of the stories with almost no effort at all.

Her characters are seldom fully rounded, and in many instances they are mercurial because of another odd and yet very strong point about her story telling abilities, namely, that in almost all of the tales in this volume, the stories twist and turn and reveal brand new aspects, sometimes entirely and completely different viewpoints or conclusions within the flow of the plot itself. She favored short chapters, and in some cases every other chapter reveals new information which completely changes the content, context and direction the story must take. This is a remarkable ability and shows the strength of her imagination and why editors and readers spoke so highly of her and why fans kept her memory alive over the years after she had stopped writing.

She also tends to favor longer stories. "The Nightmare", for example, is almost a short novel, and contains many fantastic elements set on a strange island in the South Pacific where two factions vie for a mysterious substance which might, like the legendary philosopher's stone, transmute lead into gold. The hero of the tale, Mr. Jones, has been catapulted onto the island from an ocean liner on a trip to Europe by means which are completely unexplained until the very end of the tale, and he is as amazed, alarmed and astonished as the reader when the adventure unfolds. Bizarre is not exactly the proper word here, yet it will do as an apt description of this very strange story.



“The Labyrinth” is also very long and is the strongest story in the volume in my opinion, primarily because it is also one of the most intriguing, imaginative and yet deeply disturbing tales in this volume. This story displays this twisting and turning and turning inside out yet again of story threads Ms Stevens liked to experiment with more forcibly than anything else. What starts out as a strange missing person case, with the hero’s beloved cousin disappearing into thin air, turns into a mystery, then a puzzle, then a horror story, then a morality play, and also, during all of this, a romance, as well as a nail-biting thriller. All of that is offered within the scope of a single piece of writing. I don’t know too many other writers past or present who could have achieved something as impressive, or as memorable as this tale.

What an impression her fantasy stories must have made to the readers of All-Story, Argosy and the other top selling pulp magazines in the days before and after the Great War. Imagine, to stumble across a delicate fantasy like “Elva” or “The Elf Trap” tucked amidst stories of sports, military adventure, or the sea. In issues dominated by westerns and mysteries with the occasional romance tossed in, suddenly, the reader comes across a strange horror story like “Scarapion”

Yes, it must have made very strong impressing, a lasting impression on those readers destined to become science fiction and fantasy fans in the two decades that followed. And when Famous fantastic Mysteries was launched in 1939, drawing its material from the files of the many Munsey Magazine titles, of which All-Story and Argosy were two of the most famous, guided by the requests of the readers, Ms. Gruarenteer must have been similarly delighted to have discovered stories as well crafted, carefully plotted and filled with ingenious twists and turns just waiting like uncut jewels, ready and crying to be reprinted.

I personally question the claims made here that Ms Stevens’ writings were pivotal elements in the development of twentieth century fantasy. not because her stories lack any elements that would not make this so, but simply because for so many years most of her material was out of print and lived on only in the memory of those fans who originally read them.

Very little is known about the life of Ms. Bennett. In the 1952 Polaris hardback that reprinting her science fiction novel, long time SF fan and SF writer Lloyd Arthur Eshbach tried to fill in the blanks about Francis Steven’s life and career. But investigation revealed very little, and even now, not much more is known. Much misinformation was gleaned from her daughter, who quarreled with her mother sometime in the late 1930s and never reconciled.

New information in this book gives her proper birth date, and her true death year, 1948. It fills in background previously unknown, such as information about the sudden death of her first husband only a year after they were wed, and makes mention of her second marriage, along with the information that she was gainfully employed most of her life as a stenographer and a secretary, holding several worthwhile positions. Her father died in 1917 and she wrote most of her fiction while taking care of her ailing mother in an effort to supplement her income. A few years after the 1920 death of her mother she married a second time and moved from the Philadelphia area where she had lived most of her life, out to California, and apparently abandoned her secretary talents as well as her writing aspirations. Apparently her second husband was a good provider and she did not need to work any further.

It is tempting to say that this was a great loss to the field of fantasy, but perhaps not. She had a second chance at marriage, a second life in a completely new location, presumably happier and less filled with strife than her earlier years had been, and there is nothing to suggest that the fiction market in the late twenties or during the years of the Depression would have welcomed her particular style of writing, or that she would have been able to maintain the remarkable quality of output she had displayed during the teen years. Of course, this is all purely conjecture.

This trade paperback volume is filled with interesting stories. All of them are very strong works of fiction, there are no weak sisters here. Some are science fiction, some are fantasies, a few are horror, and some are outré adventures with more than a touch of the bizarre. But they are all interesting, and all make very compelling reading. Francis Stevens made her reputation on her novels, but her short stories easily stand the test of time.

Reading this volume has certainly reawakened my interest in her work. I recommend this volume unhesitantly to anybody with an interest in science fiction and fantasy. And after finishing this collection I think I’m also going to dig out my copies of her three novels and read them again.

MIGHTY SAMPSON VOLUME ONE; part of the Dark Horse Comics hardback Archives; original stories by Otto Binder with art by Frank Thorne; \$49.95, 218 pages; full color hardback

I bought this hardback book with the vague idea of having a permanent collection of these stories. Unlike some archives editions produced by Dark Horse, or DC or Marvel, in which I happen to be missing some or even most of the comics being reprinted, in this particular case I have every single issue of Mighty Sampson from issue #1 thru the very last issue. I bought them all off the stands when they were new, and I still have them all, every issue still in Near Mint condition. So, at this point in time I'm not really sure why I ordered this thing. Perhaps it was because thumbing thru the Previews that particular month I wasn't finding much else to buy.

Whatever the reason, I got this volume a few weeks ago and I got around to checking it out this weekend. The hardback reprints the first six issues of the Mighty Sampson comic and reading it has been an experience for me---mostly a disappointing experience.

That may be putting it a little harshly, but not much. I remember not being terribly impressed by Mighty Sampson when it first came out in the mid 1960s. The best things about the comics were the neat full color painted covers. Looking thru this volume today and re-reading all those issues one after another, my original impression has been reinforced.

Mighty Sampson features stories set in a not so distant future when an atomic war has devastated civilization, but has not completely destroyed everything. Radiation has spawned weird animal and plant mutations, most of them very dangerous. Humans have mostly reverted to near savagery, and people have settled into loosely organized tribes reduced to foraging for food and material from the wreckage of the great cities which are crumbling ruins now.

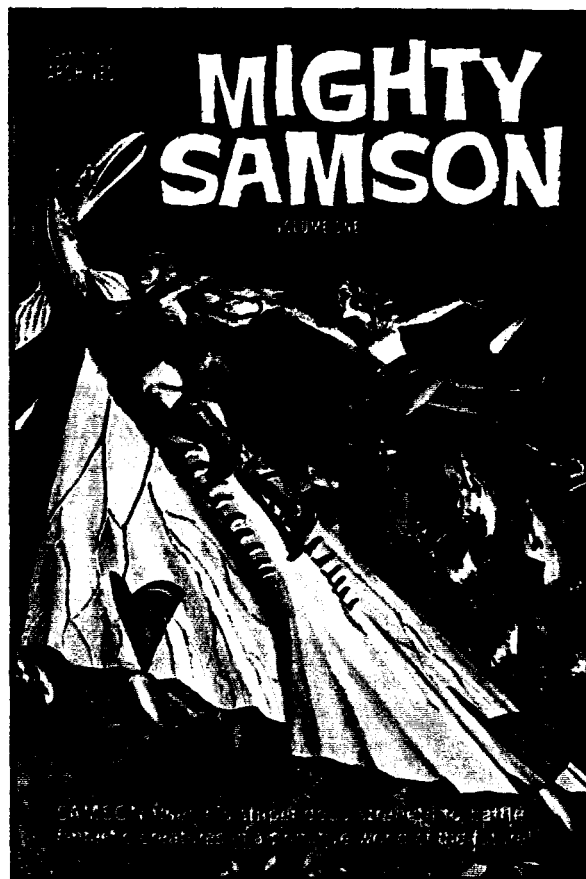
The potential for an interesting and well developed series is certainly here. The comic was created and written by Otto Binder, a guy who had a long and illustrious career in both the comic book field and also in the field of science fiction literature. Unfortunately in my opinion things just don't gel with Mighty Sampson.

Binder must not have been getting paid much for writing this series, because almost all the stories have a very casual and off-hand feel to them, as tho they were knocked out over the course of a Friday afternoon before a big family weekend, or crunched in a rush to meet a deadline. The vast potential of this unique background stories is mostly wasted.

The hero of the series is Mighty Sampson, a man of the future living in N'yark, among the ruins of what was once Manhattan. Sampson, as his name implies, is extremely strong, strong since birth in fact, and he is also very resourceful and intelligent. The origin story tells how he grew to manhood, fought off attacks by jungle plants, marauding beasts and enemy tribes. Then as an adult we see him being attacked by a monstrous mutant Liobear which almost kills him and gorges out his right eye. After a tremendous battle he finally kills the Liobear, but falls nearly dead from his wounds. He is discovered by Sharmaine, a beautiful girl whose father, named Mindor, happens to be an intellectual, a budding scientist in this post-holocaust age, determined to discover, salvage and use the knowledge and machines of the past to rebuild civilization.

