

Enkhistory

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April 1, 1956

This day we dedicate to damon knight.	1
2 Warp.	2
All Our Westerdays. Harry Warner Jr (reprint)	3
dk; some great moments. James Blish	7
dk; his name goes Laura Cohen	10
dk; the biter bit Larry T Shaw.	11
dk; the Futurians meet him. Chester Cohen	15
dk; an excerpt.	16
dk; a tale of two cons. LT Shaw	17
Woof yed	21

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 Arthur Thompson - staff artist in charge of drawing staffs




NIRVANA SEAL OF GOOD FANSMANSHIP applied for: 1956

Fanhistory #3. The undefinitive fanzine is published in the wane of the moon of madness of definitely irregular occasions. This All Feds Day issue is dedicated to all of us who have published, are publishing, or will publish fanzines. It is distributed through the FAPA and to sundry people who we consider valuable in the scheme of things, or who are otherwise favored by the ghods. Letters of comment appreciated. Donations in the form of money accepted. Remember, Doan A. Grennell is a Good Man, and KTEIC is the cat's pajamas!

Lee Hoffman c/o Royal Publications Inc 47 East 44th St. New York 17, N Y

The above address is not mine, but is that of asst. ed. LTShaw who will forward mail until I get settled and have an address of my own again. Leeh

 warp

YED

The last time I saw demon knight, he gave me an eyeball to remember him by. It was a lovely eyeball, blue-pupilled and all bloodshot. I have it now, pressed between the pages of a book.

That occurred shortly after I first met demon knight, namely at the Clevelention last September. But I had heard of him long before that. I don't remember exactly when, but I was aware of his reputation as a brilliant writer and humorist early in my fan career, and when I read my first dk story: TO SERVE MAN. I was duly impressed. The rumors were not false.

I met demon knight in an elevator. It seems fitting somehow that the elevator was ascending. It was he who explained to me why "queer but not peculiar", and he is one of the few persons ever to argue with me and convince me that I was in the wrong (a feat worthy of note). He laughed at my jokes.

The idea of this demonish came to me in Cleveland, and shortly after the con I sounded out several people (notably my east. eds) on the subject and met unanimous approval. But somehow when it came to assembling material I met an odd situation. Of all the people inquired, each said that he favored the mag, but that he personally did not feel qualified to write a definitive article on demon knight. This, perhaps, is a most significant comment on dk.

So we bring you this issue of Fy, perhaps the least definitive of our issues. And we bring you demon knight, perhaps the most complex of the personalities we shall present here. Certainly he is one of the most interesting

I regret one thing: there is no adequate sampling of dk's writing herein. When I asked him, without specifying the reason, for permission to reprint from his works, he asked me not to. So let this be warning to any fanzine editors, if you want to reprint from the works of demon knight, don't ask his permission.

---Mnemosyne

January 1956

dk: HE PUBLISHED A FANZINE

all our yesterdays

by harry warner

reprinted from Max Keasler's
FANVARIETY #12, Sept 1951

This fanzine was like most of the fanzines in history--its first issue had a cover containing a space ship blasting onward and upward. But unlike other fanzines this one also had on its cover a worried-looking little man in a business suit, lugging a briefcase, rushing toward the vessel which was just blasting off from earth, and yelling "Hey, wait!" That was fandom's introduction to Snide.

I mentioned last time the new note that Sweetness and Light had struck into fandom. Fans had taken themselves rather seriously before the '50's, having a good time at conventions, occasionally cracking jokes in the fanzines, but rarely taking the attitude that science-fiction might not be the most important thing in life. But Sweetness and Light, the return of Tucker, Bruce Yerke's *The Damned Thing*, and Snide all came along within a couple of years, less successful imitators sprang up, and nothing was sacred in fandom from then on.

Demon Knight was responsible for Snide. (He still used capital letters on his name in those days.) He resided in an alleged place called Hood River, Oregon, which no one had ever heard of before, and which has probably vanished from the face of the earth since he moved to New York. Why Demon didn't go on to make his living by his pen is one of fandom's unsolved mysteries. In those days, he seemed to have at least as much talent as Tucker, and definitely more than Bradbury. A little later he did sell an occasional yarn to the prozines, particularly to those edited by the New York Futurian group after he became closely associated with the Futurians in fan activities. He has also done some professional editing and agenting, I believe, but has turned out nothing to fulfill the promise of those issues of Snide.

One more thing about Demon, before we turn to Snide itself. Hardly a fan who is alive remembers that he is the guy who is responsible for the National Fantasy Fan Federation. Probably Demon himself has a whole chain of guilt complexes caused by the outcome of his innocent suggestion. He wrote an article called "Unite or Die" and submitted it to me while I was publishing *Spaceway*. It urged the creating of a national fan body. I rejected it because I thought it would start a lot of discussion over the

(Warner - 2)

need for such a group, and didn't want to devote much space to such an abstract quality. Damon then sent it to Art Widner, Jr. who published it in Fanfare. I was wrong. Fandom rallied around the idea without prodding, and the NFFA was created. Damon himself never took much of a part in the organization, smart fellow. It's hard to tell what fandom would have been without that article. No doubt a national group would have been successfully proposed by someone else, but it might have been a national group with different purposes and methods.

