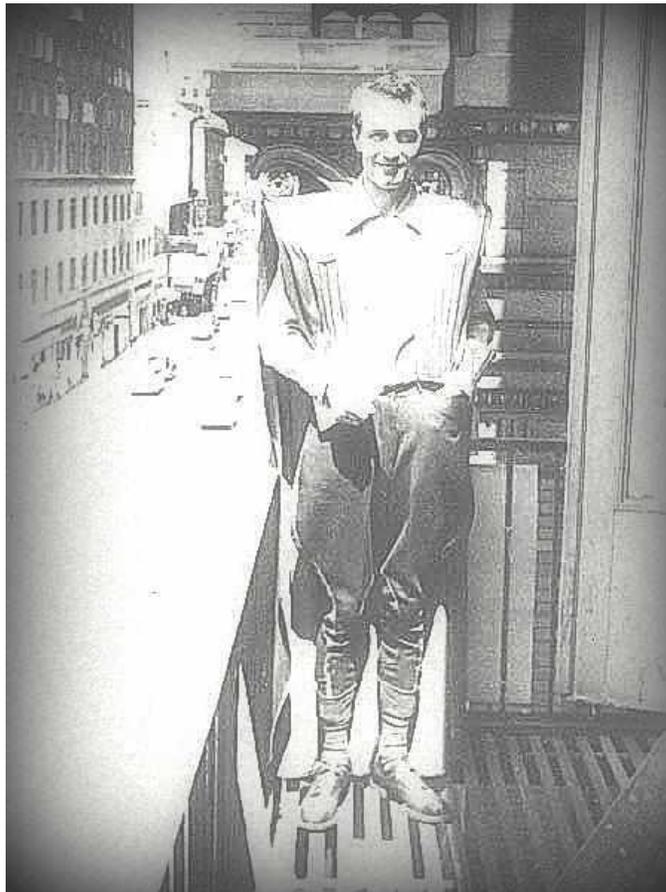


Through Time and Space!

Forry Ackerman's remembrances from *Mimosa*



edited by Rich Lynch

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cover photograph: Forry, in costume, at the 1939 Worldcon

My Friend Forry

I don't need to introduce Forrest J Ackerman with this prologue, as he is arguably the most well-known science fiction fan of all time. It was an absolute privilege to have known him as a friend but thinking back, I'm really not sure when I first met him. I'm guessing it was at some Worldcon, most likely in the 1980s, and Dave Kyle probably made the introduction. I have a very clear memory when I first had a chance to *talk* to Forry, though. It was in 1994 at the first FanHistoricon, which was held in Hagerstown, Maryland. Peggy Rae Pavlat had organized the convention to try to set up a continuing organization that would collect and preserve bits of fan history. Forry attended the convention, probably because it allowed him to visit with Harry Warner, Jr., who lived in Hagerstown, one final time. It had been hoped that Harry would attend the convention but true to his reputation as fandom's most famous hermit, he remained at home. Instead, the convention, all 15 or so of us, visited Harry in groups of three at a time.

It's my own fault, of course, that I had never taken the opportunity to seek out and talk to Forry prior to the FanHistoricon. By then I had been editor of Harry's Hugo Award-winning history of 1950s fandom, *A Wealth of Fable*, and in the process, had developed a driving interest in learning what had gone on before. But then, on the last evening of the convention, while we were all sitting in the con suite after the last program item had ended, Peggy Rae thrust a tape recorder into my hand and told me, "Interview Forry."

I didn't so much interview him as let him tell some stories. The transcript of that session became the first four installments of a series of autobiographical articles that ran in *Mimosa* (which I co-edited with my wife Nicki) between December 1994 and December 2001. They each generated quite a few comments from readers, and these were compiled and mailed to Forry. He apparently loved the feedback so much that he agreed to continue the series. So for each of the next few Worldcons, Forry and I would sit for about an hour or so in one of the less trafficked parts of the convention. He would relate more of his memories into a tape recorder and the transcripts from those sessions were edited into the remaining installments of the series.

I had always thought that Forry would, one day, write an autobiography. But he never did, and the twelve articles in *Mimosa* might be as close as he ever came. It's an absolute pleasure to be able to collect them all under one cover. I hope you'll have an enjoyable time reading them.

Rich Lynch
Gaithersburg, Maryland, U.S.A.
August 2021

Some acknowledgements:

Headers for all of Forry's articles in *Mimosa* were done by my friend Teddy Harvia, and a big thank you to him for permission to reprint them here. Also: I've been asked to include an acknowledgement that the terms 'World Science Fiction Convention', 'Worldcon', and 'Hugo Award', as used in this fanzine, are service marks of the World Science Fiction Society, an unincorporated literary society.

Through Time and Space with Forry Ackerman (Part I)

by Forrest J Ackerman



(from *Mimosa* 16, published in December 1994. Illo by Teddy Harvia.)

If I had to pick a time when I could have declared, “I am a science fiction fan!”, it would have been in 1929. I was 14 years old. I had the first letter in the first letter column of *Science Wonder Quarterly*. That letter was seen by a young boy about my age named Linus Hogenmiller, of Farmington, Missouri. And it so happened that I was feeling a little under the weather and was staying home from high school when I received his letter.

I was so thrilled to hear from a fellow science fiction fan! I had time on my hands, just sitting up in bed, so my mother got me some stationery and I hand-wrote three letters to Linus that same day. As soon as I finished a six or seven page letter I’d think of other things to tell him.

At that time, science fiction was still called ‘scientifiction’. In correspondence with Linus, he was the first one to get a little weary of writing ‘scientifiction’ all the time so he wrote ‘stf’. In the beginning we pronounced it ‘ess-tee-eff’, and that got a little tiresome so he cut it down to ‘stef’, and then merged it with ‘fan’; we had ‘stef-fans’ for a while, then ‘stfans’.

Well, about that time I created a correspondence club called ‘The Boys Scientifiction Club’. (I had nothing against girls, but they were as rare as a unicorn’s horn in the fandom of 1930.) I personally was writing to 116 science fiction fans around the world and had a correspondent in Russia, as well as several in England and Canada. Well, the way the Boys Scientifiction Club operated was that you sent in a little snapshot of yourself. You also sent in either three issues, consecutive, of one of the magazines that had a serial in it, or a hardcover book of which there weren’t too many at the time. In return, you got to keep either three magazines or a book for a month. Pretty soon, it got to where I was staggering five or six blocks to the mailbox just to send off the books or magazines to the members.

Anyway, this little correspondence club that I created had given me a thirst for writing. About that time, Francis Flagg, who was a well-known science fiction author of the day, was running out of ideas. I, however, had more ideas than I knew what to do with but at age 15, I didn’t have professional ability yet. So I would send him an idea and he wrote it up. In the last issue of *Wonder Stories*, April 1936, I had my first professional story published, together with Francis Flagg, called “Earth’s Lucky Day”. And that kind of convinced me that I was going to be an author when I grew up. I *hoped* to be another H.G. Wells, Olaf Stapledon, or somebody else

of considerable consequence, but when I grew up and looked around in my mind, there weren't these great book ideas – instead, everything seemed to trend more toward the O Henry type of super-short story.