Samson is nursed back to health, and decides to throw in his lot with Mindor and Sharmaine. Sharmaine makes him new clothing from the hide of the Liobear (including a fur cape, a fairly ludicrous not to say useless ornament considering the environment).

Aiding the pair on a food foraging expedition, Samson and his new friends are ambushed by a trio of savages from the tribe of Kull the Killer who try to steal their newly found hoard of canned food. After a battle in which Sampson shows off his incredible strength and lightning fast agility, the trio is frightened off, but vow vengeance for the future.



Kull the Killer and his gang of tribal thugs prove to be a recurring threat thru a number of stories in the early issues of the comic. In addition Samson and his new friends also encounter Terra of Jerz, a glamorous female villainess who lives across the Hudz river. It turns out she has her own underground bunker, well equipped with food and scientific marvels from the past, including a flying saucer-like air craft, and her ambition is to make herself queen and rule the combined lands of Jerz and N'yark. We are told that her ancestors designed this hidden sanctuary and have lived there for generations, altho we never see any of her kin-folk. She initially decides to use Kull and his tribe as minions, but they prove unreliable and too stupid to be trusted.

The plotting of Terra with or without Kull provide the core for most of the stories in this volume. Another interesting additional villain pops up later in the person of Headsman Thorr, leader of a group of Viking-like raiders who come to N'yark to steal metal which they use in Greenland, their homeland. Greenland is now cleared of its ice cap and rendered fertile by the atomic war. The civilization on Greenland is much advanced over that of N'yark and Jerz, but Thorr is a tyrant who also has plans for conquest, and when he decides to take the metal from the fallen Statue of Liberty, Mindor and Samson decide to oppose him.

The best story in the volume was printed in issue #3 in which Samson and his friends encounter Dr John Pitt, a man from the distant past, discovered alive in a state of suspended animation inside a closed atomic bomb bunker. This bunker was constructed to hold hundreds of people, but Dr.Pitt is the only person inside, and we soon learn that the reason for that is because Pitt is a craven coward.

He locked out his friends and everybody else when reports of the atomic attack were first broadcast, choosing to save himself and not even trying to help anyone else. His cowardice is still his dominant personality trait, as we learn that a chemical plant from the past, loaded with sulfur, is now burning and poisonous clouds are sweeping over N'yark and will kill everyone. Pitt knows how to do stop the disaster, if he and Samson can reach the blazing factory before rain falls in the next few days, and altho he initially agrees to help, he's mostly interested in saving himself and getting away from N'yark no matter how many other people die or what happens to the city.

This story is the high point of this volume, and despite a few missteps and too-convenient coincidences in plotting which a second draft or better editing could have easily patched up, it still stands as a strong story and a monument to what Otto Binder could do with Mighty Samson when he set his mind to it. Unfortunately no other story plot comes close to equaling this effort for quite a few issues into the future, and certainly not within the pages of this hardback archive volume.

Reading these stories was an interesting experience to me. Realizing that a person tends to become more sophisticated as he gets older, at the same time it occurred to me that I was never too impressed with these stories when they originally came out in the mid 1960s. And the reason is that the stories aren't very good. Sure, the background is excellent, and the set-up for many of the individual adventures show great potential, but the actual stories themselves are mostly inept, predictable and trite. Almost every single story has Samson battling some mutant monster which would have killed a battalion of soldiers armed to the teeth with modern weapons, but which Samson manages to defeat single handedly thru brute strength and blind luck. There are also no repeat engagements for monsters either; every issue has new and ever more ridiculous creatures, but you never see the same beast twice. Considering the variety, and the overwhelmingly ferocious nature of these monsters it's amazing that any human beings manage to survive in the N'yark area at all.

The ultimate in stupid mutant monster menaces appears on the cover of issue #6, the very same illo used as the cover of this hardback volume, which shows Samson with Sharmaine barely in tow, clinging to the back of a huge flying reptile, a "jet bird" we are told, an organic creature, which is able to shoot flaming jet blasts out its tail to fly at near super-sonic speed. Really, no lie. I almost dropped the book when I read that. Apparently there were no competent editors over at Gold Key during this period either.

And that leads directly to the next major problem with the series, namely, where the hell are the people anyway? Mindor, Sharmaine and Samson are supposed to be working to rebuild civilization, spread knowledge, help improve the quality of life for the survivors of this awful catastrophe, yet in most of the stories, except the three central protagonists and whoever happens to be the villain that issue, there are no people shown at all. Where are the people that Mindor is supposed to be helping? Where are the tribes which have been salvaging and trying to survive in this ruined city for decades? There are none. There are no tribal groups, no families, no children, no other people of any kind, nothing at all that indicates there are other people in the region, despite the fact that every single story of every single issue Mindor keeps telling us about working to create a better future for the people of N'yark.

For that matter, considering the background set-up here, namely, that many generations have passed since the atomic war, and that the people have reverted back to savagery and have been living on and cannibalizing the

ruins of the city to somehow survive, the city itself appears to be in remarkably good shape. Yeah, some buildings are skelatanized, but most of the streets, subways, bridges, the smaller buildings, even the roads, including street and traffic signs, are all pretty much intact. This makes no sense at all.

And what about Samson's friends, Mador and Sharmine? Not a single word of explanation is ever offered as to where these two people came from, or how they became so educated and comfortable with modern scientific knowledge, or even where they got those twentieth century clothes they are wearing, decades after the city has supposedly fallen into wreck and ruin.

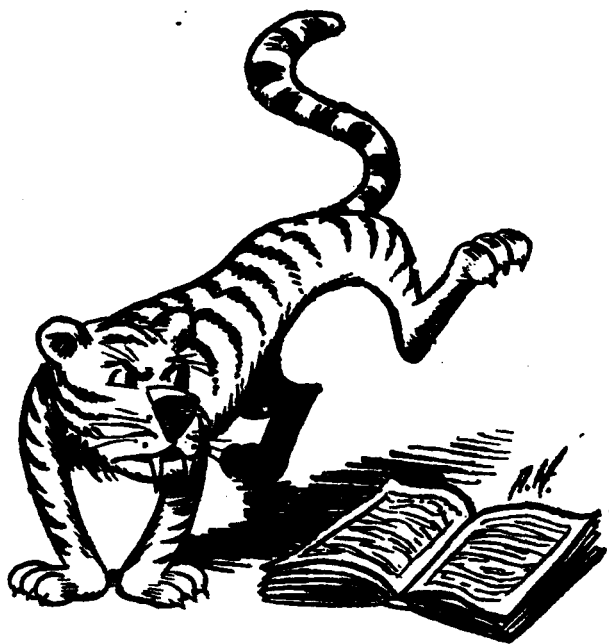
The character itself is also inconsistent. Samson's strength is not just phenomenal, it's unbelievable. The only weakness he has is that he is able to be flattened by Terra's electro-prod, a super high voltage cattle prod which she uses on anybody who gets in her way, usually on Samson. Other than that he has no known weaknesses, or limits to his strength. Rather than think the problem situations thru in each story, Binder simply has Samson hammer his way to victory, and when danger is about to overwhelm him, some lucky accident manages to save him every time.

In issue #6, the story with the jet bird on the cover, Samson and Shamaine are about to be crushed by a falling skyscraper, but then they leap out into space and, what luck, land on the back of the Jet bird which flies them away from the danger before finally shaking the pair off into nearby deep water. I realize that comic books aren't intended to be sophisticated literature, but I expect better writing than this from any kind of coherent published story and Samson simply doesn't deliver.

Often an initial story plot offers great potential for development. But almost always Binder takes the easy way out, fills the panels with new mutant beasts, skips over any involved plot development and opts for easy outs and simplistic solutions to story concepts which should realistically require a lot more complicated thought and action on the part of the heroes. But that would have required too much work, so he doesn't bother.

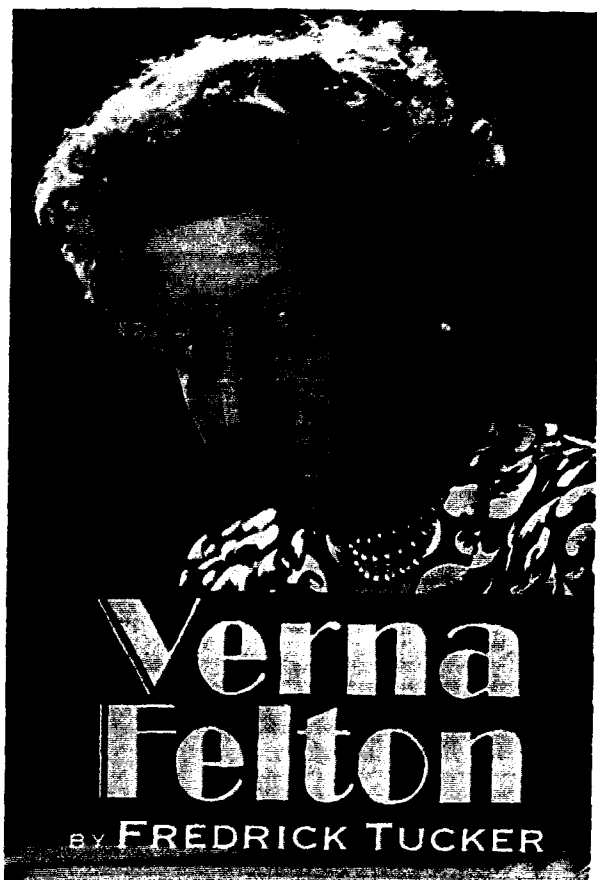
The art by Frank Thorne also leaves a lot to be desired. Over the period of years Thorne's art evolved and improved considerably. Unfortunately little of the technique and style he displayed in the 1970s is evident in these early Mighty Samson stories. The art is pedestrian, and serviceable but lacks much imagination. The art is heavy with blacks to save time on details, and the use of darker colors creates a generally muddy effect. No doubt Thorne purists and admirers will disagree, but I find Mighty Sampson to not be among his better work. The page rates may have been low, but the total artistic effort expended here appears to be little more than adequate.