Snide began to appear in 1940 and lasted for a year or two. Bill Evans, then living near Damon, was a co-editor after the first issue, but I think he'll agree that the vital spark was furnished by Damon. The best material was written by Knight under pennames, and Knight did the illustrations that contributed so much to the magazine's flavor. I was one of the few fanzines in those days with really free format--i.e., one in which a heading any prescribed size or shape, a format which permitted the page in the middle of the article to be broken by an illustration. Damon ranks in my books as the best cartoonist ever produced by fandom. Not the best artist, he didn't have the finest sense of humor, but he had the ability to weld a joke idea and a drawing inseparably together. Best of all, his cartoons were genuine stf jokes, not something borrowed from a magazine and twisted around into fantasy. They were inspired by situations that could occur only in stf, like the most famous cartoon of all, the man in the space suit, trying to get rid of the fly perched on the tip of his nose. Or the breathtaking silk screen cover for the second Snide--silver, deep blue and blazing red on a pale blue background, depicting a spaceman shooting his futuristic raygun, receiving the full effects of the blast in his posterior and saying: "Damn Einstein!"

Snide wasn't altogether humorous. Serious stuff was published, although you never knew how long it was going to stay serious, like the remark in the middle of a prozine review column: "Free life subscriptions to any of the publications listed here may be obtained by writing to their respective editors, enclosing a one-and-a-half cent stamp."

However, satire, light-hearted fiction and nose-thumbing at the prozines were the lifeblood of the magazine. The fiction was typified by a Ray Bradbury story, Tale of the Mangledomvritch. This was only two pages long (Snide was a half-size publication, with 8 1/2 x 11 pages folded down the short axis).

(Warner - 3)

But I think the best thing in the first issues was "Via Totem Pole" and "Via Sweepstakes" a couple of parodies. It's an odd thing how a good parody can remain enjoyable long after the thing it burlesques has been forgotten. Lewis Carroll's "You Are Old, Father William," is a satire on a now forgotten poem, which lives in its own right. Similarly, Damon's parody is as fresh and delightful as ever, even though the inspiring stories are permanently buried in the files of Thrilling Wonder Stories. Around 1939 or 1940 TWS was publishing a series of connected short stories, each of which had a title beginning with "Via", and all of which consisted of radio messages received from a pioneer space expedition. The author was listed as Gordon A. Giles, generally considered a pseudonym for someone, and while the adventures of these earthmen on other planets were better than the average TWS fiction, the series grew ridiculous, stretched out to such length.

In the first of the Knight parodies, Jupiter Expedition Number One is in bad shape. The gravity on Jupiter is so strong that the metal in the tin cans has been compressed and so the cans can't be opened with the ice pick and everyone is starving. The expedition has found life on Jupiter, although the natives are not considered very intelligent, because none of them has been seen to move yet, except for one that got knocked down a hill by a rolling stone. However, on the 2,348th day of the expedition:

"As I said yesterday, our food problem was solved. It happened this way. Ginerton was looking in a pile of trash for the ace of spades when suddenly he came up with a small metallic object in his hands. It was a can opener. 'Ginerton,' said Captain Batwell, summing it up, 'you have found a can-opener.' And that's the way we all felt about it. We drank a piece of toast in honor of Ginerton's quick-witted act. (Toast is liquid here on Jupiter. Ugh.)

"Barney and Faren have gone off together and are learning how to read. Barney is cross-eyed which complicates matters. Captain Batwell, Ginerton, and myself have done a little scouting around. Heavily loaded, we staggered part way into the jungle. The pink elephants charged now and then, but we found a simple way to stop them. We quickly form a circle and feed each other seltzer tablets. Then they go away. Stilson is working out a new way to peel an orange from the inside. He says the world of science will be astounded.

A little later, the men decide to explore a totem pole that is standing just outside the ship. Snarletti was anxious to get inside and look for records and things, so we walked all around it looking for ladders. We found none. 'Strange,' mused Captain Batwell, impressively, as always. We gathered around him, shushing each other, while the great man thought. Finally he looked up, his face alight. 'I have it!' he said, 'There must be some other means of entrance!' We cheered. The captain had again saved the day. And sure enough, when we had looked unsuccessfully for elevators and fire escapes we found a door at the base of the huge monument. It was a triumph for human reason."

(Warner - 4)

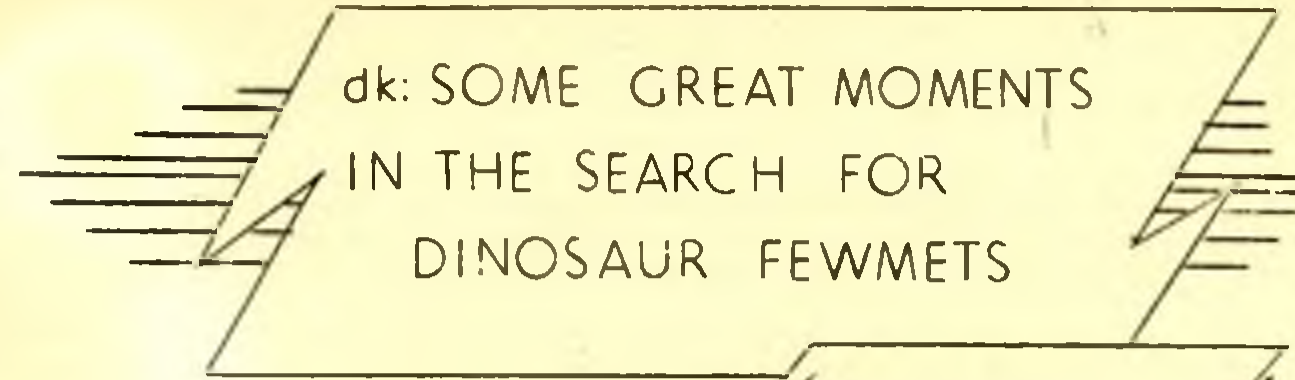
The expedition then tries to figure out why totem poles have been found on all the planets. The members decide that it was because the inhabitants liked to build totem poles.