I'm getting ahead of myself a little bit, but some years later, I finally wrote I guess what must be the world's shortest science fiction story – one letter of the alphabet, for which I got paid a hundred dollars. After its initial sale, I sold it four more times, so I got paid five hundred dollars for a single letter of the alphabet. Since a natural word, I think, is considered generally to have about five letters in it, I got paid at the rate of \$2,500 per word. Later, I sold it in eight translations, and of course, I retained the serialization rights. Then I confess that I did a very sneaky thing, I copyrighted the remaining letters of the alphabet, so nobody can use them but me for one-letter stories... I will reveal for posterity that letter of the alphabet. The story was called "Cosmic Report Card: Earth", suggesting that flying saucer aliens were going around checking out Mars, Venus, Jupiter, and so on. I'm afraid the Earth got an 'F'.

The 1930s was the era when Hugo Gernsback started the Science Fiction League. In Los Angeles, the fourth chapter was created and one day in 1934, in the garage of an adult fan, there was a preliminary little meeting, but nothing happened until a year later when we finally got going. I was at the charter meeting of that club, which eventually came to be known as the Los Angeles Science Fantasy Society, or LASFS. By that time *Thrilling Wonder Stories* was sponsoring the League, I believe. A young fan named Roy Test came to the club, together with his mother Wanda Test. She became our first secretary and the minutes were called 'Thrilling Wanda Stories'.

At that time, Charles D. Hornig was a young fellow who put out a very fine professional-looking printed magazine called *The Fantasy Fan*. Gernsback, who was looking around for an associate editor, saw this publication and he asked Hornig to come and see about getting the job. Well, he was staggered when a 17-year-old boy walked into his office. I still remember that letter I got from Charlie Hornig: "Forry, can you *imagine* what's happened?!? I've become the *editor* of *Wonder Stories*!!" (When he was given the offer, he had said, "I'll have to go home and ask my mother and dad whether they will let me.")

Well, in 1939 I heard, through the pages, I guess, of *Thrilling Wonder*, there was going to be the first World Science Fiction Convention. Well, boy oh boy, gosh wow, I sure intended to be there! I trembled with every clickety-clack of the railroad track, from L.A. to New York, and when I got off the train there was Don Wollheim and five or six fans to greet me. One of them, fifteen years old with a bit of a paunch and dribbling cigarette ashes, looked me up and down disdainfully and said, "So *you're* the Forrest Ackerman who has been writing those *ridiculous* letters to the science fiction magazines." He introduced himself to me as Cyril Kornbluth. And then he punched me in the stomach! I thought, "Well, welcome to Fun City! For this I came three thousand miles???"

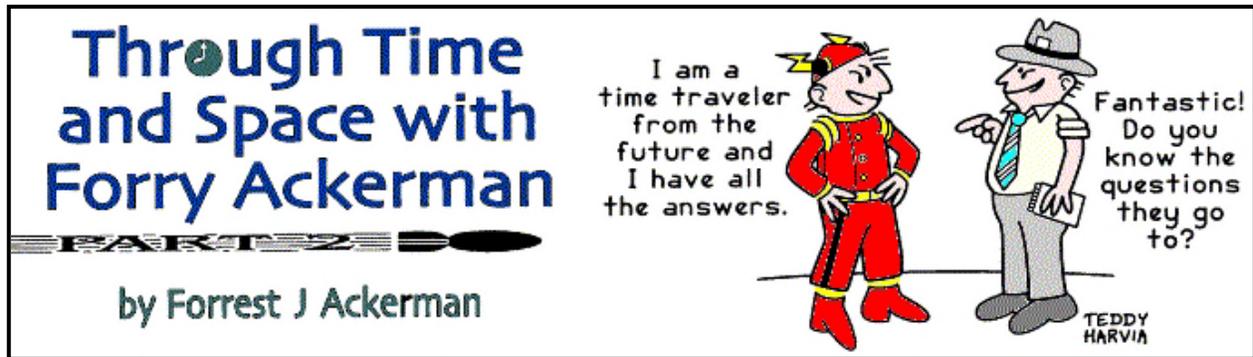
Both Wollheim and Kornbluth were among the fans who were excluded from that very first Worldcon. I still have sort of a sick feeling in the pit of my stomach about it. When the gavel fell, and the first World Science Fiction Convention became reality, six fans were left standing outside. I couldn't *believe* it!

Ray Bradbury was a member of that first Worldcon; back in 1939 he was busy getting autographs rather than giving them. My recollection to this day is that I lent him fifty bucks so he could spend three and a half days and nights on a Greyhound bus to get there. I am told that every time that Ray Bradbury tells this story the loan keeps going up and up in value in his memory – it's gotten up to ninety-five dollars now! It took him a year or two, but he finally managed to pay it back. Ray had deliberately gone to the convention carrying a portfolio of work by Hannes Bok. I remember accompanying him later to the office of *Weird Tales*, meeting Farnsworth Wright who was a rather emaciated-looking individual. At that time he had Parkinson's Disease – he could just barely sign an autograph for us but he took one look at Hannes Bok's work and immediately accepted it.

Ray Cummings, the legendary author, attended the convention. We had hoped that A. Merritt might attend also, but he was busy being the Sunday section editor of *The American Weekly*. So the day after the convention, a little group of us – 6 or 8 fans – got together and visited him. Someone had phoned, and he was waiting to meet us in his office. The now-deceased fan Dale Hart was so excited he was going to meet A. Merritt that he got up and brushed his teeth with shaving cream! He was *really* foaming at the mouth! While we were in the anteroom, waiting for Merritt, along came Virgil Finlay who was doing work for *American Weekly* and Merritt. He had a marvelous portfolio of these originals and our eyes were popping out of our heads to see his incredible classy work. Well, about ten minutes later we were ushered into Merritt's office – he was a little on the deaf side so we all clustered around. He was extremely cordial to us and made us fans feel quite welcome.

Another event at that convention was my costume, which was based on *Things to Come* and Frank R. Paul's artwork. Many people have asked me over the years, "Forry, where did you get the nerve to wear that futuristic costume on the streets of New York?" But I think it was sort of like being mild-mannered Clark Kent, going into the telephone booth and coming out as Superman. When I wore that outfit in public, little children were running in the streets of New York crying, "It's Flash Gordon! It's Buck Rogers!" I even got the nerve to go out to the Worlds Fair in it; they had a platform with a microphone, and if you were from Spain, or from Sweden or France or Germany or wherever, you could come up and greet the world in your native language. So I got this quixotic notion to go up and speak in Esperanto to the world and say that I was a time traveler from the future where we all spoke this language.

One other memory I have of that first Worldcon is that the banquet was so expensive that only 29 people could afford it. It was *one dollar a plate!* I had the good fortune to sit with Willy Ley, the great rocket expert, on the left of me and L. Sprague de Camp on the right. One hundred and eighty-five of us were at that first World Science Fiction Convention! Several years ago, my wife entertained one hundred and eighty-six science fiction personalities in our home including two astronauts – one more than that whole first World Science Fiction Convention!