Dark Horse intends to reprint the rest of the series, but frankly, I think I'll pass. I've got the rest of the series in my comic collection anyway, and altho the art improved over the issues, the stories did not. Mighty Sampson could have been a great comic book. It had enormous potential. Otto Binder could have turned this into a something truly unique, but he didn't. Frank Thorne could have pushed his creative powers and rendered these stories with real depth, imagination and detail instead of opting for lots of close and medium shots heavy with black with only occasional attention to detail, but he didn't bother either. The best thing about this series was the spectacular cover paintings by Morris Gollub and George Wilson. Those covers sold the comic. It's nice to see them reproduced again, but I think I'll skip any future volumes of his series. I dropped fifty bucks on this volume, a big mistake on my part, but it's a mistake which I hope you won't make.



VERNA FELTON; by Fredrick Tucker; Bear Manor Media; 2010; Trade paperback; 760 pages

I've read a lot of biographies of different people, biographies covering a wide range of personalities in a wider range of occupations, but let me say right up front that I have never seen a bio as comprehensive, or as well researched this Fredrick Tucker volume on Verna Felton.



Most people today if they have heard the name Verna Felton at all probably remember her from her TV appearances, primarily on "December Bride", as star Spring Byington's best friend and faithful side-kick Hilda Crocker. That show ran on TV for five years beginning in the mid to late 1950s and has been in nearly perpetual reruns ever since.

However Ms Felton is much better remembered by those of us who collect and listen to old time radio, where she had many supporting roles from the 1930s thru the 1950s.

Hard core film collectors will also recognize her name as a veteran character actor who made a scattering of pictures, but they would primarily remember her from her voice work with Walt Disney's feature length cartoons in such memorable roles as the Red Queen in "Alice in Wonderland" or the fairy godmother in "Cinderella", or as one of the good fairies in "Sleeping Beauty".

And if there were any old timers left around, they would remember Verna Feldon as the star and leading lady of The Allen Players, one of the longest running stock stage companies from the beginning of the twentieth century up until the end of 1920s.

Verna Felton was thrust into show business at the tender age of ten years. Her father was a physician in California who moved the family around a lot. He liked to gamble and socialize with friends in saloons and men's clubs, and probably moved often to avoid accumulated debts. He died in 1899 leaving his family with nothing but

bills to pay. Verna's older brothers were farmed out to relatives and friends, but Verna was deemed too young to leave her mother.

Her mother had absolutely no job skills of any kind beyond those of wife and mother, and no possibility of employment. Things looked very grim indeed until a friendly actor and stage promoter named Harry Smith stepped forward and suggested that Verna, who was an adorable child, should join his theatrical stage company and support herself and her mother on the stage. Verna had appeared in amateur stage performances, and Smith had been looking over the local talent at a benefit talent show at the Victory Theater in San Francisco given to raise money for the victims of the 1900 Galveston Flood. He was specifically seeking a young girl to use in the Jessie Shirley stage company who could entertain the audience with songs and dances during the set changes between play acts.

At first Verna's mother Clara was horrified. But after meeting with Ms Jessie Shirley personally, and under gentle pressure from Smith, and with no other prospect, not even scullery work available, she decided to allow Verna to become one of the youngest actors on the California coast.

It was a monumental decision, but it turned out to be a fortunate one as well. Verna was a natural born actor, and rapidly became the darling of the company, adored by both the public and the press. A couple of years later she and her mother moved to the stock company operated by Pearl Allen. Allen took care of Verna as if she was his own daughter. A few years after that Pearl Allen married Verna's mother, and Clara in turn also took up acting and became a respected character actor in the company's stage productions.

In those days a life on the stage was hectic. In addition to moving from venue to venue, typically a stock company would give nine or ten public shows each week, one each night, with a matinee on Saturday, two matinees on Sunday, and sometimes a Children's performance on Wednesdays. Also typically the company would present one or sometimes two different plays per week. That meant that in addition to the play(s) which were being offered that particular week, the cast would also be in the process of learning a brand new play for the following week, with six to seven long rehearsals in the morning and afternoon hours before the paying performances, and also, as Verna noted years later, trying to somehow forget the lines from last week's play so they wouldn't make a mistake in front of the live audience.

Also back in those days, except for historical dramas, the female stars of the stage had to supply their own clothing and costumes for each play. In addition, popular actresses were also expected to be fashion plates and mirror the newest fashion trends and styles for the women in the cities where they performed. This was an enormous burden and quite an extra expense in the life of a stage star, one that could have disastrous results. Tucker relates that the occasional leading lady during this period left the stage bankrupt after trying to live up to the image the public expected of them.

On the other hand, that image could also result in a bonanza of free publicity. Mr. Tucker relates that while performing in Portland, Oregon in 1907 Verna managed to be featured in a full page multi-photo newspaper spread as she introduced a radical new style to the people of Portland—short skirts. The newspaper feature noted that while Miss Felton advocated earnestly the wearing of short skirts, she “does not endorse the extremes to which some enthusiasts incline”. Verna stated that “Ankle length, or the shoe top cut for the sloppy weather, will ensure comfort and guarantee against bedraggling. There is no need to carry the short skirt to extremes.”

The Allen Players had its ups and downs over the years, settling finally in the upper north-eastern part of the US and into Canada, particularly Vancouver, for most of the years of its existence, and Mr. Tucker manages to cover every single part of that career with meticulous detail. Every move, every new play, every change of venue, every economic turn for better or for worse is chronicled in detail here.

Verna grew to womanhood on the stage. As the years went by it became obvious that silent movies were cutting heavily into the audience potential for stage productions, but the Allen Players, situated comfortably in Canada, did not have as many problems as other stock companies in the US did. Allen’s choice of brand new plays, restaging innovative old ones, and even using original productions written especially for their company keep the audiences coming in for a long time. But eventually the changing times, especially World War I, caught up with them. By the time sound movies began to be introduced it was obvious to everyone that the days of the touring stage companies were over.

Along the way Verna had married fellow actor Lee Millar in 1923 when she was thirty-two years old. Their first child Lee Jr. arrived a year later. Papa Lee was on the road and away from the family a lot. Times were hard, but as an experienced stage director, producer as well as accomplished actor he got work in New York, Chicago, Washington DC. Sometimes Verna got work on the stage with him, but often she was not working.

Verna and her husband, along with her mother and step-father parents landed in San Francisco in 1931, just in time for the Depression to hit hardest. Papa Allen got a job as a salesman with a plumbing company. The times were hard, and finally Verna decided to try something new, something her husband and many old timers from the stage regarded as nothing but a passing fad—radio. After all, who would sit at home and listen to people speaking a story when they could go see a stage play or a movie?

But Verna pointed out that their prospects for stage or movie work was dim indeed, and radio work paid. Of course, in the early 1930s it didn’t pay much. For a half hour show on the network, a stock player was paid ten dollars, and then had to kick back ten percent, a buck, to the network. Work at non-network stations paid even less, and they also wanted a kick-back. But it was money coming in, and in the dark days of the Depression any money coming in was good, especially considering how many people were without work of any kind.

Gradually Verna got more and better radio work. When the networks built brand new state-of-the-art broadcasting studios down in Los Angeles, Lee and Verna moved from San Francisco down to LA to be closer to the heart of the radio business. AFRA, the union for radio actors came along, and things got better all the way round.

Verna found that she loved radio. It was to become her favorite performing medium, and as a trained stage actress she adapted readily to performing before the mike. The most difficult thing about radio work was having to learn *not* to project her voice. A stage actor had to be able to make her voice heard all the way to the last row in the balcony. But if a radio actor tried to do that it would blow out the station tubes and even if the transmitter tubes held, the voice would be a blur on the radio speaker at home.

Her husband got roles on radio as well, but remarkably, his ability to imitate animals of all kinds proved to be his biggest attraction. He was more in demand as an animal imitator than as an actor on radio and in the movies. He may also have been the first cartoon voice of Pluto in those early Disney cartoons. His career was cut short when he died the day before Christmas in 1941

During most of the time in San Francisco and after moving to Los Angeles Verna got roles as older women in light comedy plays, as mature mothers or matrons in dramatic roles, even kindly old grandmothers and brawny ranch house matrons. In Los Angeles she soon became a regular character actor on the Lux Radio Theater.