On the long voyage home, the ship is polluted with Jovian bedbugs, so Captain Batwell sprayed everything with kerosene and lights a match. "For six years on Jupiter we had not known a temperature above a hundred," the narrator points out. Then the creeping cold of space sets in, while Parkers calculates every half minute with the space duodecent, because "The slightest error would land us inches and inches from our destination."


The narrator sums it all up by saying of the return trip:
"I can't describe how we felt. Anyway, why should I?"

---Harry Warner Jr 1951

#



dk: SOME GREAT MOMENTS
IN THE SEARCH FOR
DINOSAUR FEWMETS



James Blish

It was a hot summer in 1955, in Milford, Pa. Damon Knight was learning to swim, and most of us--damon, Helen, Valerie (dk's first-born), Karen (my No. 1 daughter), and I--had gone to a beach on the Delaware River. Virginia (my wife), Beth (my No. 2 daughter) and Blackout (my cat) stayed home.

Damon and I got in first. Valerie came down the beach after us, shouting "Mommy, mommy, mommy." Damon breasted the Delaware with the grave solemnity of the beginner.

"I wish we could break her of that," he said. "She calls everybody 'mommy', including me."

"You're lucky," I told him. "Beth calls me 'Blackout'."

Damon sank like a stone.

This is how damon knight learned that he couldn't laugh and swim at the same time.

All my anecdotes about damon seem to be of that order. They are of no consequence to begin with, and besides they have to be explained. (If inspected closely, they usually turn out to be about me instead of demon, anyhow.) You see, Blackout was a black cat, and at the time I had a black moustache, and it was really only the moustache which Beth called Blackout, not all of me.... You see what I mean?

At the time of demon's first marriage, which took place during the biggest blizzard New York City had had since umpteen years before, Virginia and I had a seven-room house on Staten Island. Since both damon and I were free-lancing that year, he and Trudy moved in with us; there was plenty of room, and we thought it might be cheaper for both of us. For some time, demon and I shared the same working quarters; our working habits were about the same (out of bed at the crack of noon, slop around in robes waiting for the afternoon mail, give up all pretense of getting

(Great Moments -- 2)

anything done before dinner, and then run the typewriter like fury from 8:00 p.m. until two or three in the morning). We had also done three collaborations up to that time, and expected that with this arrangement we would do quite a few more. (We did two.)

For a while this worked like crazy. For one thing, the wives got into a kind of cooking competition with each other, so Damon and I ate like kings (and pigs). I don't think either of the women was ever declared the formal winner, but I do know that Trudy almost did for me. She cooked German style, the sauerbraten and potato-dumplings kind of meal, and after one of these I could just barely stagger to the couch and lie down. The nights Trudy cooked, I sometimes didn't get to the typewriter before midnight; it was all I could do to breathe. Both Damon and I were thin and skeletal at the start of this contest; before it was over, you could have prodded a two-inch dent into any part of either of us.

Of course, it wasn't exactly as cheap a life as we'd thought it would be. Besides, we all developed a passion for Monopoly, which kind of cut into the writing hours. The arrangement finally broke up after an ungodly run of bad luck: Damon had meningitis, Trudy had appendicitis, our first child died; Damon took to calling the house "Miasma Corners". In addition, the Knights were getting tired of living in what amounted to one room. They left, after being with us about a year, and soon after that we sold the house.

Maybe somebody is interested in those collaborations. "No Winter, No Summer", "Tiger Ride", and "The Weakness of RVOG" were all written in the same way; they were stories on which Damon had gotten a good start, written himself into a corner, and given up for the time being. On the first one, he also had the ending in mind, but couldn't see how to get to it; on the second, he had an ending he didn't like; the third stumped him completely. I suggested that I try to take a crack at finishing them, and he agreed. "The Secret People" happened the other way around: I had a start on the yarn--about a quarter of the finished story--and didn't know where to go from there; Damon finished that one, while we were living together, without any further work on my part, except for about an hour's conversation about Damon's notion of 'neutrinos'. "Tiger Ride" was also written on Staten Island. The one yarn which Damon and I really wrote working side by side, paragraph by paragraph, was aimed at PLANET STORIES and failed to go there even after three rewrites; it is so thoroughly and awfully a PLANET story that Harry Altshuler, Damon's current agent, won't even give it back to us for fear we might offer it somewhere else and ruin our reputations forever.

After Damon moved to Canadensis, Pa., and I to Milford, I suggested that we try collaboration again, and see whether or not

(Great Moments -- 3)

we could turn "The Weakness of RVOG" into a novel, writing alternate chapters. As it turned out, our approaches had diverged too much in the intervening years to make that possible; we had the manuscript about half written before it became evident that Damon didn't like the direction in which I wanted to take it. He thought we ought to backtrack to somewhere around Chapter Three and start over again from there, and he didn't have the time for it; he was busy writing "Hell's Pavement". So he turned the project over to me, to take it where I would.