(from *Mimosa* 17, published in October 1995. Illo by Teddy Harvia.)

The second World Science Fiction Convention was in Chicago in 1940. My futuristic *Things to Come* costume had gained a certain amount of renown at the first Worldcon the year before, in New York City. So by the Chicon, the notion had caught on and we now had about 25 fans in costume. Doc Smith, who was the Guest of Honor, was a big fan of Catherine Moore's interplanetary character, Northwest Smith, so he came as Northwest Smith. Morojo – Myrtle R. Douglas, who used an Esperanto name and who was my girlfriend for about eight years – and I actually put on a little dialog from *Things to Come*. After it was all over, at about 8 o'clock at night, I had a quixotic notion – I realized that about five blocks away was the major newspaper of Chicago. So I said, "Hey, gang, come with me." I got everybody who was in costume and we went through the streets of Chicago to see the night editor. I became the spokesman; I went up to him with a straight face – he was looking at these Martians and other futuristic people, and wondered what in the world had hit him – so with a straight face I said, "Well, sir, we are time travelers. Tomorrow, we picked up your paper and we found this photograph of ourselves and this interview. So we realized that we'd have to come back in our time machine to be interviewed!"

At that convention, three or four young fellows – Olen Wiggins being the leader from Denver – volunteered for the next world convention, never dreaming they would get it. Once they did, they didn't know exactly what to do with it and one of the burning issues was who would be the Guest of Honor. At that time, and it was just third time around, we could have invited Edgar Rice Burroughs or H.G. Wells or Olaf Stapledon or *any* of the great names in science fiction. But I was in the enviable position of sort of time traveling six months to a year in advance because I had been invited to Robert Heinlein's home. He was living in Hollywood at the time. I was able to read all his classic manuscripts before they were published – "The Roads Must Roll", "Coventry", and others. And so I put Heinlein's name in nomination and, indeed, he became the Guest of Honor.

By the way, I want to mention that I named the very first convention, the Nycon, and the second one, the Chicon. And I probably would have called the third one the Dencon. I have to credit Don Wollheim who came up with the notion of the Denvention, which I thought was an excellent idea.

The 1941 Denvention was a truly interesting convention. I've been to 51 of the 52 World Science Fiction Conventions, and to this day I feel that the talk that Heinlein gave in Denver was really the most extraordinary – even when looked at from many years later. His Guest of Honor

speech was called “The Discovery of the Future”; it was the first any of us had ever heard of ‘timebinding’. At the time, Walt Daugherty was the first one to record a convention, on actual phonograph records, and he successfully recorded Heinlein’s talk. Afterwards, I took the Daugherty phonograph records home to transcribe them. I sat with one hand on a record and one on the typewriter – I’d listen a little bit and type in a little bit. Then I stenciled it, mimeographed it, collated it, stapled it, addressed it, stamped it, and mailed it for ten cents a copy. One hundred of them! Four or five years ago, in San Francisco at an auction, one of these surfaced – it sold to a dealer for thirteen hundred dollars!

Heinlein made quite an impression on us in other ways, too. He did something that I can’t say I approve of in this day and age, but at the time it seemed incredibly cool. He was a very suave individual then, and in the middle of his talk he stopped for a moment, took out a cigarette, and lit it. It’s a wonder that the whole convention didn’t start smoking!

Anyway, the word went around that it was Heinlein’s birthday in a couple of days, so we all chipped in and there was enough to buy eight books that his wife told us that he was fond of. He nearly lost control; he nearly broke down and wept at the banquet when he was given the gift. There was a costume contest at the Denvention, and even Heinlein participated. There was a character in a story in *Amazing Stories* by Eando Binder called ‘Adam Link’, the humanoid robot, and Heinlein came as ‘Adam Stink’ – walking kind of stiffly across the floor. E. Everett Evans won a contest in the masquerade as the Birdman from Rhea. He had personally pasted about one thousand colored feathers on a costume, but it took him so long to do that he never finished the rest of the costume. He had to be content just wearing the head.

One further thing about that masquerade – I got a prize as the ‘Hunchbackerman of Notre Dame’. A mask had been created for me by Ray Harryhausen, but in order to make it he had me come out to Pacific Palisades where he was living. I remember that it was a hellishly hot day; I just lay there and he put this goop all over my face, which in those days took about a half hour to an hour to solidify. Ray left for a while to do some other things while the goop hardened; there was really no reason for him to stick around while I was just lying there baking. It was so hellishly hot that day that the soles of my feet were perspiring, so I took my shoes and stockings off. Well, Ray’s great Mastiff dog named Kong came over and got interested in the saline solution. He had a big red raspy tongue – he would go up and down on the soles of my feet! It was awful! But nobody was around, so nobody came to my rescue.

Before there could be a fourth Worldcon, World War Two intervened. I remember how we fans at LASFS learned about the war. It was on Sunday, the 7th of December, and a now-deceased fan named Arthur Louis Joquel II – we all called him ‘the twoth’ – came into the LASFS club room white-faced and said, “My God, the Japanese have just bombed Pearl Harbor!” But we didn’t know exactly what he meant: “Pearl Harbor? Who was she?” That very night L.A. was in blackout. We didn’t know but what the Japanese planes wouldn’t come over and bomb us that very night. But a number of us daring fans went down to the center of Los Angeles, and when we looked up there were thousands of stars! We were never aware of them otherwise.

I was involved for 3 years, 4 months, and 29 days in World War Two. I wound up being a staff sergeant and editing the second most popular of the two thousand wartime newspapers. It

came to be called the ‘Army Science Fiction Newspaper that Forry Edits’, or something like that. At first, I was just a cub reporter; I would run my legs down to the kneecaps to find somebody and interview them, and bring back a genuine story. The editor would then look it over and throw away the facts and dictate some kind of phony story. So after a while I got the notion, what’s the use in knocking myself out? So I’d just pick interesting names off the roster and make up stories to fit the names. Then I even went beyond that – I even made up names like they do in most of the TV shows nowadays. I would have things like: “Sergeant Ray Bradbury was seen in the company of Captain A.E. van Vogt the other evening...” I even managed to get a science fiction movie still into the newspaper – it was from a film called *Gold*, a 1934 German science fiction film about the artificial transmutation of elements. The photo showed a great, gigantic cathode ray machine; I published it in the newspaper and said that Sergeant Ray Harryhausen in Germany had uncovered this! Then, once when I was asked to make up an appeal to support the war cause, to buy bonds, I took the same futuristic sans-serif typewriter I had for *Voice of the Imagi-Nation* and Science Fiction League stationery. I dated it ten years in the future and said, “Dear Sgt. Ackerman, I am happy to write you from the year 1952 to tell you that because everybody bought bonds, we have satisfactorily concluded the war with Hitler and Japan.”

It was one time, I’m embarrassed to say, that my vision of the future was a little too conservative!



(from *Mimosa* 18, published in May 1996. Illo by Teddy Harvia.)