But an appearance on the Jack Benny show changed her life forever. She had played the mothers of several of the cast members off and on before, but in 1939 Jack's Irish tenor Kenny Baker decided to leave the show. Jack hired a new singer, a young man named Dennis Day, who could sing, but had never had any experience acting, particularly not before a radio microphone.

The Benny writers came up with a good idea. They invented a stage mother for Dennis, a domineering battleaxe who would interrupt him, and do most of the talking for a few shows until Dennis got his radio legs and became comfortable with his speaking role. Remarkably, the writers immediately decided that Verna Felton was exactly the actress to play the part. Just as remarkably, Jack Benny decided Verna Felton was absolutely the only actress he would never accept for the part. When he saw her sitting in the waiting room for the open audition, he told her to go home, the part was not going to go to her.

Except the writers were unanimous in their insistence that Verna be given a chance, and when she tried out for the part, even Jack Benny was forced to admit that she was indeed right for the part. Verna Felton became Dennis Day's belligerent mother who berated Benny on the air, who always insisted her son Dennis get more money, or better songs, better dressing rooms, or more lines in the skits. In 1943 she only had one appearance the whole season, yet on that one program, 12 Dec 1943, she got the loudest and longest laugh of the season—23 seconds long—when she interrupted Jack with the classic line “Ahhhhhhhhhh Shut Up!!”

Verna continued the role as Dennis' mother over the years, but remarkably, she never got a cast credit on any of the Jack Benny radio shows, or on any of his TV shows either, until on the October 19, 1958 TV show when Jack finally called her on stage and personally introduced her to the audience.

The role of Dennis' mother opened up vast new areas for Verna as a radio actress. She soon honed the persona of battleaxe, and began using it on other programs. At the same time she developed her other most sellable radio character, the snooty, egotistical upper class society dame. She got recurring roles on many big name radio programs, appearing with people such as Rudy Vallee, Joan Davis, Eddie Cantor, Judy Canova, Bergen & McCarthy and with Abbott & Costello, among many others.

But one of her longest and most enjoyable roles was on the Red Skelton program playing Grandmaw to Junior, Skelton's “Mean widdle kid”. This was one of her longest recurring roles, and led to what she admitted was one of the worst mistakes of her career.

When the Skelton show was being reformatted in 1949 and gained a new sponsor, Proctor and Gamble, production costs for the program were downsized until it could prove itself in the new time slot, on the new network for the new sponsor. Skelton asked everyone to take a cut in salary. All the cast members did, except Verna. In her early fifties at this point, she decided she hadn't that many years left in the business and refused to take a cut. Her decision meant she was immediately kicked off the show. Years later in interviews she stated that this was the worst mistake of her career because it not only cost her a very respectable recurring weekly role, but also meant the end of her long friendship with Red Skelton. Skelton never forgave her and never even spoke to her again from that point onward.

It is impossible in this brief review to touch on all the things Verna Felton did on radio over the almost thirty years she was involved with it, but Mr. Tucker does, and he does it in great detail. Every appearance, every reaction, every change, every new style or variation in her characters is covered in these pages.

Mr. Tucker also devotes a generous number of pages discussing her work with the Disney Studios as a voice actor in his cartoon productions. Disney liked to use radio people for his film roles, and Verna fit right in. Also contrary to modern perceptions of cartoon production at Disney, this was not voice-over work. The people who spoke the words were regarded as role actors. Their words were recorded, and at the same time artists sketched characters of the actors doing the voices to blend in facial expression and movements with the drawn cartoons. If there was a change in some of the dialog, the voice cast had to be reassembled to record the new dialog and have the artistic staff do more new sketches to incorporate all the changes.

Her first role was the snooty matriarchal elephant in “Dumbo”, a role that so impressed Disney that he forever after referred to her as “his favorite elephant” and insisted she return for three other major cartoon features where she was the model and voice for the fumbling fairy godmother in “Cinderella”, the Red Queen in “Alice in Wonderland”, and as leader of the good fairies in “Sleeping Beauty”

Tucker also unearthed the information that one of Verna's beloved dogs was the action model for Lady in “Lady and the Tramp”. Her last film role was with Disney as Winifred the Elephant in “The Jungle Book”, a movie that was not released until 1967, a year after she had died of a stroke at age 76. Ironically she died on 14 Dec 1966, just hours before the death of Walt Disney himself.

Mr. Tucker also spends a considerably amount of time discussing Verna's involvement with TV, from her very first TV show, "Oh, Miss Tubbs" in 1945, broadcast over W6XAO-TV, the nation's very first experimental television station from Los Angeles, to her signature role as Hilda Crocker, on "December Bride".

While many TV fans believe that "December Bride" was a spin-off of the "I Love Lucy", in fact it was a popular radio production several years before it transferred over to TV. Originally slotted as a 1952 summer replacement show for Jack Benny, public approval was so strong that the show was immediately signed on as a regular CBS radio evening feature for the fall season, where it continued to rack up strong rating numbers.

There were a few hiccups before the show transferred over to television, all of which Mr. Tucker relates in detail. The role of Spring Byington's close friend and confidant made Verna a national star almost overnight.

As a result of her TV exposure she got new film roles, including a plum part as Helen Potts in the film "Picnic". "Picnic" was a screen adaptation of the play of the same name which had been a Pulitzer Prize winning Broadway hit in 1953. It was written by William Inge, the same playwright who had created "Bus Stop". In every interview afterward Verna stated that this was the favorite film role of her long career. She also did more TV work, but from the time December Bride hit the small screens across the country, she was forever enshrined in the memories of everyone as Hilda Crocker.

It is obvious that Mr. Tucker has a special affection for the December Bride years of Verna's career. In addition to the lavish behind the scenes details he gives about the program along with coverage of all its creators and players, he devoted many pages of the appendices to describing in full detail every single episode of the TV "December Bride" series.

It took Fredrick Tucker five years to research and write this book. With the incredible amount of pages and detail presented in this volume one would be tempted to think it might be prodding or boring in parts, but that is generally not the case. Mr. Tucker is an engaging writer who makes everything about Verna Felton's life interesting, and he keeps the pace moving right along.

The only parts I found flat were his insistence on chronicling the life history and genealogy of Verna's relatives, friends and associates, including, so help me, even the members of her weekly canasta and bridge playing club. That drags a bunch, but at the same time I can't help but admire Mr. Tucker's amazing thoroughness. In addition to painting a complete picture of Verna Felton the actress, he also manages to present an in-depth examination of Verna Felton the human being, a genuinely nice human being with a terrific sense of humor who was beloved by virtually everyone she came in contact with.

This is an excellent book. It's a thick volume, but it's a fast read and it holds your attention. I recommend this book to anyone with an interest in old time radio or television. Verna Felton was a major influence and presence in both these popular medias, and this book certainly does justice to her life and her career. At \$39.95 the volume is a bargain, and it is certainly the best book which will ever be produced on her life.



STAY TUNED FOR TERROR!

By

Robert Bloch

There are many old time radio programs for which few or no copies are known to exist in the present time. Certainly one of the semi-legendary shows in this category is a fifteen minute syndicated series titled "Stay Tuned for Terror", an anthology horror series produced and aired in the middle 1940s. What makes this program so intriguing, and the complete absence of any surviving episodes so frustrating for OTRadio collectors is not only because it was so well remembered and enjoyed by those who originally heard the program, but also because it was extensively advertised in the pages of *Weird Tales Magazine*, and because it was written by legendary science fiction/horror writer Robert Bloch. As a syndicated series, by rights all the copies of this program ought to exist, somewhere. Yet in the close to fifty years fans have been collecting old time radio on tape, not a single copy has ever surfaced. We know the titles of all the programs, and the original syndication dates for every single show. This information was provided to fans by one of the series producers. Yet as of 2010, no copy of this program has ever been found.

This article reprints Robert Bloch's comments on the creation and his involvement with this series, as well as comments on another of his stories which enjoyed success on radio and in other electronic media. This material is reprinted from his "unauthorized autobiography" ONCE AROUND THE BLOCH, published in 1993 by Tor Books, and is reprinted by permission of Tom Doherty Associates/Tor Books, the copyright holders.

Fall [1944] found me busy on yet another project of my own. Once again it came about at the instigation of James Dolittle. You may remember that back in 1939 it was Jim Dolittle who took on the role of Moses to lead Gauer and me out of the wilderness and into the Promised Land of politics. Although we found no overflow of milk and honey, and even though the cash flow had been limited, there was still reason to accept Dolittle as the poor man's Charlton Heston.

Thus, when he mapped out a way to break into the magic world of radioland, I was prepared to go the route.

At that time "Lights Out" was a successful anthology series of horror stories. How it managed to stay on the air without the services of Jim as an actor or myself as a writer was a mystery, but now he was prepared to offer a solution. His idea was roughly equivalent to the one he'd approached me with five years earlier. The equivalent consisted of his auditioning, and the rough part was that I would write him a free script. The only difference lay in the fact that both he and my script would

be given a hearing by the powers that be at "Lights Out".