Though I first met Damon when he was about fifteen (and so was I), I can't say even now that I know him well; he is not the kind of man who gushes confidences. But I have some impressions that I think are medium-reliable. For one, Damon seems to me to love the truth more than anybody else I know; it seems a point of honor to him to weigh his opinions and then tell you exactly what they are, and damn the torpedoes. I think this is evident in his criticism, but it's also true in his personal relationships; though I have the impression that the sometimes brutal frankness of earlier years has lately moderated a little. He laughs easily and often; the most minute incongruities tickle him. Like many writers, he is an intellectual snob, but fools amuse rather than outrage him, which makes it easy for almost anybody to get along with him. During one period when Virginia and I were down to our last pennies, he sent us his latest story check, though his situation was nearly as bad as mine, because he couldn't bear to think that I might be doing without beer. He won't kill anything, not even vermin, and the day an opossum came to live under his front porch you would have thought he'd been given the Nobel Prize. He wants to own a coprolith, not to use as a paperweight or for any other practical purpose, but just to be able to say he owns one. Lately he has discovered that he is a poet, which seems to intoxicate him; it is, of course, a heady discovery for anybody to make about himself; I think he is a good one, too. (Virginia, a poet herself, agrees.)

I can't put these impressions into any better order than this because Damon is a complex person and I wouldn't know which of his complexities to stress above the others. For all I know, the coprolith may be more important than the kindness, though I doubt it. As a writer, I think he is one of the top ten in science fiction, and one of the three or four most thorough craftsmen the field has; as a friend, he's one of the best.

dk: HIS NAME GOES
ECHOING
ALONG

Laura Cohen

"It's going to be a boy and we are going to name him Damon," the father-to-be said. He had learned a few hours before that a baby was en route. I don't know that this scene took place some 30-odd years ago in Eugene, Oregon. But it did take place in New York City in 1952. Naturally, after having the proper course of action pointed out to me so clearly, I, as the mother, had to follow through, and so, eventually, Damon Chester Lawrence Cohen was born.

Today, three years later, I can't honestly say that Damon Cohen is at all like Damon knight in behavior, appearance or any other respect. Apparently the name itself carried no influence.

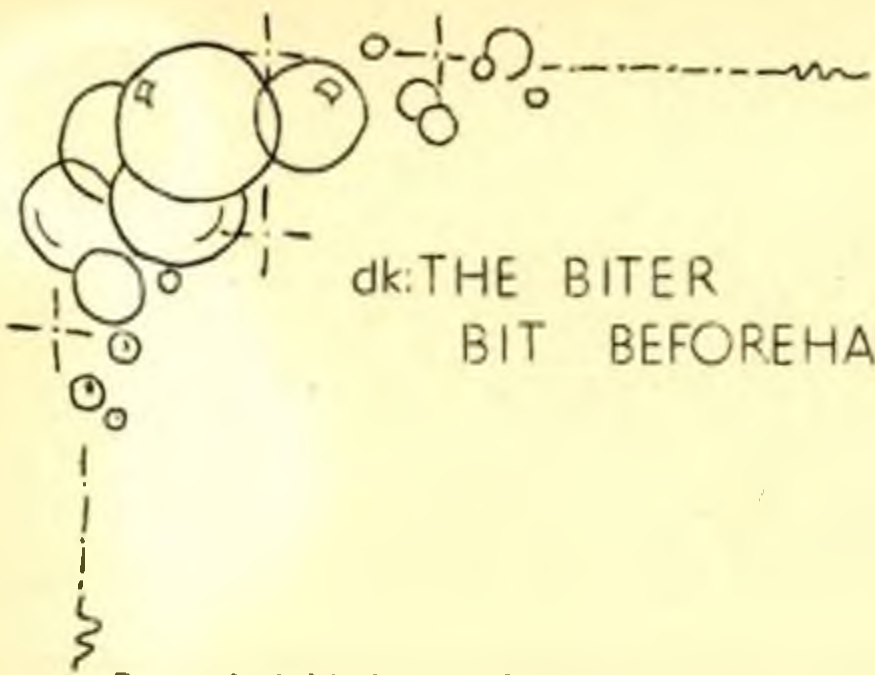
But I like the name, not only because it is a nice one, but because I find pleasure in telling people Damon was named after Damon.

Somehow you know that one of the dangers of naming your child after someone else--the likelihood that the original will suddenly turn in a direction you can't approve, that one day you will find your son bears the name of an eminent rapist, for example--this danger just doesn't exist. Damon knight will go on being Damon knight the rest of his life and you'll always be glad he's a friend of yours.

-- Laura Cohen

"That accounts for his great size!"





dk:THE BITER
BIT BEFOREHAND

Larry Shaw

Damon knight is a multi-talented man--to such an extent that it would have taken a much more perceptive person than myself to pick, as late as six years ago, the single skill that was going to dominate his career. (And even now, it would not surprise me completely if he suddenly stopped writing and took up, say, sculpting and made a splendid success of it.) Still, it is obviously not entirely an accident that he became a writer. I'd guess that he made a conscious and careful decision about the time WORLDS BEYOND folded; I'm certain he took fire in a way that was a delight to see just about then and has been blazing with cheery warmth ever since. (My one regret is that he has never achieved the high production that I, as his faithful fan and as a professional editor, would like to see from him.)