People often ask me about my collection. Back in the 1940s it was a bit smaller than it is now, but I still had 1,300 books. And when I went off to war the question arose: What's to become of my collection? Well, when I entered the military, it looked to me like E. Everett Evans and some of the other elderly fans around town would never be called up unless there was an actual invasion of America. So I said, "In case I don't make it back, why don't you take my collection and rent some little store front and put it in there?" When the war ended they seemed kind of disappointed that I survived, because they were sort of looking forward to having the collection on display. At that point I said, "We don't really have to wait for me to die, you know. We can still exhibit it." And that's basically what happened. The collection became known as The Fantasy Foundation and it was publicized at the next year's Worldcon, which was in Los Angeles.

Prior to the 4th World Science Fiction Convention, the Pacificon, which was the last Worldcon I ever nicknamed, we had one of the pre-con meetings up in my apartment. It was then that the question arose of who we should have as a Guest of Honor. I don't think I've ever told this tale – it's one that made me very unhappy at the time, but I guess it made me a great hero with the feminists of the day. I said, "Well, what do you say if we have our Guest of Honor for the first time be a female?" The leading lady writer of the time was Catherine Moore, who lived right there in L.A. "You know, we might also have a female editor, Mary Gnaedinger, who edited *Fantastic Mysteries*. And maybe we could get Margaret Brundage, the great artist."

But right away somebody complained: "No, you can't! Henry Kuttner is going to be very upset – you have to have Kuttner along with his wife."

I objected loudly. "No! That would destroy the whole notion! Kuttner should be proud that of all the women possibilities, his wife is the one that's honored. We're not saying that she is better than he is, we're just saying she's the best woman writer of the time." But everybody hollered me down. We did have a nice substitution, though – A.E. van Vogt and his writer wife, Edna Mayne Hull. But I always felt kind of cheated that they couldn't see it my way. And we never have had an all-female Worldcon Guest of Honor list.

But back to The Fantasy Foundation. I thought we wanted to have something to show the fans rather than just the name so I knocked myself out – I recorded information on all 1,300 books I had at the time. I got kind of wrapped up in that and I thought, I don't want to just enter 'The Man Who Mastered Time by Ray Cummings' – I should tell whether it was a first edition, then I should say who drew the cover, and then I should mention its subject matter if it's a title where you'd have no idea what the book is about, and so on. I was really going all-out. My listing got called *I Bequeath* – I said, "All these books I freely give to the world, for posterity."

Well, when the great day dawned on the day the convention began I was the first one at the convention halls, about 8 o'clock in the morning, but I had so knocked myself out prior to the convention that by 4 o'clock that afternoon I absolutely collapsed. I lasted just long enough to tell them, with a very halting, husky voice, about the idea of The Fantasy Foundation. After I collapsed they took me upstairs. I was trembling all over; I was icy cold. They covered me up and I think I passed out for a little while. That evening, at 8 o'clock, I heard Robert Bloch arriving downstairs. Over the microphone he said, "Well, folks, here I am in Los Angeles, all the way from Milwaukee. Before I left, I made three sales, that made it possible for me to be here – my overcoat, my typewriter, and my car."

It was the first time, I believe, that we had a four-day science fiction convention. Well, they carried me home and I thought, I'll have a good night's sleep, you know, and I'll be up. But the second day of the convention went by, and the third, and the fourth... I was in bed for 19 days! It was a total physical collapse.

At about that time it occurred to me that the term 'Worldcon' was actually a misnomer. We had been calling it the World Science Fiction Convention, but actually nobody had yet come from outside the continental U.S.A. So I proposed creating what I called the 'Big Pond Fund'. It was evident who the greatest fan in England was at the time – it was Ted Carnell. It was also evident that it would be a good idea to find a way to bring him to the next year's Worldcon. You know, I honestly believed that I had only to mention it and the dollar bills would appear all over the place – we'd have a thousand bucks and he would come.

Well, at the end of a year I had a measly one hundred and two dollars or something like that, and I saw that altruism wasn't going to work. So I went after greed and got a raffle going. I got Arkham House and the various magazines of the day to offer free subscriptions. I also personally put in a lot of stuff; for one dollar you had an opportunity to get the whole thing. I even disappointed a lot of my friends at Christmas; instead of giving them some kind of present, I bought five chances on their behalf. But even after the second year I still wasn't much further ahead. We had three hundred bucks or so and it still wasn't enough to get Carnell over. So in the third year I gave up on everybody else. I put in enough money, I think, out of my own pocket to get Carnell over. He finally came in 1949. And that was the end of organized fan funds, at least temporarily; the idea lay fallow for several years until the Walt Willis Fund, and then the Trans-Atlantic Fan Fund started up. The second time around, it all worked!

I should say at this point that not all international fan visits were the result of fan funds. In 1953 a Japanese fan named Tetsu Yano came over, using his own resources.

After the second world war, the G.I.s stationed in Japan had been burning a lot of paperbacks. Tetsu happened by one of the times this was going on, saw a science fiction book, and grabbed it out of the flames. And then, by Japanese standards, he did a rather daring thing – he wrote a letter that was published in *Thrilling Wonder* in which he said, “I’m just a poor know-nothing Japanese boy bitten by the science fiction bug. Could anybody conceivably send me an old cast-off magazine?” So I sent him over some care packages, we started a correspondence, and finally I mentioned that in 1953 we were about to have what we called a Westercon. I got back quite an excited letter in which he wrote, “Gee, if I could manage to get there, would I be permitted to attend?” And I wrote back, “*Permitted!* Oh, my god, you would be the Guest of Honor! This would be grand! You could stay at my home; we’d be thrilled to have you!” So, somewhat later, I got a telegram that read, “Tetsu have bought ticket, come and go. Please be waiting 29 days from now.” He had gotten on a cattle boat, I think – with just six human beings aboard. Twenty-nine days later we were down at the dock when he arrived. The first day he was with us he was so excited – he couldn’t sleep all night long. Well, he’d only planned to stay two weeks but we kept him here six months.

He had some adventures while he was here in the U.S.A. Besides the Westercon we also brought him to that year’s World Science Fiction Convention, the 1953 Philcon. He, Wendy and I, and H.J. Campbell, the editor of the British magazine *Authentic Science Fiction*, made some kind of sight as we were driving cross-country to Philadelphia. Campbell had a big, black beard and sitting beside him was this little oriental chap. There was a time or two that I wasn’t sure we were even going to make it to Philadelphia. I remember we got up to the top of a high mountain pass. My wife Wendy was driving and our car couldn’t quite make it over the top. So the three of us guys got out and pushed it to the top, and when it started going down the hill on the other side we were all running after the car!

Another reason I’ll remember that 1953 Philcon is because, at the hands of Isaac Asimov, I received the first of all Hugo Awards. And then I gave it away. What actually happened there was mis-reported so let me use this opportunity to clear it up.