It took me less than a week to come up with a few suitable pages, but suddenly, within that brief period, the powers that be stopped being. To our surprise and dismay, the show was canceled.

Jim thought we could do better, and we did. He brought together Chicago agent Berle Adams and a sports announcer named John Neblett who covered major football games and also had a program of his own. They listened to us and liked the idea.

As a result they went into partnership to produce a series of thirty-nine shows to be sold through syndication. It was decided to start with a fifteen minute length rather than half hour. This would save production costs and increase the sales potential to smaller local stations which couldn't afford across-the-board purchases of longer programs. Syndication would avoid cutting a network in on ownership and prevent their control of the show itself. Once Berle Adams bankrolled the project, Neblett would



Weird Tales

is on the air in

STAY TUNED FOR TERROR

This programme is adapted by ROBERT BLOCH from his stories which have appeared in WEIRD TALES, the narrator being Craig Dennis.

STAY TUNED FOR TERROR is produced by Neblett Radio Productions, with the active cooperation of WEIRD TALES MAGAZINE . . . for the enjoyment of fantasy fans everywhere.

LOOK FOR ANNOUNCEMENTS IN YOUR LOCAL NEWSPAPER giving the broadcast time and dates in your area.

~*~

And remember to



Stay Tuned for Terror!

produce and distribute. Jim, using the stage name Craig Dennis, would do leads and narration. All that was required of me was the writing.

My payment was a matter of choice. I could either opt for ten percent of the profits or settle for a flat fee in advance. Marion and I talked it over.

A percentage of the profits meant nothing if there were no profits. And even if a profit were made, it would have to be divided among Jim Doolittle, Berle Adams, John Neblett and me, with a hefty chunk to the sales personnel who handled the distribution end of the deal. On the other hand, seventy-five dollars a script in real money tended to add up when multiplied by thirty-nine. And if the first series of episodes prospered I had the option of renegotiating the next time around. Meanwhile, the addition of almost three thousand dollars to our annual income would help us move to better living quarters and furnish them, as well. After concluding our arithmetic, this was the deal I went for.

If I'd gone into higher mathematics perhaps I would have figured out that with each of the thirty-nine shows averaging a little over ten pages in length, I was committing myself to writing over four hundred pages of radio script—a complete series—for a total payment of \$2,925.

Moreover, I was expected to deliver all thirty-nine of those finished shows within the coming three months. In other words I must write three scripts a week for the next thirteen weeks in addition to handling my regular full-time job at the Marx Agency.

On to top of that, once this entire task was successfully completed, I was also obligated to spend the following weeks overseeing the actual production of the show. This meant that at least two days out each week I would leave the office at five o'clock, catch a train to Chicago, grab a bite to eat and rush over to the former Columbia Broadcasting Studios in the Wriggley Building. There the programs were first rehearsed and then recorded on huge 33-1/3 RPM transcription disks, which, strangely enough, played back from the inside of the record rather than starting at the outside. Since it was necessary to complete at least three shows at each session, work would continue until midnight, after which I'd crash at John Neblett's pad, rise early, take the train back to Milwaukee, then go directly to the office for another full day of work.

Somewhat to my surprise the easiest part of these illogical logistics was writing the scripts. Since the majority were adaptations of my own stories from *Weird Tales* it was a simple matter to arrange the tie-in. The magazine agreed to run a full-page ad in every issue in return for a mention in the introduction to each show. Actually, some of the stories had appeared in other publications and a few were originals I came up with as I worked. But all of these seemed appropriate for a series called "Stay Tuned For Terror".

The only real difficulty in the adaptation was the problem of condensation. A story which required half an hour's reading time in printed form had to be aired within just twelve minutes. It was like trying to squeeze seven ounces of toothpaste back into a three-ounce tube.

Since I retained no copies of the scripts and never obtained recordings on those unwieldy and unplayable transcription platters, it's difficult to recall which stories worked. All I remember is that we did. Doing shows back to back at each recording session there was no time to be anything but good, a fact to which I was not indifferent.

Our director was Howard Keegan, who had previously served in that capacity on "Lights Out" itself. In addition to Jim Dolittle, aka Craig Dennis, the regular cast included younger brother Donald, network leading lady Angeline Orr and veteran character actor Wilms Herbert, who also did some of the female voices because he was bivocal.

It was a versatile and talented cast, and their professionally paced performances improved my pedestrian scripts. Further improvements were added by a sound engineer and a sound-effects man, who combined forces to create aural illusions particularly necessary to a show of this character, or lack thereof. Our music was provided by a portable organ, known in the business as a "God box" because of its frequent funereal accomplishment to soap operas. Luckily, the organist knew the classical excerpts I indicated for use and could improvise on his own. Also vital to the success of this sessions was John Neblett, who produced, and Berle Adams, who wrote checks.

After run-throughs—during which music and sound effects were rehearsed, and the show itself was properly timed—the real job began. Johnny Neblett, Howard Keegan, the sound engineer and I retired to the glassed-in recording booth at the rear of the studio. The organist went into our theme, borrowed from old-time Universal monster movies which I had borrowed from Tchaikovsky's *Swan Lake*. During what followed I had the privilege of making suggestions to the director without having to join the union. If the show went well, we moved on to the second one. Often we managed to sneak in a third. Around midnight, after blood pressure rose and blood sugar level fell, we finished the cutting session and cut out for a late dinner.

It was a strenuous schedule, but I survived, and so did the family. Marion was buoyed by the prospect of moving into new and improved surroundings and Sally was honing her walking and talking skills. Neither Gus Marx nor any of his clients complained about the quality of current copywriting, so it must be assumed my work and their judgment was no worse than usual.

Completed on schedule, the series went on sale that spring and on the air that summer. I never received a

ROBERT BLOCH

"A joy to read." -Christopher Lee

"I knew I would love this book
as soon as I saw the title!"

-Janet Leigh

ONCE AROUND THE BLOCH

An Unauthorized
Autobiography

listing of play dates, but know the show aired in various outlets across the country and in Hawaii as well as over the stations of the Canadian Broadcasting Network. We heard the program on WMAQ, Chicago. I think it was a modest success. At least they started talking about making another thirty-nine shows and Mercury Records approached Adams about doing an album.

Then, as if on cue, but without any sound effects or musical stinger from the God box, the roof fell in.

Berle Adams's principal client, Louis Jordan, demanded his full-time attention on tour, and Mercury Records sold out. Some advance sales for the fall season came in but there would be no payment until a month or more after delivery. The show just wasn't worth the gamble and it went on hold.

Nothing happened, and continued to happen all the rest of the year, except that Johnny Neblett and Angeline Orr were married. He continued his sports reporting, piloting his own plane to and from football games across the country. All too soon thereafter he died in a crash during one of those flights. Any further hopes for the show died with him.

I mourned his tragic passing and continue to do so to this day. As for "Stay Tuned For Terror", its demise left me with many pleasant memories and few lasting regrets.

During the decade, in addition to ghostwriting, radio scripting, copywriting and spraying graffiti on Mount Rushmore, I contributed about one hundred stories to various magazines. Perhaps the best known was "Yours Truly, Jack the Ripper", which saw publication in the July 1943 issue of *Weird Tales*.

There was nothing particularly unusual about this story's composition, probably the last of my output prior to joining the Marx Agency. It was just one more product of the secondhand typewriter mounted on the secondhand card table in the corner of our one-room apartment, as well as a product of my interest in those whose lives were overshadowed by the looming of their own legends.

The real-life Ripper had captured the imagination of millions, but he himself had never been caught, or even accurately identified. Over the more than half-century which had elapsed since Jack the Ripper carved a name for himself, he had been commemorated time and again in

factual and fictional accounts of his efforts to disorganize prostitution—and five individual prostitutes—in London's Whitechapel. He has also cut a figure on both stage and screen.

One of the oddities connected with this mysterious murderer was that *he* had christened himself, in a letter to a news agency signed "yours truly Jack the Ripper". This interesting little detail, although often recounted, had implications which others seemed to have overlooked. I was fascinated by the phrasing the murderer used for self-identification, and, upon due reflection, realized that those five words could constitute both the title and the plot of a short story. Bringing the Ripper into modern times and using an American city as a new setting for his successfully unsuccessful operations required the addition of a supernatural rationale which I had no difficulty supplying. And which others since then, I might add, have had no difficulty borrowing for their own.

But in 1943 my idea was fresh, and after stealing the usual penny a word for it, I received a thirty-day sentence on various newsstands. As usual, aside from a few comments in the letter column of *Weird Tales*, the story went unnoticed.

Then fate—or dumb luck—took a hand. Agent Julie Schwartz sold the yarn for an additional twenty-five dollars to editor A. L. Furman's "The Mystery Companion". I was quite excited by this, my first appearance in a hardback anthology. Then the piece was bought for dramatization on a CBS radio show, "The Kate Smith Hour". The playlet starred Laird Cregar, who by sheer coincidence was about to be seen on screen as Jack the Ripper in "The Lodger". Since then my little story has continued to lead a charmed life in print, and on radio and television, for a total of fifty revivals thus far. I have also been obliged to reincarnate the Ripper in everything from an episode of "Star Trek" to a full length novel of my own. Over the years Jack and I would become blood brothers.