Damon may have had obscure and profound reasons for picking the particular probability-line he is now living on, but I think two of the reasons are obvious: by writing, he can say the things he thinks are important to the widest possible audience (and I do not mean to imply that he wants to preach); and, at the same time, have a lot of fun by playing public and private jokes on the world.

By no means all of demon's work has been humorous, of course, and some of it has been very grim indeed. But every single word he has ever put into print, it seems to me, has been lightened and enlightened by his admirable appreciation of irony, his wise wit, and his cheerful good will.

In any case, it is his love of private jokes I want to concentrate on at the moment. Several of his stories furnish examples. Sometimes the joke is one demon can share with science-fiction fandom as a whole, sometimes only one other person in the whole wide world will dig it; but it is a rare thing for a story of his not to contain at least one. (And, I should probably point out, the story itself never suffers because of the presence of the joke.)

(Beforehand -- 2)

Take "A Likely Story" in the second issue of INFINITY. I choose this not (well, only partly, then) because I printed it, but because it is the most recent example I know of and one of the most clear-cut. In this story, in case you haven't read it, demon's friends and acquaintances are the characters; the narrator--obviously demon himself--attends a meeting of the "Medusa" (Hydra) Club which someone (the revelation of precisely who is made in strict accord with the best detective-story techniques) is turning into a complete shambles through the use of a newly-discovered science-fictional gadget. Some of the characters are merely named; the major ones are described with incredible accuracy in a razor-sharp phrase or two.

A number of people have asked me what celebrities were lurking behind which names. So, in case you've tried to figure out the unpredictable assortment of puns and anagrams yourself (and just because I feel like getting this into print somewhere), here's the complete cast:

Rod Pfohl	Fred Pohl
Tom Q. Jones	George O. Smith
Punchy Carrol	Judy Merrill
Leigh MacKean	Key MacLean
Dorrance Canning	Laurence Manning
Art Gerynbergen	Marty Greenberg
Bill Plass	Phil Klass
Asa Akimsov	Isaac Asimov
Ned Burgeon	Ted Sturgeon
L. Vague Duchamp	L. Sprague DeCamp
B. U. Jadrys	A. J. Budrys
Larry Bagsby	Jerry Bixby
Ray Alvarez	Lester del Rey
H. Drene Pfeiffer	H. Beau Piper
Will Kubatius	Walter Kubiilius
Don W. Gamble, Jr.	John W. Campbell, Jr.
Horty Plass	Morty Klass
Jerry Thaw	Larry Shaw
Preacher Flatt	Fletcher Pratt
Kosmo Samwitz	Sam Moskowitz
Don Bierce	John Pierce
Balmer	Palmer
Phog Relapse	Rog Phillips
Werner Kley	Willy Ley
Fred Balester	Alfred Bester
M. C. (Hotfoot) Burncloth	C. M. (Hotfoot) Kornbluth
Ham Jibless	James Blish

(Beforehand -- 3)

...plus a ubiquitous fan known as Harry Somebody; many people have taken the model for him to be Harlan Ellison, but I'm sure it was actually Joe Fann that damon had in mind.

(I honestly don't know just how Joycean damon was being in some of these cases. Ham Jibless is a lovely anagram of James Blish, but it could be even more than that: Ham Brooks, in the old Doc Savage stories, was a dapper character who carried a sword-cane; James Blish is a dapper character who used to carry an umbrella-cane.)

No, I'm not going to give away the identity of the "villain"; try to figure it out as you read the story, if you haven't already. It can be done if you're sharp--though I'll bet you won't succeed.

The point of all this, anyway, is that you just know, if you know damon, how much fun he had writing the darned thing. Personally, it wouldn't surprise me if the story had started with one of those outrageously clever names. I can picture damon dreaming along over some routine task, and suddenly coming all alert with a pleased "Ho ho!" as "Preacher Flatt," to grab from the bag at random, popped out of his subconscious into the here and now. And I can picture him dropping everything else to rush to the typewriter, rough out a plot, and churn out the story with nothing more than that as a beginning. It would be perfectly typical--a number of his stories have had their beginnings in humorous remarks by Helen Knight (who can be, incidentally, a delightfully witty girl).

Then there was "Cabin Boy," a full-sized novelette based from start to finish on an obscene jingle! (I sometimes wonder if Horace Gold himself knew when he bought the story; I'm sure damon would be uproariously happy if he didn't.)

It should be needless to say that this is only one facet of damon's writing, and a minor one at that when you consider how many facets there are--but I find it a fascinating one. And it fascinates me, too, that damon's career as a professional writer began with one of the most superb pieces of irony that even a connoisseur like himself could possibly desire.

Damon's first professionally-published story was named "Resilience" and appeared in the February 1941 issue of STIRRING SCIENCE STORIES. It was only a little over a page long, as I remember it, and it is probable that damon received no payment for it whatever. It was not, of course, as polished as his current work, but it lacked nothing in cleverness.

(Beforehand -4)

It concerned an invasion of Earth by a race of little people --roughly a foot high, if I recall correctly, and certainly no more than two feet. They had no remarkable weapons themselves, but they had one remarkable property: they were resilient to the nth degree. When you hit them, no matter how hard and no matter what with, they merely bounced. This alone made them undefeatable.