When I received the Hugo, I felt that my best years of fanning were behind me. If they only had said it was a career award I would have felt comfortable in accepting it. But it was supposed to be for the Best Fan of the preceding year, and I was convinced that Best Fan was actually Ken Slater, over in England. I didn’t really feel worthy of it. It was like giving a guy a check that doesn’t belong to him so I sort of endorsed it. I said, “I certainly appreciate this, folks, but I really believe that Ken Slater should have it.” And with that, I left the stage. I really don’t know who took possession of the trophy; if my life depended on it, I couldn’t say. The most obvious individual would have been H.J. Campbell, who was going back home to England after the convention and would have been in a position to deliver it to Ken Slater.

Well, when I sat back down, Wendy was *furious*. She said, “What have you *done*, Forry? You’ve insulted the entire convention! They voted this to you – how could you give it away??”

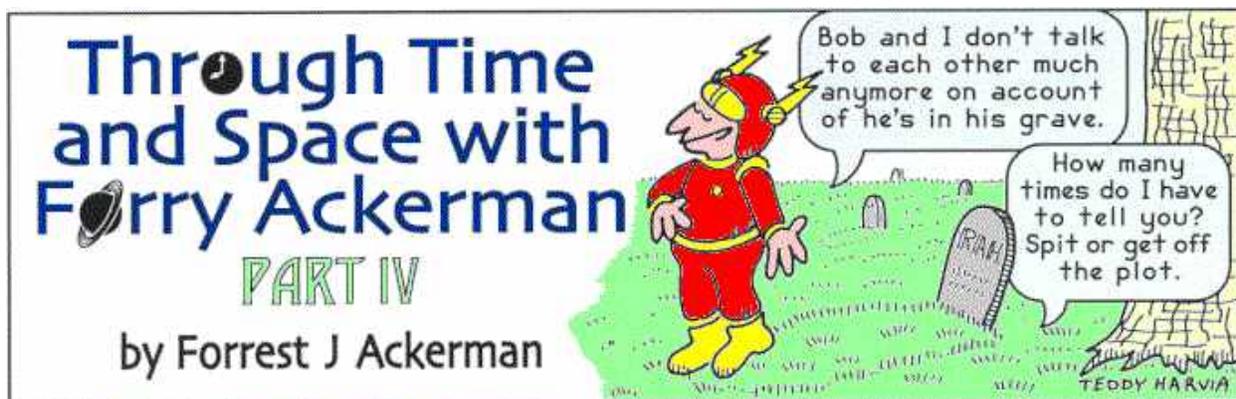
What can I say? When I got up there I had said what I felt – that I didn’t really deserve the award. But Wendy managed to so convince me that everybody was going to clobber Forry Ackerman that for the only time in my life, I didn’t go to the masquerade. I was just too

embarrassed and upset. The next day I crept down early because I didn't want to see anybody. I went down about six o'clock to have breakfast, and I bumped into Robert Bloch. He came over, grabbed me, and said, "Oh, Forry, what a magnificent gesture! Why, you did more for international fandom..." and so on. It did make me feel better. But I all the time I was thinking, "I'll kill her! I'll *kill* her!!"

Some years later the award was returned to me. People had kept asking me over the years, "Didn't you get the first Hugo? If so, where is it?" Well, that eventually got me wondering about Ken Slater. I finally wrote him and said, "I gave it to you, it's yours fair and square. I'm not an Indian giver. I'm not asking for it back but I'm just wondering if you've given any thought what is to eventually become of that award. If you have a son or daughter who would appreciate it, fine, think nothing more about it. But if not, I'd like to preserve it."

Well, I understood he might have taken that the wrong way. So Dave Kyle went to bat on my behalf and explained to him I wanted it back only if he hadn't anybody to pass it on to. The next time I saw him in England he very generously gave it to me then and there.

But back to the Philcon... I don't remember that my speech endorsing Ken Slater was very long at all. But one of the people up on the dais must have thought otherwise. One photo, apparently, was taken at the moment I received the award and was accepting it. It showed Isaac Asimov, the rascal, standing behind me looking at his watch, as if I had been talking on for too long!



(from *Mimosa* 19, published in November 1996. Illo by Teddy Harvia.)

I'm happy to say that Walt Willis has been my friend for over forty years. A lot of people think that I met Walt Willis for the first time when he was brought over to the Chicago Worldcon in 1952. But I had actually met him the year before that when I traveled to the United Kingdom.

In May 1951, British fans had put on the first international science fiction convention and I was a Guest of Honor. It was there that I first met Walt but with everything going on, that first meeting doesn't stand out very well in my memory. Anyway, one day, after the convention, I found myself in Scotland and it suddenly occurred to me that, gee, I was only about 45 minutes away by air from Ireland. If I went, I could see the Big Three fans there. And so I hopped in a taxi and got over to the Glasgow airport.

I was the last one aboard an old-fashioned propeller airplane. I was a bit nervous; it was the first time I had ever flown! (I had crossed the ocean by ship.) I had earlier phoned ahead and talked with Walt Willis, and he said they would be in Belfast to meet me. So as my first flight left the ground, I looked out the porthole and saw a cemetery! As the plane climbed, we went three times around a cemetery and all I saw out there were gravestones. Not a good omen for my first flight! When we touched down in Belfast it turned out they were having a transportation strike – the only thing they could get to pick me up with was a hearse!

I'd left a cemetery and was picked up in a hearse! And that's how I *really* met Walt Willis.

And now, speaking of being ready for a hearse, I have to tell you the story that involves Robert Heinlein and Cyril Kornbluth, and myself. The year was 1958, and I had just received a flaming mad letter from Heinlein: "How *dare* you accept my Hugo in my absence, hang onto it for over a year, and then when I found out you had it, drag your feet for another month before returning it?"

Well, I went pale and trembling to my wife, and I said, "Honey, is this the way senility starts? Did I ever have Heinlein's Hugo?" And she said, "No, no, no..."

So I phoned Isaac Asimov, and I told him, "Help! Save my life – tell me I didn't take Heinlein's Hugo." The fact was that Heinlein and I were more or less on the outs by then; the time had come if I had said 'up', he would say 'down', if I said 'black', he'd say 'white'. Finally, I wrote him and said, "Bob, I admire your work. You've entertained and educated me about as much as anybody ever has in science fiction. But, obviously, as social beings, we just can't get

along. We might as well give up on each other – you’ve got all your fans and activities; I’ve got plenty to keep me busy.” And we’d just nod when we’d meet at a convention.

So we *had* given up on each other, and I was certain that he was absent in 1956 when he got that Hugo. I’m sure if somebody had come to me and said, ‘Forry, you know Heinlein, don’t you? Will you accept on his behalf?’ I *know* I would have said, ‘No, I don’t think I’m the proper person. He wouldn’t appreciate it.’ Well, Asimov just couldn’t remember the circumstances, so he said, “Robert Bloch was the Master of Ceremonies, and he would have had to physically hand it to you. Ask *him*.”

So I called up Bob, and he said, “Oh, Forry, I’ve been to *sooo* many conventions; I’ve been Master of Ceremonies so many times that I don’t even remember my own Hugo. But Dave Kyle – *he’ll* be able to tell you.”

