

Implosion

Implosion #30 is the local monthly fanzine of Arnie Katz (330 S. Decatur, Suite 152, Las Vegas, NV 89107). It is produced for the 29th Distribution of Apa V, the Las Vegas apa, which has as this month's theme "Nostalgia" Today is April 13, 1996, 1996

Implosion: The Fanzine that proves anyone can publish a fanzine.
Member, fwa.

Back Date Magazine Store Epiphany

Sometimes we talk about the great questions of fandom. Mostly, we debate the merits of various combinations of pizza toppings, but that can only fill so many hours. So at odd moment, like when we reach quick agreement on sausage and pepperoni, we discuss subjects like "What is the relationship between fandom and science fiction."

Joyce believes in the Mystic Brotherhood of All Fen in the Blood of Science Fiction, a philosophy she acquired from Andy Hooper. I argue that the day of science fiction as the wellspring of fandom is past, that it is not even necessary to have a familiarity with sf to become a trufan.

I argue this, the apostle of fannishness. It is hard for me to do so, surrounded by evidence of my long-standing love of science fiction. Before I was a fan, I loved science fiction.

Lenny Bailes and I were about 15 when he discovered back date magazine stores. Although a year younger than me, he led the way in the exploration of nearby New York City.

My other friends considered every trip to Manhattan from our suburban New Hyde Park an epic adventure. On the rare occasions when Eugene Cohen, Mark Heller, Janice Gold and I went to the city, everything was carefully scripted. We knew exactly where we were going and what time we needed to be there, and the itinerary always included a check-in with Eugene's dad, who owned The Fifth Avenue Card Shop, a stationary and sundries superstore, located in the Empire State Building.

Bailes -- we called him "Bailes," pronounced as a single syllable, in those days -- attacked the Big Apple differently. His boundless self-confidence and

insatiable curiosity translated into total fearlessness when confronting intriguing new possibilities.

It was easy to under-estimate Bailes. He was a year younger, and some aspects of his personality developed slowly. Our Mutt-and-Jeff appearance, as we galumphed down Patton Boulevard, amused many, but I knew Bailes was a special person.

Some years earlier, I had accepted that he was smarter than me, maybe much smarter. I thought I was pretty brainy, so I conceded this point with great reluctance -- and only in the dead of night. I didn't feel the need to share this judgment with Bailes, but I did pay attention to whatever my friend did and said.

He and I were on the outs, briefly, during this period. The proximate cause was that I punched him in the belly on the corner of Patton Boulevard and Haddon Road, when he interrupted a conversation between another schoolmate and myself.

This was one of four occasions in which I sunk to physical violence. The other three were self-defense, so this stupid attack on my best friend has continued to haunt me ever since. (I'm sorry, Lenny.) I remember a feeling of extreme frustration, but I knew I'd screwed up the moment I launched the blow.

It was during his "lone wolf" period that Bailes learned that the city line bus connected to the subway, which traveled to any part of the city for one measly token. Always a bit apart from most of the other neighborhood kids, Bailes dove into the NYC experience without a backward glance.

One Saturday morning, as I sat eating breakfast in the kitchen, someone knocked on the door. It was Bailes. He let me know that, though I was considerably less than perfect, I was the only person who would appreciate his latest discoveries.

Specifically, he'd stormed the headquarters of DC-Superman Comics, read bound volumes of *Green Lantern*, *Superman*, *Flash* and other "golden age" comics, and gotten a personal,

private tour of the operation. He'd actually talked to Julius Schwartz and Mort Weissinger, the two most popular editors.

I made no effort to hide my awe and envy. This sealed the breach, and our friendship resumed. I can't recall any subsequent fusses between us, so I guess even I improve, given a few decades.

During the estrangement, Bailes had become a more worldly person. He'd ridden the subway everywhere, which led to other discoveries. Though unaccustomed to being a follower, I put myself in his hands, and we began to make regular raids on the treasure trove of New York City.

Bailes and I both read science fiction avidly from the time we'd learned to read. By 1960, we'd read just about everything in the school and local libraries. I'd found the contemporary crop of prozines during our regular newsstand crawls, but my allowance couldn't stretch very far in that direction, even with the low cover prices (about 35¢) then in effect.

The resourceful Bailes found an answer to this financial problem: back date magazine stores. They lined Third and Sixth Avenues in a pair of 20-block ribbons from about 42nd Street to the low 20s. They were crammed, one or two per block, into dilapidated buildings resignedly awaiting the wrecking ball.

These dingy establishments sold dreams. We meticulously combed the ever-changing inventory. If we had unearthed any science fiction treasures, we wouldn't have had either the knowledge to recognize them or the money to buy them. Being young and optimistic, it never occurred to us that generations of acquisitive New York science fiction fans had picked these places clean of mint condition *Unknown* and *Astounding*.

We settled for prozines at 10¢-15¢ each. A couple of bucks, all we had, brought home a stack of prozines. True, they were mostly mid-1950s *Amazing* and *Fantastic*, and copies of *Future* and other Lowndes mags of comparable vintage, but there was something to be said for quantity if you were as starved for sf reading matter as we were.

Sometimes the back-date stores surprised us with a few copies of Larry Shaw's *Infinity* or Ray Palmer's *Other Worlds*. I prized both titles, though they were diametric opposites.