At the time, however, it was earthshaking enough just to have had a story published in a book and broadcast nationwide on a popular radio show. The aftershocks were a long time in coming; nobody popped up immediately to purchase more reprint or radio rights for other efforts of mine, and the next story I wrote sold for the same old penny a word.

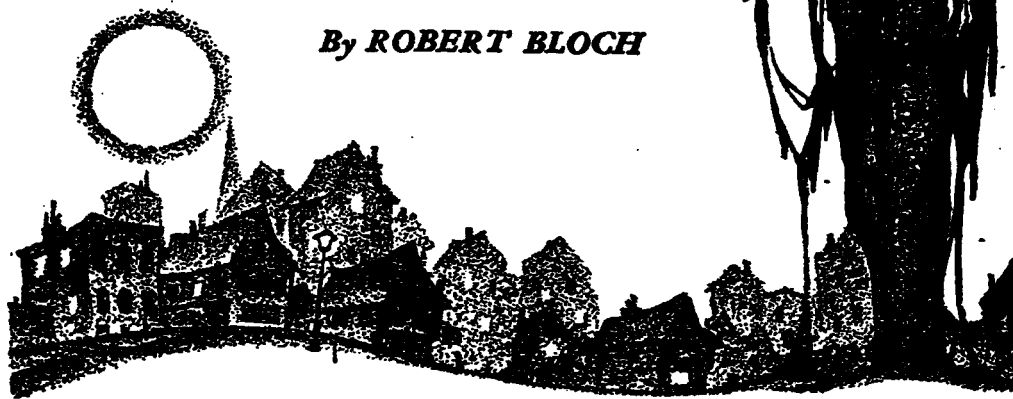
Over the years I have been asked my opinion of the Ripper's true identity. After much study, I now firmly believe that Jack the Ripper was actually Queen Victoria.

Robert Block (5 Apr 1917 – 23 Sep 1994) was a superlative writer of science fiction, fantasy, horror stories and of television plays and movie scripts, best remembered by the general public as the writer of the story "Psycho" which was made into the Hitchcock movie of the same name. In addition, anybody who was even remotely active in science fiction fandom during the 1940s thru the mid 1970s would also acknowledge him as one of the funniest and wittiest human

the greatest monster of all time still lives! He's here, among us—leaving his signature in blood. . . .

Yours Truly— Jack the Ripper

By ROBERT BLOCH



I LOOKED at the stage Englishman. He looked at me.

"Sir Guy Hollis?" I asked.

"Indeed. Have I the pleasure of addressing John Carmody, the psychiatrist?"

I nodded. My eyes swept over the figure of my distinguished visitor. Tall, lean, sandy-haired—with the traditional tufted mustache. And the tweeds. I suspected a monocle concealed in a vest pocket, and wondered if he'd left his umbrella in the outer office.

But more than that, I wondered what the devil had impelled Sir Guy Hollis of the British Embassy to seek out a total stranger here in Chicago.

Sir Guy didn't help matters any as he

sat down. He cleared his throat, glanced around nervously, tapped his pipe against the side of the desk. Then he opened his mouth.

"What do you think of London?" he said.

"Why—"

"I'd like to discuss London with you, Mr. Carmody."

I meet all kinds. So I merely smiled, sat back, and gave him his head.

"Have you ever noticed anything strange about that city?" he asked.

"Well, the fog is famous."

"Yes, the fog. That's important. It usually provides the perfect setting."

"Setting for what?"

beings on the face of the planet. His speeches at science fiction conventions are legendary, and his fanzine pieces, often written with his friend Wilson Tucker, were guaranteed to send even the most dour reader into convulsions of hysterical laughter. His "unauthorized autobiography" ONCE AROUND THE BLOCH covers not just his career as a writer, but also provides insights and observations about the people he met and the world he passed thru. This wonderful book, an invaluable focus of source material for anyone interested in the development of both science fiction/fantasy and the world of Hollywood during the late fifties and sixties, is now regrettably out of print. Efforts on the part of Bob Bloch's many fans to get the volume reissued have been underway for a couple of years. Meanwhile, anyone who would like to read more of his life, the field, the people, as well as his comments and views on everything from popular entertainment to politics, can find a copy by accessing such on-line book services as Alibris.com. The prices are reasonable, and this is definitely one volume anyone with an interest in popular media should buy and promptly read.

STAY TUNED FOR TERROR

1)	The Strange Flight of Richard Clayton	1-15-45
2)	The Bat Is my Brother	1-22-45
3)	Warm Up the Hot Seat	1-29-45
4)	Soul Proprietor	2-4-45
5)	Satan's Phonograph	2-12-45
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34)	The Dark Demon	9-3-45
35)	I Hate Myself	9-10-45
36)	The Curse of the House	9-17-45
37)	The Man Who Raised the Dead	9-24-45
38)	The Boogie Man Will Get You	10-1-45
39)	Horror Show	10-8-45

copies know to exist—NONE!



READER REACTION

Frank Mazzarella; 23 Coolidge St.; Leominster, MA 01453

Bob I am reading your latest fanzine and particularly the article about "She" the 1930s movie. I think that the Escape radio show did an adaptation of the story, but were there any other OTR versions? Kino put the trailer for the movie on YouTube and it looks beautiful in color. Naturally I went to Amazon and had them send the book to my Kindle (no-charge for the book or the service) and I intend to read it. The problem with Haggard is the amount of adventure novels that he wrote. There are so many of them, it would take a year to read them all.

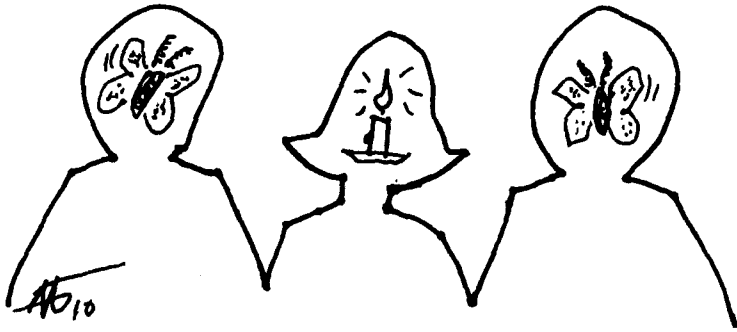
I know I mention him an awful lot, but Old Eddie relied on me to find mail order catalogs so I could order his comic strips, movies, books, old radio shows, etc. He asked me to find a source for old movies and I forget who I used, but he bought a healthy amount of old favorites. "She" was one of them, as was "King Kong" and a couple Wheeler and Woolsey movies, Joe E Brown flicks, a Joel McCrae feature called "Bird of Paradise" and basically a whole slew of early 1930's flicks which he saw at the local movie palace as a boy. I still have most of them. I bought on Beta (my choice of video player at the time) and he had me transfer the audio from each movie to a cassette tape. My reward was the videotape itself, as he had no use for it. Oh, he had me buy the serial version of Bela Lugosi in "Chandu" and several other Bela movies. I also bought some reel to reel recordings of cowboy movies which I also put on cassette for him. He walked around town all day with a carriage, picking cans and listening to his movies on a Fisher Price cassette player (he always carried extra batteries and extra Fisher Price players in case of a breakdown).

"She" was a big one for the kids in his generation and he often quoted from the book and the movie. I remember his first OTR orders were for Manhattan Merry Go Round, Calling All Cars, Blondie, and King Kong and anything with Vincent Price on it. He was a lonely old man, never married, plenty of money, who loved to relive the 30's, 40's and 50's.

Anyway, I wish you would have talked more about the evening you watched "She"; who watched it with you and where and did you have the deluxe Kino edition. I love hearing the details surrounding these nights....in fact I would read a whole book about your experiences at the Old Time Radio Club and Cliffhanger meetings. There is something fascinating about guys who love something so much that they create these little clubs. I've always been intrigued by the Cliff Hanger Club. The Doc Savage conventions lately have been filmed and uploaded to YouTube and I get a real kick watching the whole meetings

I enjoyed the "Wanted" review, and the "Funnyman" article, but the Haggard review really brought back memories of Eddie and I had to run to my closet and dig out the old Beta tapes....he's been gone since '93, but I still have the old stuff he would order...I bought him a paperback at your store, jammed with Weird Tales reprints...he was in heaven...(Worlds of Tomorrow by Leo Marguiles) he would go up to his room in late afternoon and read until he slept and the next morning he was spouting quotes and describing scenes with the excitement of a kiddie at Disney.

My brother (the Mayor) and I looked out for his younger brother who survived him. We found him on the floor and dehydrated one day four years back and we got him into a nursing home and my brother completely rehabbed his pigsty of a house so he could come home...Mario enjoyed the same stuff that his bro Eddie did and I would talk by phone with him every night, until one day last month my brother went over to check on him, and he was dead at 84.....we grew up next door to these guys (4 brothers and a sister) and all 4 boys had fought in WW2 at the same time. They were like brothers or uncles to us. None ever married, they were considered peculiar, but I guess anybody with our hobbies might be considered a little eccentric. The family was quite a story but now they are all gone.