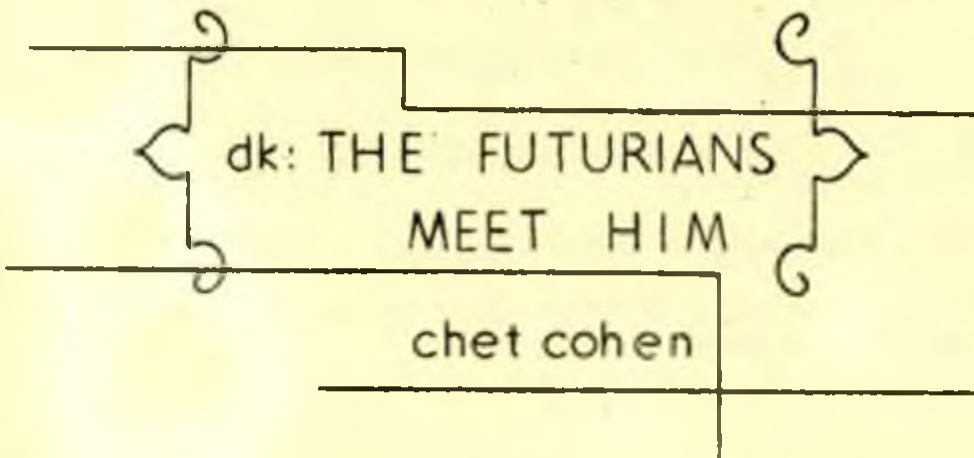
In the opening paragraphs of the story, then, a guide was showing a bunch of tourists a historical marker or something of the sort, and saying: "This is where the brittle people made their last stand." The last line of the story, most of which was told in a flashback to the opening stages of the war, was: "And the little men just kept on marching."

Cute? Sure. Except that when it appeared in print, it drew a complete blank; nobody got it at all. Because, you see, at the last possible moment some over-zealous and not-very-bright printer --a pawn perhaps in the hands of an omnipotent chess-player whose sense of irony matched Damon's own--changed the crucial word in that first quotation, so that it read "little" instead of "brittle"!

It is a tribute to Damon's own resilience that he recovered from the blow and went on to become a writer in spite of it.

-- Larry T. Shaw

"Yes, Virginia, there is a Larry Shaw!"



DAMON KNIGHT (HE's a fan I know) has one peculiarity--among many. HE hates to have HIS name spelled in upper and lower case.

Although I am the most notorious non-fan in the world, I have attended more blasted science fiction conventions than most real fans. It was at one such brawl (the Denvention) that I received the worst shock of my entire fan experience.

For months, ever since we had gotten DAMON's letter informing us that HE was coming to New York, a bunch of the fans (and me) had spent many useless hours speculating about what HE must be like.

When we finally saw HIM at the Shirley-Savoy in Denver, HE turned out to be beyond our wildest speculations.

I was standing beside the stage in the main hall, morning-aftering with the rest of the Futurians when I happened to see the door open at the other end of the hall. A huge head supported by a thin, ready, neck appeared in the aperture. It was capped by a thick, blond pompadour, below which was a long, thin, needle-like nose. Midway down this protrusion perched a pair of dark hornrims.

As I watched, bug-eyed (and swearing off liquor), the door opened wider, and the apparition entered the hall. Up the graded floor it came, in a peculiar bouncing stride, pants cuffs rising to the midcalf at every step, followed close behind by two quite normal looking adults. These, we learned later, were parents.

Gasping, I grasped Michel's arm (the one that later became osteomyelitized) and croaked: "Christ! Look, that must be DAMON KNIGHT!"

"Ulk," said Johnny, noncomitally.

As the apparition came up, I advanced to meet it. "You're DAMON KNIGHT, aren't you?" I squeaked, extending my hand.

(through history with DAMON KNIGHT -- 2)

"Yus," came the voice from somewhere within the farther reaches of its esophagus.

I clasped the limp, clammy hand and said: "Let me introduce you to the great Wollheim."

Behind HIM, the parents stood, quietly beaming.

From that day to this, I have never seen a more typical-looking science-fiction fan.

-- Chester Cohen

"Argo!"

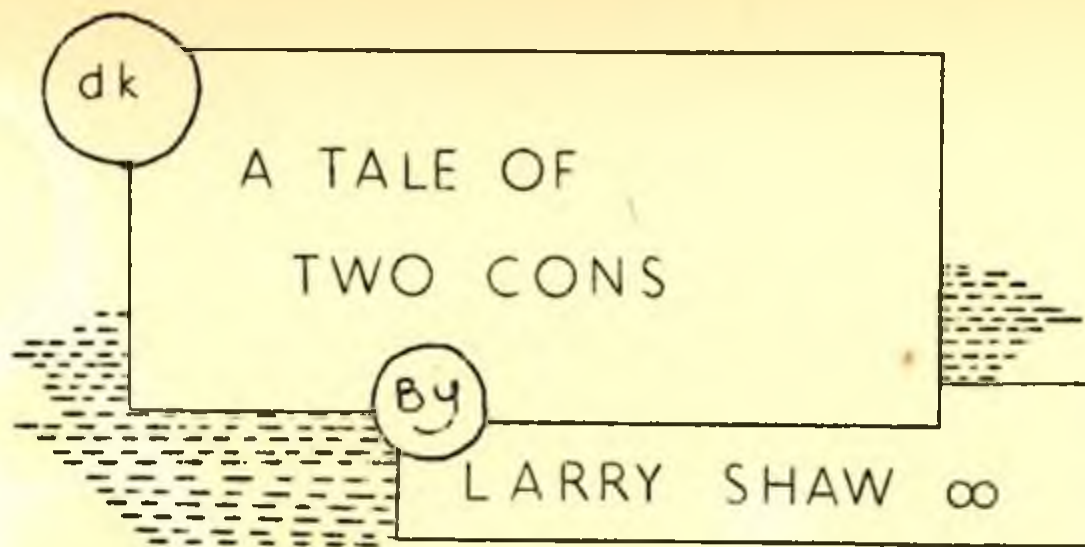
"I get most of my ideas in an abandoned Turkish bath in Brooklyn," said Knight, flicking the ash from his cigar carelessly into his grey Persian. "I believe nothing so resembles the fis-sionating chamber of a space ship as the awful emptiness of the steam rooms in this establishment--so dark, so full of nozzles..."