The short-lived *Infinity* published a few superb stories like Arthur C. Clarke's "The

Star," and many good, solid, readable ones. This contrasted sharply with *Amazing* and *Fantastic*. By the 1950s, the Ziff-Davis Twins had fallen far from their none-too-lofty position. Walter Mitty-ish tales dominated both. The main difference: the *Amazing* hero invented something that made him invisible so he could visit the women's locker room unobserved, while the *Fantastic* hero got his power of invisibility from a potion or other supernatural source. He went to the same locker room, though.

I didn't know about Ray Palmer's checkered fanhistory, which includes editorship of the first fanzine and the *Shaver Mystery*, but I could tell that *Other Worlds* wasn't an everyday prozine. It radiated the nervous, mercurial energy of the marginal, sleazy enterprise.

"Lurid" succinctly describes the stories The writers, including the post-*Mystery Shaver*, loved to linger over semi-pornographic tableaux of half-nude alien women with unlikely skin and hair color.

Instead of the scholarly Lowndes or the relentlessly upbeat Paul W. Fairman, *Other Worlds* had a half-crazed hustler who had a new scheme to extort financing from the readers almost every month. He alternately complained about the perfidy of fans and pros and exhorted them to sacrifice to keep *Other Worlds* in business.

Typical of Palmer's dubious marketing schemes was the merger of the science fiction magazine with a ufo sheet. One month, the cover read "FLYING SAUCERS from *Other Worlds*," and the next time it was "Flying Saucers from OTHER WORLDS." It wasn't always easy to tell one from the other by scanning the contents.

Palmer's grip on reality wasn't the tightest, but you couldn't say he wasn't fascinating. His editorials made everyone this side of John W. Campbell look staid. Ray Palmer blasted his flamboyant personality, a cross between Dick Geis and Harlan Ellison, across every page..

I knew most of *Other Worlds* was sludge, but that didn't prevent Ray Palmer from galvanizing my imagination. He made magazine editing seem so exciting that he inspired me to seek a career in editing.

Our allowances flowed through the back-date stores' cash registers. As soon as we had a little reserve, we'd rush into the city and turn it into moldering magazines as quickly as possible. It wasn't long before Bailes and I swept most of the cheap digest SF magazines

off the shelves.

Alarmed at the way our source of cheap science fiction was drying up, Bailes took the next step. Brad Day was primarily a mail order dealer. His ads ran in the back of several prozines, including the Z-D Twins. We sent for his list, which contained his store's address.

At first, Bailes and I hesitated to make the journey, because Mr. Day's store wasn't in easily accessible Manhattan, but rather in the mysterious borough of Queens. Bailes studied the subway map while we hoarded a couple of weeks of allowance, and then set off to see this fortress of science fiction under the elevated IRT tracks.

A twinge of disappointment hit me as I entered the store for the first time. It was tiny, one-quarter the size of any of the back-date stores I'd seen. Then I realized that the shelves, which were at least 12 ft. tall and covered every wall, were packed solid with neatly ordered paperbacks.

Mr. Day watched us carefully. The middle-aged proprietor displayed no zest for the retail side of his business. To him, we weren't customers, but intruders. (He eventually moved the store to a barn in the Catskill Mountains North of New York City, where he probably got less than one retail customer a year. That undoubtedly suited him fine.)

No magazines. I blurted out a comment to that effect. Only with some evident reluctance did Mr. Day mention another room. It had all the prozines we could want, he advised. "And which ones do you want?"

We didn't have want lists. Bailes and I knew what we had in our meager collections. We didn't yet own so many prozines that there was any chance we'd fail to recognize the cover of any issue back in New Hyde Park.

Unfortunately, our knowledge stopped there. What we didn't have, we didn't know. Mr. Day informed us that he wasn't about to let two kids go traipsing through the magazines with out a list. "You got a list, I'll find what you want," he said.

I was ready to go home in defeat. Bailes was much harder to deflect. He swung into a five-star wheedle that melted the huckster's flinty heart. I don't remember the strictures under which he allowed us, for a few precious instants, to view the prozine room, but somehow Bailes negotiated our way into the sanctum.

It was the mother mode. I'm sure a wily old

science fiction collector like Sam Moskowitz or Ted White would have taken it all in stride. For me, it was like the first glimpse of Jayne Mansfield (reference update: Pamela Lee).

This was what I wanted to read until my eye fell out of my head. I *needed* those prozines. Had to have them. In a heartbeat, science fiction went from a strong interest to my ruling passion.

My memory of the actual transaction is hazy a powerful mystical experience dimly recollected. Ecstasy and agony warred within me as I beheld the ranks of science fiction and fantasy magazines in the back room of Brad Day's shop. I'd never realized there was so much, and yet most of it was beyond my financial reach.

Someday, I vowed as I extracted all the issues I needed to complete my run of *Infinity* from a floor-level shelf, I'll have a collection like this. I'll have them all. I will seek out the people who have these magazines and get them from them.

I was a proto-fan, a fan waiting to happen, from that moment. Within two years, Bailes and I published **Cursed #1** and joined fanzine fandom.

Joyce and I have a small prozine collection. It's mostly stuff I saved off the newsstands in the 1960s and early 1970s, plus the issues I bought from those back-date stores. Joyce has purchased some pulps over the years. It totals a couple of modest book shelves and a few little stacks elsewhere in Toner Hall.

I'll never have that room-filling magazine collection. Wouldn't want it, to tell the truth. If I had it, where would I put my fanzines?