Meanwhile, people like us are good candidates for being bed ridden; plenty of reading to do and radio shows to listen to. I live like an invalid anyway, sometimes never leaving my room where I play with my books and tape. Lately I am just enjoying all of the things that I have brought into my home over the past 20 or more years. I pulled out all of my radio cassette tapes (thousands) and I am listening to them ever so slowly. Many are not marked and contain surprises from my early days of radio show listening. When I belonged to

the OTR club I listened to one tape every morning during my morning run. That meant I would be out at 5 AM in the winter during blizzards and ice storms listening my way through a group of Suspenses or Jack Armstrongs or Jack Benny's. Those are good memories and I think about them all the time. I would dub some of the shows onto my own cassettes and usually failed to label them. That is what I am listening to now. Amazingly I still go for that same morning run at 5 AM and I still listen to OTR with a few podcasts here and there. One show I like to bring along is the Book Cave, a podcast about pulps and pulp people (thebookcave.libsyn.com). Ric Croxton, the host puts out at least one show a week. I prefer the shows concerning the old days of pulp, but he does an awful lot of new pulp stuff with Ron Fortier and Will Murray.

More and more B westerns are becoming part of my daily routine and now I have been seeking out literature about the old cowboys and their sidekicks. I am still listening to 2-4 hours of OTR per day and messing around with the internet for a couple of hours. I guess I am acting like a retired guy even though I am still only 57. I certainly feel 57, especially after mowing the lawn or helping out cleaning house, but I still manage that 1 hour run every day. When I was younger I ran 6 miles. Now that I am elderly and slowing down in pace, I don't count miles, but run one hour at a pace that may not even equal 6 miles. I don't want to know how slow I really have become. I am just glad to be able to go out and do it everyday and enjoy my tapes and the fresh air.

My wife bought me a Kindle for my last birthday and she got it online at a great price, \$149.00. Naturally one month after she bought it Amazon upgraded the Kindle and dropped the price as low as \$139...it'll probably be \$99 by Xmas.

I really did not like it when I first got it. It was a hassle to read a book on it, and there are so many features missing from it that I am certain will show up in future issues. I mean there is almost no way to travel between pages. If you are on page 1 and want to flip through to look for something or even browse, it's impossible. Now the good part is that you can load the machine up with public domain books generally available at the internet archive, Gutenberg, or Google Books. It's like finding a couple of thousand comic books on your front porch. I loaded up with so much stuff that I probably will not look at, but I have favorites that I have been reading. After a while you get used to the machine and actually begin to enjoy reading on it and learning how to get around it. Luckily there are blogs and podcasts that specialize in secrets and tips to make your life easier.

There are some great books on Amazon that are free. I love reading westerns and there are tons of Max Brand and Mountie type stuff in the public domain. If you order it from Amazon, there is no charge, the book is free, and they automatically send it to you and within seconds of clicking the order button, it magically appears on your kindle. Finally I bought a book for \$5.99, Tinkers, by Paul Harding. I love the book and the price is cheap. There are plenty of \$1.99 books and others slightly higher. For example, if you want HP Lovecraft, you can get everything for free, but you will have to search around in different places. Or you can pay 2 dollars and have Amazon send you the complete works all at once. I am stingy and would rather work to get them free.

You can read comics on your kindle, however, they have a long way to go. At this point the best experience is with pdf file comics. They are hard to come by, but I found a guy online who has a couple of hundred Gold Key comics on PDF, mostly stuff like Perry Mason, the Nurses, funnybook stuff and some sci fi and adventure and plenty of westerns, which is ok by me. I enjoy reading comics on kindle, but it is a little tricky.

The Kindle is probably the best e reader out there. The I Pad is too heavy and the print is strange looking and most of the others are playing catch-up with Amazon. Amazon's machine does only one thing really and that is read books. It does have the capability to go online anywhere you are with or without wifi, but the experience is less than pleasant altho reading your email is something that works pretty well. Now that I have had it awhile I am

glad I do. There are lots of pulp stories online and I transfer them to the Kindle. It allows you to get some free books and read classics which are readily available for free. I like James Fenimore Cooper, as I have said before, and I put his complete works on Kindle. There are books by him like the "Sea Lion" which are rare and expensive, yet a click or two and it is on my kindle, cost free.

So that is what is going on out here. I still have time spent with my kids and on their various problems and yes i do work here and there. Mostly Criminal cases and some real estate. Lots of lawyers coming out of schools and they are mucking up the market. This city is lousy with them. But I plug along and enjoy my hobbies as much as I can.

///Thanks for your comments. I continue to enjoy OTRadio. There are still tons of programs I have not gotten around to listening to. I find I listen to stuff in bursts. Not the exact same show, but I might sit down (or lay down on the bed, more properly) and listen to four or five hours of assorted radio programs, and then perhaps not listen to anything at all for a five day period.

I used to follow a routine where I ate lunch and always listened to at least two radio shows. This ensured me getting to hear lots and lots of radio programs. For some reason I got out of that habit a few years ago. Now I do the newspaper crossword puzzle with lunch. Maybe I should change back. Some radio shows remain fresh and interesting, and some seem very trite and corny to me now.

I'm glad you are enjoying your Kindle reader. I have absolutely no desire to get involved with one of those things. I have communicated with a number of people who have tried the assorted electronic readers and all of them have complaints, particularly about the brightness and clarity of the print, as well as the lack of ability to thumb thru the pages without a lot of hassle. Many of those folks have returned their readers and gone back to print.

The thing that really bothers me about the Kindle is the fact that the material can be electronically edited and erased without your input. Some months ago there was a flap (justified I felt) when everybody who had bought a copy of "1984" had their copies electronically erased by Amazon without their knowledge or permission. There was some kind of problem with the book edition and royalty rights, I never did get the details straight, but what horrified me (and many others) is that Amazon, or anybody, could just electronically reach out and erase a book you had purchased and which was presumably your property on your own electronic reader. And how appropriate that the book in question was "1984"

This raises the very legitimate question of whether you actually own anything that is on your electronic text reader. If the seller of the electronic book can delete any title it wants without your knowledge or permission, then what's to stop some other agency from editing or censoring the material on your reader? What's to stop someone from going into your e-reader book files and selectively censoring the material to enhance their views or suppress material they find objectionable for their own personal reasons? This looks like a very dangerous area to me.

Watching older movies in modern context gives you a chance to look at the movies and the way they were made from a different viewpoint. Sometimes it is easy to spot social circumstances or economic presences which might have been ignored by the viewers at the time the movie was made. Films, like comics, are an expression of the culture in which they were made, a mirror or society if you will, and it is interesting to look at them both as entertainment and as historic manifestations of common culture. Or at least it's interesting to me anyway.///

Alexis Gilliland; 4030 8th Street South; Arlington, VA 22204

Thanks for Fadeaway #17, which arrived earlier this month. My wife, Lee, who was for a time a member of a web forum with you, sends her regards.

I don't know that reviews of justly forgotten movies, such as "Paper Bullets/Gangs Inc/" and the Randolph Scott version of "She", are all that useful, even as filler.

Siegel and Schuster's attempt to reprise their successful Superman with the unfunny Funnyman was more interesting, in that it suggests what and how they were thinking. I note that Superman also did a lot of stuff in his stories without any real explanation beyond his Kryptonian ancestry. However, if a story lets the reader ask how some particular action related in the story is possible, then the storyteller has failed at a very basic level. FYI the January 1949 date on the first Funnyman comic refers to the date when it was pulled off the stand and not to its date of release.

OK, GOD, YER OMNIPOTENT,
OMNISCIENT, AND JUST, SO
HOW DO YOU EXPLAIN ALL
THAT HUMAN SUFFERING?



IT BUILDS
CHARACTER

Comic strips in book form constitute a kind of time binding. I have Bill Watterson's complete Calvin and Hobbs, as well as George Herriman's Krazy Kat, and several volumes of Walt Kelly's Pogo. I grew up on Dick Tracy and Little Orphan Annie but have little inclination to revisit them.

///As has been noted before, Fadeaway covers a wide variety of topics, mostly related to science fiction and areas which touch on science fiction. I doubt that every readers would find all of the articles and reviews

offered here to be equally interesting because the subject matter covered is so broad. However, also as noted before, I fully intend to continue the eclectic mix.

My reviews of old movies are an effort to gain reader perspective and make some comments about films which may or may not be regarded as classics in the field. For example, that article on the Randolph Scott version of SHE got response from readers, some of whom considered it to be a genuine classic and not a gigantic flop as I did. I suggest that those holding that opinion were primarily relying on youthful memories and had not actually viewed the movie in a long long time. In any event the review did generate comment and opinion.