Well, at that time Dave Kyle was over in England and it was 4:30 in the morning for him. But I thought, if *I’m* not going to sleep, why should Dave Kyle? So I called him and I said, “Help, help! Save my life! Tell me I didn’t accept Heinlein’s Hugo!” Well, to my dismay, he began laughing uproariously! “What’s so funny?? C’mon, this is serious!” More laughter. I said, “Dave! This is costing me big bucks! This is a trans-Atlantic phone call! Stop that laughing! What’s so funny??”

And he said, “Forry, don’t you *remember*? That was the time the Hugos didn’t *arrive*! It was a big embarrassing scene! We had nothing to give to *anybody*! You couldn’t *possibly* have taken his Hugo!”

Well, I thought that Heinlein might not even accept this unsupported word but we had our own Watergate tapes – Franklin Dietz, who had taped the entire convention. So I called him and said, “Save my life! You find those tapes and play them. If I hear myself say, ‘It’s a proud moment as I accept this Hugo’ you will have a scoop, because three thousand miles away you will hear me put a bullet through my brain.”

Well, he was busy then and didn’t have the time to look through miles of tape. It was about a year later that he finally found it, and of course it never happened! So then, finally, I contacted Heinlein and told him the whole story. Then I asked him, “Why did you ever accuse me?”

This is when I learned of Cyril Kornbluth’s involvement. Heinlein told me, “When I came back from Europe, Forry, Kornbluth met me, shook my hand and said, ‘Congratulations, Bob, on your Hugo!’ When I said, ‘My Hugo??’, Kornbluth replied, ‘What!? You mean Ackerman didn’t give it to you?!?’” Well, unfortunately at this point, Kornbluth was dead so I couldn’t call him up and get the straight of that story.

There was never any explanation or apology. And matters eventually went from bad to worse. In the 1970s there was a new science fiction magazine called *Vertex Science Fiction*. The editor called me up and said, “Forry, we’d like to feature Heinlein in our first issue. Do you think we could get an interview from him?”

At this point, Heinlein had said about the most insulting thing to me that’s ever been said to me, in my entire career in science fiction. He said, “I can conceive of no circumstances under

which it would be necessary or desirable for you to have my telephone number.” For twenty-five years I could call Vincent Price or Robert Bloch or Ray Bradbury or Arthur C. Clarke, and I’d always give them full protection and never abused the privilege. But that’s what he said to me. So I said to the editor of *Vertex*, “Well, I don’t speak for Heinlein but I know he’s just been interviewed by *Playboy*.” And up to that time, being interviewed by *Playboy* was the apex of your existence. But Heinlein insisted on being paid for it – the first time anybody had ever been paid for an interview in *Playboy*. I told him, “I really doubt that, on top of that, that you’d get either an interview that you could afford or that he’d give the second one.”

Well, they called me again, three days later: “Oh, god, you were absolutely right. No interview from Heinlein. Boy, we’re on the spot! We’ve got his name on the cover, we were so certain that we’d have something by him. Help!” So I thought of his previously-discussed Guest of Honor speech that he’d given in 1941, and somewhere in my eighteen rooms I knew I had a copy of it. So I searched it out and I read it, and I thought, well, this makes Heinlein a prophet-with-honor – many things that he had prophesied had indeed come true.

Anyway, I thought it was still a great speech and that it was time for fans who missed it the first time around to get the opportunity to read it. So I gave it to them to publish, and I said, “Now look, this is public domain; it was never copyrighted. The minute it’s out of my hands you can thumb your nose at me and say, ‘Thanks, sucker’, print it and pay nobody anything. But I feel by putting his name on the cover, you’re using several thousand words by him so you should pay Heinlein, regardless of public domain.” And then I said, “It sort of seems to me you wouldn’t know of this; you wouldn’t have a copy if I didn’t provide it to you, so I think I ought to get a few bucks out of it, too. And finally, we ought to recognize that if Walt Daugherty hadn’t made the original recordings, nobody, including Heinlein, would have it.” In my mind, I sort of thought that eighty-five percent for Heinlein, ten percent for me, and five percent for Daugherty would be fair.

Well, it was published; it saved the editor’s life. But about a year later I got one of these flaming letters written on asbestos. Heinlein wrote, “How *dare* you give my work away to that magazine and accept a payment for it?!” Well, I’d been sent a check for two hundred dollars – this was from the magazine that later paid me a hundred dollars for one letter of the alphabet. So I sort of thought they probably sent him about seven hundred and fifty dollars, and maybe fifty bucks to Daugherty. Well, it developed that they had sent me two hundred dollars, expecting me to make the division – exactly what I didn’t want to happen! So I wrote Heinlein, explained what happened, and I wrote him a check – not for two hundred dollars but taking in consideration inflation, I added twenty dollars to it, and considering in a year he could have had five percent in a bank, another ten dollars; I wrote him a check for two hundred and thirty dollars.

At this point, I was out thirty bucks for all my activities. I thought the decent thing for him to do would be to calm down and say ‘I’m sorry, here’s fifty bucks for your trouble; give twenty-five to Daugherty’. But no – he called and he wasn’t too sure this was exactly the way things had happened. He sort of felt that I got caught with my hand in the cookie jar, and I had given him \$230 just to assuage my conscience. And then he said, “I’m taking the curse off this money by giving it to my favorite charity.” How about *my* favorite charity??

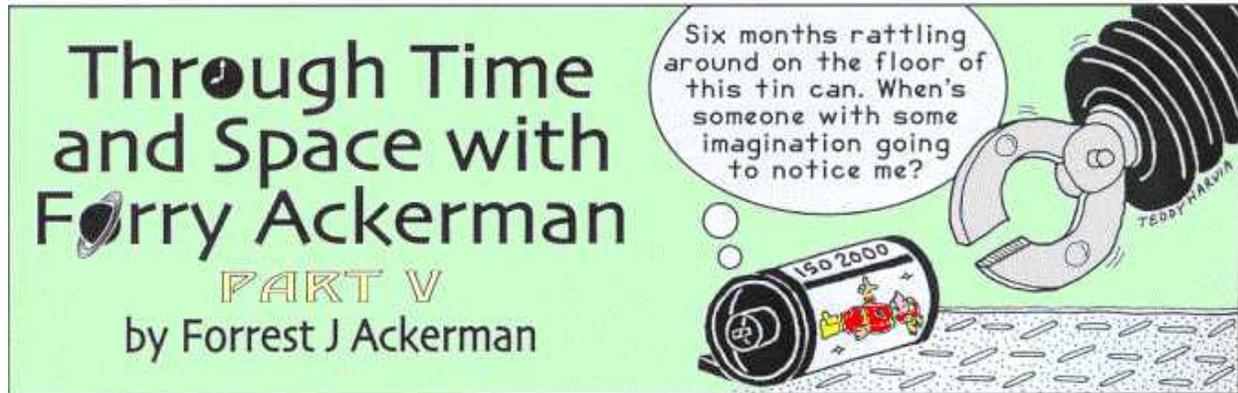
It was “Solution Unsatisfactory” as far as I was concerned.