Knight was born, twenty-four years ago, in a hovel on the outskirts of Hill City, Kansas. He does not remember his mother, except when he needs money. In a long and crowded career, he has been stovedore, gold miner, undertaker, lightning-rod inspector, department store executive, sniper, shoe salesman, zoo inmate, confidential secretary, coke sacker, rat farmer, and deep-sea diver--but he has never been a writer.

"I happen to own fifty million monkeys," he explains casually.

-- Damon Knight

(excerped from
PS's Feature Flash,
PLANET STORIES,
Summer 1948)



Early in September, 1944, damon knight and I attended the Buffalocon--the first one, at which Ken Kreuger was host. We spent part of the time happily drinking Dal Coger's liquor.

Early in September, 1955, damon knight and I attended the 13th World Science-Fiction Convention in Cleveland, Ohio. We spent part of the time happily drinking Dal Coger's liquor.

Each event marked the end of a particular era in my life, and the beginning of a better one. But since this is supposed to be about damon and not me, I won't go into the details. Still, you can see how important damon is: eras just can't end without him.

The Buffalocon was, in a sense, my first meeting with damon. Actually, we first saw each other, were introduced, and exchanged some words much earlier, at a meeting of the STForum--the science-fiction, chowder and marching society of New York City at the time --held in Julius Unger's Brooklyn apartment on January 31, 1943. I know the date because I wrote a report of the affair for Julie's late lamented science-fiction newspaper, FANTASY FICTION FIELD. At the time, I also acquired several drawings by damon in my autograph book. This is significant; I was a yokel neofan while damon had already been living in New York for more than two years and had no particular patience for fannish things any more. It was not, under the circumstances, exactly a case of love at first sight.

The Buffalocon was different. Wollheim had persuaded damon to go, but knight was very reluctant and did not expect to enjoy himself. I joined Donald, Elsie and damon on the train as it passed through Schenectady, and I suppose I was still a pretty unimpressive sight: I was still a green kid; I had been working twelve hours a day for several days and I had a bad cold. Damon and I sat together. At first the conversation was desultory indeed. But after a while damon warmed up considerably, and by the time the weekend was over we had become quite good friends.

(Two Cons -- 2)

As I say, it was an important event for me, and this is undoubtedly why several incidents stand out very clearly in my memory. I can recall perfectly, for instance, the stunned expression on Damon's face when Abby Lu Ashley came charging into the living room where we had slept the first night just as he was beginning to button his shorts. I recall walking around in the rain with him while he looked for non-existent cigarettes; I insisted it was raining salt water, which he would have none of; he insisted on buying me a beer, which impressed me because I knew how broke he was. There was one night when he and I never did go to bed; we spent it making abortive attempts to write humorous convention reports and discussing my probable future in New York; the following morning we tried to wake up Walt Liebscher by crooning "Liebscher's feet stink!" at him, but only succeeded in annoying him.

Damon was very insistent that I look him up as soon as I got to New York to stay, which flattered me. A month or so later, I took him up on it.

This is the best point I can think of to digress a bit and tell what I know about the pre-New York Damon. He was born, to the best of my knowledge, in Eugene, Oregon, grew up in Hood River and went to art school in Salem, both in the same state. He wanted to be a cartoonist, specifically--for a while at least--a Walt Disney employee. His father was a high school principal and ran a professional mimeographing service; Damon couldn't have been more than 15 when he illustrated a mimeographer's manual written by his father, which they co-operated in publishing. It was a beautiful job. Damon's cartoon technique was marvelous even then, and the book contained the best mimeographing I've seen in my entire career. (Later Damon tried to peddle it to a professional publisher in New York, without success; this is a genuine shame, because I know of a lot of fans who could make good use of the book.)

It has just this moment struck me as odd that Damon didn't use the mimeo when he published his fanzine, SNIDE. But he didn't; he used hecto and silk-screen, both very effectively. SNIDE was, in fact, one of the all-time classics among fanzines, even though it only lasted two issues. Among other things, it contained beardmutterings, which Damon invented.

Another thing Damon did during his actifan period was the writing of a letter to Art Widner, in which he suggested that fandom needed an organization to which every known fan could

(Two Cons -- 3)

belong. The letter was published, and became the spark that set off the National Fantasy Fan Federation. I mention this to show that even as perfect a person as Damon has blots on his record.

Damon the fan corresponded with people like Bill Evans, Barbara Bovard and John Hollis Mason--but mostly with members of the Futurian Society of New York. The upshot of that was that Damon came to New York with the Futurians direct from the Convention, in 1941. And by the time I pulled in from Schenectady he already acted like a natural-born New Yorker.