Dates on comic books in the 1940s may not have been the actual "pull" dates as we now know them. In fact, altho I was too young to pay much attention during the late forties, in the 1950s and 1960s I noticed that most often when the new comics came in, if there was room on the racks, nothing got pulled. If there wasn't enuf space, then damaged/battered comics got pulled first, and then the clerk at the retail outlet would look at the title of the comic, and if there were old issues of that same title on the racks, they would be pulled to make room for the new issue. There was so much confusion about this that in the 1980s the comic industry adopted the color coded strips along the tops of retail comics so that clerks would, for example, pull all the old red strip comics off the rack on the week that the new red strip issues came in. Even then it was a mess for anybody who wasn't a dedicated comic book fan.///

Joseph T. Major; 1409 Christy Avenue; Lexington, KY 40204-2040

You ask "Why Again? regarding putting out a fanzine like Fadeaway again. My question would be, "Why Not?" Typing—and typos—preparing stencils, mimeoing, collating, addressing, was an immense mental and physical effort in the old days. Nowadays typing is easier, spell checking reduces typos, printing proofs is a flash, any decent copying machine will collate, and there are built in addressing programs.

Yet, while the era saw hundred-page fanzines produced almost daily, it seems, nowadays for the serious fan the effort beyond an irregular tweet is beyond his energy. With the easy provided by the advance of computer technology, there should be more fanzines, fan pages, fan boards.

But there aren't. Indeed, as we have seen, the awards go to those who go outside the box.

APAs too. (Warning—repetition of a possibly tired old story). When I first became aware of FAPA, I learned that there was an apa, a shadow FAPA made up for the FAPA waitlist. The shadow apa had a waitlist of its own also.

Nowadays FAPA is well under its established limit. But then, there was an APA '45 (for fans born after that year) and an APA 55 (likewise). but no APA 65 or later.

The view of the world has changed, and to those who find it briefer and briefer, less and less demanding means of viewing it. We are seeing a shift in fandom from participants co consumers.

And going on to other news, your comments on Robomower—so they've produced a Roomba for the lawn. I'm surprised it wasn't in "The Door Into Summer". Probably the consequences of Heinlein's living in a dry climate.

When we went to Colorado, I noted that one stretch of our trip would be over a two-lane highway going thru rural areas, and expressed some concern about being stuck behind a piece of farm equipment, unable to exceed ten miles per hour. The relative with whom we were staying reassured me that the area was unable to support any kind of farm that needed such equipment. He was right.

I did an article a few years ago contrasting the comic strips in the newspaper from fifty years previously with those that were in the papers at the time the article was being written. One thing was that the strips got smaller. The intricate art that Caniff or Raymond drew would be too small to see today.

There had been a shift of types; the old comic page had adventure strips with long continued stories. The contemporary one had gag strips, with at best a week-long continuity.

Instead of the Dave Kyle story, I'll recount the local connect with Al Capp; which may not seem connected at first, but persevere. The University of Kentucky owns a splendid estate near Lexington. Its name is "Spindletop", named after the Texas oil field developed by Frank Yount, the late husband of the builder, Mrs. Pansy Yount.

In spite of the grandeur of the mansion, Ms Pansy Yount was not so much shunned as ignored by Lexington Society. They were mostly horse-racing grandees, whereas she was a nobody who came from the working class. She became rather withdrawn and suspicious at this treatment.

Among her detractors, she came to conclude, was cartoonist Al Capp, who was deliberately satirizing and humiliating her across the nation. How did she know this? Because Mammy Yokum's first name was—Pansy!

//Many thanks for your comments on Fadeaway #17. I certainly agree that composing material and transferring it to master pages is considerably easier these days than it was in the past. The computer is a miracle of modern efficiency compared to ye olden days when I first started in this hobby, especially with Spellchecker (the greatest invention of the 20th century in my opinion).

The difficulty, as I related in the previous Fadeaway issue, is that the Post Office has pretty much dealt the death blow to physical fanzines with postage rates that are truly outrageous. In the distant past, up thru part of the 1990s, it cost about fifty percent more than a first class stamp to mail out your average 24 page fanzine. Now there is no third class mail rate, and if your zine prints up fewer than 300 copies (and can qualify for the special 300+ copy bulk mailing rate, with sorting restrictions and other stipulations), then the faned is forced to send out copies of his publication at 1st class rates—\$1.22 for that self-same 24 page fanzine. Not too damn many fans can stand up to that kind of financial burden.

One of the things that continue to mystify me is that the Internet, which has proved to be such a useful communication device for most of the world, has not spawned any abundance of worthwhile on-line fanzines. In addition many fans have also bitterly complained that on-line zines get very few comments from their readers. Email is fast and costs virtually nothing; so why is there not more real communication between science fiction/comic/movie/mystery what-have-you-type fans? In the days when you had to type the letter, stuff it in an envelope, mail it and wait for days for a reply it seems there was a blizzard of fan communications. I remember coming home every day eagerly anticipating a big pile of letters and zines to help me communication and keep in touch with other people interest in science fiction and comics. Today we have on-line discussion boards which become on-line insult temper tantrums with little or no actual communication taking place. If somebody could unravel this gorgon's knot of contradictions I would certainly pay close attention to the explanation.

As a lifetime science fiction and comics fan I know that I appreciate actually holding and reading a physical fanzine. Frankly, I suspect a lot of fans have the same hidden desire to actually experience a physical zine rather than flip thru a flickering computer screen.

Yeah, SFPA, the apa I recently rejoined, which sparked my interest in relaunching Fadeaway, is also well under its membership quota. I realize the world changes, stuff happens, time marches on (_____ fill in your own cliché of choice), but it seems bizarre to me.

Newspaper comic strips have been under assault for close to thirty years. The problem, in my opinion, is that newspapers these days are being run by "Journalists", whereas in the old days newspapers were run by hard headed businessmen who hired reporters to get the news and keep up with civic events. They knew that newspapers had to be entertaining as well as provide the news, and they made sure their papers were filled with plenty of entertainment, including advice columns, humor, puzzles, serialized novels, contests, and comic strips.

Over the past 30 years the people running newspapers have deliberately cut down on the physical size and the quantity of comic strips being run, as well as pruning back the other entertainment features the newspapers used to routinely offer. And then these same people are startled and amazed when the readership of newspapers continues to spiral downward.///

Brad W. Foster; P.O. Box 165246; Irving, TX 75016

Wow, a new print-zine has arrived in my mailbox. Okay, at issue seventeen it might not be officially a "new" fanzine, but since it is the first issue I've seen, it's new to me. And these days, getting to see a new, actually printed-on-paper fanzine show up is a great thing indeed!

I'd love to see more of these, though don't know if my few words here will count enough as a "genuine" letter of comment to qualify. My usual coin of fannish-exchange is to send a couple of my odd little cartoons. But the artwork in this issue all looks very content-related. (Okay, maybe that "Off the Mark" cartoon from Paris qualifies as a filler piece, so maybe there is hope? Anyway, if you are up to considering some fillos-for-the-sake-of-fillos, just let me know, and I'll attach two or three for your consideration.)

Enjoyed all the super in-depth reviews here of both books and movies. Though, I have to admit, by the time I had gotten to page 20 and started on your review of "Gangs Inc.", I penciled a note in the margin along the lines of: "Does he like ANYTHING in this issue? Nice to see a book or film he DOES like." Of course, on the very next page got to your look at the various old comic strip reprint books, so I can see that you're not a total curmudgeon... courmuggyawn.... curmughon... old fart! One of my own favorite collections is the full "Little Nemo" series that came out several years back. And is great to see so many books now being devoted to saving these classic strips in more permanent form.

Hmmm, see, that's a typical loc from me. Not much meat. So, if you would consider fillos as well as word, drop me a reply here and be happy to send something your way to stay on the mail list. The ol' mailbox looks might lonely whenever there isn't a large manila envelope in there these days.

///Thanks for your letter of comment on Fadeaway #17. First off--YES!! Please send along some of your illos for possible use in upcoming Fadeaway issues. This zine *always* needs illos (and articles, and letters of comment) but especially artwork.

One of the reasons I noted and will continue to point out comic strip reprint books is that not only do a lot of fans not know about many of those volumes, but, from my many years in this hobby, it has been my sad experience that almost every effort to reprint comic strips is primarily a labor of love, and generally speaking if you don't buy the books right away, they go out of print rapidly and never return. Even the most ambitious and well financed efforts seem to flounder sooner or later. The sad rule seems to be that so far as comic strip reprint books go, unless it's something current and vastly popular like Peanuts or Garfield, they won't be around very long.

I will admit that my movie reviews in issue #17 were all negative. What I was hoping for was to spark some discussion about why those particular movies were failures. It is both irritating and at the same time fascinating when a movie like "Murders in the Rue Morgue" starts with excellent actors, superb sets, exceptional photography and a brilliant director, yet emerges as a flop that cannot get the viewer involved in the story plot. A lot of folks are interested in movies as art as well as entertainment, and I was hoping to get some sort of analysis and commentary on how and why these movies turned out the way they did.

So far as "Gangs Inc", as I mentioned in the review, I found the people involved in the movie much more interesting than anything else about that piece of fluff, which is the main reason I bothered to cover it.///

That's it for another issue. If you enjoyed what you read, please write a letter of comment. Those who send in LOCs will automatically receive the next issue. Otherwise...