Speaking of agenting, though, I should say something about my career as a literary agent. It all began in the 1940s – after three years, four months, and 29 days of World War Two, when I was weary of saluting and wearing a tie, I looked around for something to do to support myself without a boss, and representing science fiction writers as their literary agent seemed like it might be a good idea. But my first year at it I made a thousand and seventy-five dollars in commissions and spent a thousand and twenty-five dollars in postage. I made a big fat fifty bucks.

That would have been the end of it but young Ray Bradbury, and Asimov, and other ascending stars came to my rescue. Although they already had agents they’d let me occasionally sell something abroad for them. Well, I hate figures and love words; I don’t like to quibble around with nickels and dimes so I generally just evened things off. The first time I made a sale for Asimov, I sent him a check, we’ll say, for an even hundred dollars when it might have been a hundred dollars and eleven cents I owed him. He immediately wrote back and said, “Well now, Forry, I don’t want a penny more than I’m entitled to, but on the other hand, I don’t want a penny less.” Well, maybe I should have expected that; the next time I made a sale for him, after I figured it out, his payment actually came down to a certain amount and an extra one-half cent. And in those days the Post Office still produced one-half cent stamps, so I sent him his check and attached a one-half cent stamp to it.

Isaac Asimov in correspondence may have been a little predictable but there was no telling what he might do in person, especially at conventions. At the end of three days in Asimov’s company, he was such a clown, I had to push my cheeks together, they were so sore from laughing! There was the time, at a Worldcon in the 1960s, that the publisher of *Famous Monsters of Filmland* had recently started a new satirical magazine called *Help*. And in order to publicize it, he had a classy model in an itsy-bitsy teeny-weeny polka-dot bikini wandering around with a sign on her back: ‘If You Need Help, Follow Me’. She would bring people to a kiosk and they would get a complimentary copy of *Help* magazine.

Well, Isaac Asimov got out of an elevator and, you know, he gloried in his reputation of being the Dirty Old Man. He saw this fair derriere about 25 feet in front of him and he broke the world record for the 25-foot dash. The floor was made of marble, and in the final two feet he went down on his knees and slid right up to the back of the unsuspecting model. In this position, on his knees, his lips were directly behind her hips. And then the world-famous author of the *Foundation* series bit her... right on her foundation.



(from *Mimosa 20*, published in May 1997. Illo by Teddy Harvia.)

I've already mentioned how, in 1951 when I was in Europe, I went over to Northern Ireland and met the Big Three, including Walt Willis. Walt probably wasn't aware of it, but for that entire trip the only time I was ill was when I was with Walt Willis. And when he came to America the next year he returned the compliment – the only time he was ill was when he was in my home!

When Walt came back to Los Angeles during his second North American trip, in 1962, he had wanted to do some things he hadn't been able to on his previous trip. One of these was to see Disneyland, so we spent a full day there, having a good time, but managing to lose a roll of exposed slide film at some point. Six months later, a fan from Chicago, Bob Greenberg, while on the submarine ride at Disneyland felt something rolling around by his feet. He reached down and picked up a little can of undeveloped photographic film. When he got back to Chicago he had it developed, and to his surprise staring back at him on the very first slide was a face he recognized – *me!* It was sheer luck that a *fan* had found the roll of film – for six *months* it had been rolling around where *anybody* could have picked it up!

Well, it turned out that one of the reasons Greenberg recognized me was that he was a fan of *Famous Monsters of Filmland* magazine, of which I was the writer and editor. But for more on that subject I should go back a few more years.

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In 1957, fifty-five of us chartered a plane to fly over to London for the World Science Fiction Convention that year. Dave and Ruth Kyle had just gotten married, and that was their honeymoon. When the plane landed, there was some question as who should be the first American fan to set foot upon British soil for the World Convention, and we finally all decided on Sam Moskowitz. So when the door opened, Sam paraded down the stairway and I followed shortly thereafter.

Well, after the Loncon we had a couple of weeks before the plane flew back to America so we fans scattered out around Europe. I went first to France and while I was passing by a news stand in Paris, I noticed a motion picture magazine. On the cover was Henry Hull as the Werewolf of London. That attracted me, and inside I found the entire issue was dedicated to imagi-movies. So I of course purchased a copy for my collection.

I stopped in New York on the way back home to California. At the time, I had been involved as a literary agent specializing in science fiction. I'd been selling to a magazine called *After Hours*, which was a kind of a poor man's *Playboy*; it was edited and published by a fellow named James Warren.

Warren knew I was in town, so he came to meet me at my hotel and we went down the street to an eating place. I told him about the convention and then I showed him this movie magazine from France. Well, in his mind's eye he could immediately see it turning into English. He felt that all he had to do was write a letter and somebody over there would lend him all the stills. What he didn't realize was that they were not the property of any one person, but belonged to maybe half a dozen collectors and it would have been quite difficult to get them back together again. Also, as he began reading and translating the text, he found it all rather dry and didactic, which he felt wouldn't exactly appeal to an American audience.

At that point he was ready to give up on the notion but I spoke up and I said, "Well, I have about 35,000 stills at the present time. I've been seeing these fantastic movies ever since I was 5½, back in 1922. I'm sure I can put together a magazine like this for you."

Even though he was buying fiction through me, he still didn't know me from the proverbial Adam or if I was just a Holly-wooden head full of hot air. So he said, "Okay, I'll come out to Hollywood and check you out." And he did, arriving with a flourish at the airport. But I didn't know until many years later that he had had nothing in his expense account for cross-country plane trips. So in order to impress me, he had taken a bus all the way to Las Vegas and *then* got on a plane. When he came out to my home and saw that, indeed, I *did* have 35,000 stills, the next thing I knew I was sitting at a dining room table with an old mechanical typewriter, and he was sitting opposite me with a sign which read, "I'm 11½ years old and I am your reader. Forry Ackerman, make me laugh!"

Well, I hadn't the slightest intention of being funny about anything. What I had really planned to do was produce about a hundred-page magazine. There would be one definitive still of *Dracula*, with an explanation on how the public reacted to it at the time, my own feeling about the film, and a summary of the plot. There would be similar entries about *Frankenstein* and *Things to Come*, and the whole thing would be more or less like an encyclopedia. But it turned out that Warren had already gone around New York with an idea similar to that for a proposed magazine called *Wonderama*. At the time there were thirteen distributors and every last one of them had turned down the idea of a magazine with crazy messed-up faces in it. That might have been the end of it, but right about then *Life* magazine came to his rescue with a feature on the runaway success of teen-age monster movies such as *I Was a Teen-age Werewolf* and *I Was a Teenage Frankenstein*. After that issue appeared, one of the magazine distributors remembered that crazy editor who'd been around. That distributor called Warren back and when Warren again brought up the idea of *Wonderama*, the distributor told him, "No, no, forget about that – put monsters on the cover and you're in business." He didn't care much what was inside as long as it was appealing to the teenage crowd that was into monsters.