Chet Cohen's account of his meeting with Damon is undoubtedly accurate, but it may be misleading for those who don't know the subsequent history. What happened was that Damon lived with an odd assortment of Futurians for a while (during which period he began the typical first novel we have all begun), but soon pulled out to set up a separate establishment with Chet. When I arrived, they were living in an apartment on East 17th Street which they called Nome. The purpose of the name (in addition to describing the temperature of the place) was to enable them to say, when leaving a party, "We're going Nome now." (They would explain this at the drop of a hat, but I don't know whether they ever actually did it or not.)

Strangers generally, and fans in particular, were not exactly welcome at Nome, but Damon invited me to drop in often, and after Chet had come home in the wee hours a couple of times to find that I had passed out in his bed, he accepted me, too. A three-cornered friendship sprang up which shows every indication of remaining as permanent as such a thing can possibly be; Chet and I see Damon much too seldom these days, but every time we meet we sneer at each other as joyfully as ever.

Damon was working as a sub-editor at Popular Publications at the time, which meant hard work, anonymity and a low salary. I went to work for a trade magazine called HAT LIFE, which meant (in addition to the same qualifications) that I had to wear a hat. A gag was born; every time I entered Nome of an evening, and every time I said something outstandingly stupid, Damon or Chet, or the two in chorus, would bellow, "Throw your hat out the window, Larry!" This worked out beautifully when somebody like Bob Studley or Charlie Colcord witnessed it for the first time, because I invariably did throw my hat out the window (it landed on the fire escape outside, where I could retrieve it at my leisure, but the outsiders didn't know that).

(Two Cons -- 4)

Damon and Chet were still, technically, Futurians, and I, technically, became one, but the entire group got together only rarely and only by accident. I lived for a while with John Michel; Damon and Chet dropped in occasionally, but mostly I went to their place. Our place--Station X, on West 4th Street--was supposed to have heat, too, but had very little the winter I was there, and Damon and Chet had the times of their lives on the days we smashed up the back porch and our one comfortable chair to burn in the fireplace. And one fabulous night (when Johnny wasn't home) Damon came in drunk at about three in the morning, determined to put out a one-shot. This was surprising because Damon has had little use for amateur publishing since his SNIDE days, but he wrote and I ran off a single-sheeter called IT, which is probably worth millions of dollars a copy now.

Things like that don't last. Wollheim and Michel decided they wanted to cut off all ties with four of our Futurian friends. Damon, Chet and I were disgusted and took a public stand with the other four, and were sued by Wollheim for things like defamation of character as a result. (I still think we acted properly, and perhaps even nobly, if not especially brightly.) It was a moderately nerve-wracking period generally. I told Michel off, he told me off, and I moved out--into a place on West 17th Street. None had grown definitely unsatisfactory and I was lonely, so roughly six months later Damon, Chet and I moved into another apartment together. We had some fine times. Damon painted, and many of his friends painted too, just because he did. But this didn't last long either; Chet and I shipped out, Chet continued to do so while I started spending a lot of time in Schenectady again, and Damon got married.

This has been a difficult piece of writing to begin; now it is going to be difficult to stop--but time, in particular, is running out. Like Blish, I find it easy to go on talking about Damon, but difficult to think of things that will clarify him at all to people who don't know him. Damon is a self-contained man.

He and I have shared a lot of things, and he has taught me a good deal of what I know about writing and some of what I know about life.

Strictly speaking, he was not a fan very long; I can't accurately evaluate his influence on fandom or vice versa. I do know that he has decided he likes science-fiction conventions, which is probably significant--but I don't know of what. Generally, I think Blish's summation is an excellent one, and I am grateful to him for making it. Also, I think it possible that Damon is the one great man I know. I know no one I like better.

If this had been printed in red instead of black, it would have been significant of the fact that Larry T Shaw was the one who bled for this, instead of LeeH in whose veins runs the ghu of mimeo ink. But since this came out black, I guess that proves that Shaw bleeds the same stuff the rest of the seekers after the Enchanted Duplicator do.

He, more than I, be responsible for this. He obtained most of the material, stencilled what he obtained and dashed it off to me for duplicating. And when the white label (heavy) paper was not available here, he obtained it in NY and sent it here for me. Unfortunately, due to running a larger edition than originally planned, there was not enough of it, so some of these pages are on that same thin stuff as Fy #2.

The headings that are good are by ATOM. The rest by me.

SPECIAL NOTICE TO FANZINE LETTERHACKS.

We previously announced that every fifth Fy would be general in nature and feature letters of comment. This is not so. We have decided not to run a general ish. Or letters of comment.

Someone told us that without a letter column no one would comment and give us egoboo, and we'd wither and die from lack of it. Well, (change over from accidental plural to conscious singular) I figure all the important people, most of whom I'm in correspondence of some spasmodic sort, will comment anyway, letter column or not, and the thoughtful people who really enjoy the mag, and the fans who despise it, will write. Occasionally, at least. And all comment will be appreciated, if not published.

Oh yes, one more thing, if you write/run reviews of fanzines, please review Fy and mention that interested parties can have copies if they'll send a request accompanied by return postage.

And one other thing, after the end of February 1956, I will be away from Savannah and it may be years before I get back, if ever, so please don't send any mail here then. After Feb 29, you can write c/o Royal Publications Inc, 47 East 44th St. NY 17, NY, which is not my address, but the address of asst. ed. Shaw, who will forward correspondence.

Thine,
LeeH