Well, that didn't make me too happy; I had really wanted a serious publication. I had no original intention of funning around with fantasy films. But that was what was required, so for

about twenty hours a day I sat in front of a typewriter so hot it was smoking (I was afraid I was going to die of cancer, it was smoking so badly). At about four in the morning, publisher Warren and I would go over to a 24-hour eating place for orange juice, coffee, and hot cakes. After that I would take him to his motel, then four hours later pick him up at about eight o'clock in the morning and away we would go. It went on for days and days like that, but in the end we had a magazine we were both reasonably happy with – it was the first issue of *Famous Monsters of Filmland*.

That first issue was not circulated simultaneously all over the United States – there was at first just a try-out in New York and Philadelphia, in February of 1958. Unfortunately, the day it appeared in New York there was a terrible snow storm going on and Warren must have thought, “Oh death, doom and destruction. Nobody will be going out to buy *Playboy* or *Life*, let alone our little curiosity.” But the next week he called, very excited, and said, “We’re getting fifty fan letters a day! There have been 200 fan letters just from Philadelphia and New York! If it goes on like this, in other parts of the country, don’t you think we ought to squeeze out one more issue? Can you *do it*?”

I laughed and replied, “Jim Warren, you don’t know me very well. I don’t happen to believe in reincarnation, but in case I’m surprised and I keep coming back for the next 5,000 years, I think I can go on and on without ever duplicating myself.”

Well, I didn’t quite go on forever but I did edit 190 issues of the magazine, ending in the early 1970s. It was the economics that convinced me to quit. I was never really paid any fabulous sum of money to begin with, and it never got any bigger. Even in times of rampant inflation I continued to get the same check every time I created a magazine, at the end of a year it was buying me five or ten percent less than at the beginning of the year. I had discussed this with Warren four years before I resigned as editor and he had agreed in principle to increase my payment. But year one went by, then the second, and then year three. At the end of year four, I thought, “Well, I’m chopped down by about one-third of what I could buy four years ago.” Also, the two-hundredth issue of *Famous Monsters* was on the horizon, so I wrote Warren and said, “I know you won’t pay an extra penny for this, but I would like to give the readers two hundred pages for the two-hundredth issue.” I got no response to that, so I resigned after issue 190. The magazine went on one more issue after I resigned, and that was the end of it.

A few years before all of this unpleasantness happened, while *Famous Monsters* was going very well and I was happy, Jim Warren called me up one day and said he was going to create a comic book about ‘a mod witch’ and he wanted to know, “What would you call her?”

Well, just off the tip of my tongue, I said, “How about ‘Miss Terry’?” If you say it fast, it sounds like ‘mystery’.

He replied something to the effect, ‘Not bad but no cigar’, which I didn’t mind, since I don’t smoke anyway. So I kind of forgot about it until 1969, when I was flying down to Rio de Janeiro for the Science Fiction Symposium that was going on there in March of that year. Sitting directly behind me was George Pal, director of *The Time Machine* and *War of the Worlds*, and sitting with him was Yvette Mimieux, who played ‘Weena’ in Pal’s adaptation of *The Time Machine*. Across from me was Roman Polanski, who gave us *The Fearless Vampire Killers*. A.E. van Vogt

was aboard, as were Robert Bloch, Poul Anderson, and Harlan Ellison. If that airplane had gone down it would have wiped out about half of the fantasy and science fiction community.

Around midnight there was some thunder and lightning, and I was wide awake, looking down at the Amazon River snaking along. The hungry piranha were probably jumping up, hoping we would crash and they would get a free hot meal for a change. I began thinking, gee, if we crash land, we've got our fearless leader, Harlan Ellison, who could hack away through the jungle and get us back to civilization. And we have the white goddess, Yvette Mimieux, and there was George Pal to direct and produce – we'd have a fabulous movie!

But then, oh yeah, what about that mod witch? Well, *Barbarella* was very big at the moment, and I realized they'd be bringing back *Cinderella*, and would probably make a movie about a space siren called 'Asterella'. Wait! How about 'Vampirella'? The idea for the name had leaped into my mind! She, along with her twin sister, Drakulina, lived on the planet Drakulon, where the rivers flowed with blood instead of water.

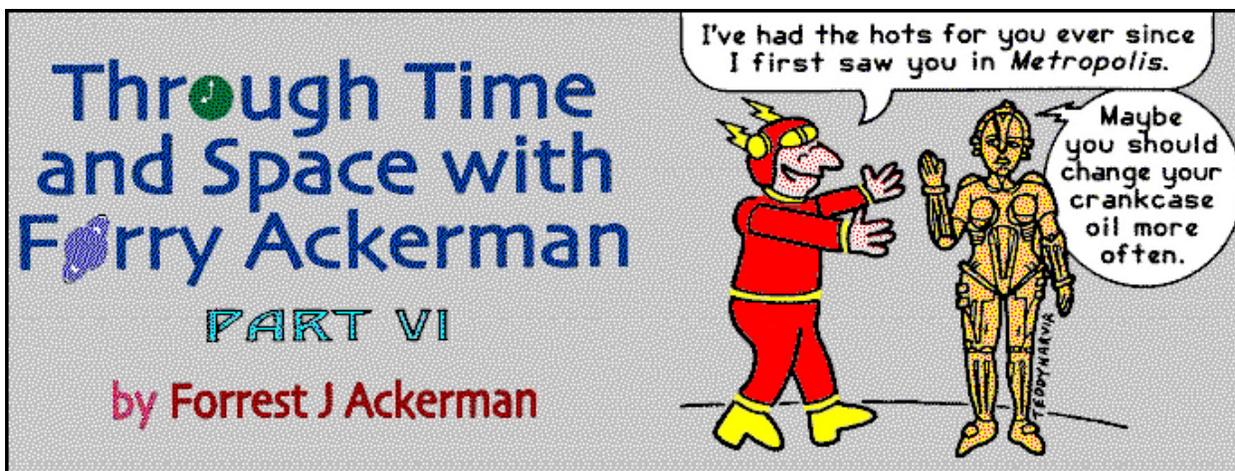
When I got back to New York, Warren had about half a dozen possible titles on a bulletin board, to which he added 'Vampirella'. And as people came in, he said to them, "If you were interested in comics and had half a buck to spend, which of those titles would you buy?" They all gravitated toward 'Vampirella', so that evening he told me, "OK, you just named her."

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I've not only edited a magazine about movies, I've also been in a fair number of them. It started back in the 1940s. By the time I had become a Corporal at Fort MacArthur in California during World War Two, a studio, I think it was Columbia, came to the base. They were making a movie called *Hey, Rookie*; in one sequence they had extras getting out of a bus, and they included me in a scene as the editor of *The Fort MacArthur Bulletin*. Shortly after the war, my friend Walt Daugherty was involved as an extra in a film which got an Academy Award, *The Farmer's Daughter*. He asked me if I was also interested in being in it. As an ex-G.I., I wasn't making much money; I was interesting in anything to keep body and non-existent soul together, so I took the job. My big scene was in an auditorium where I sat right behind Loretta Young, which later turned up as a little postage stamp-sized picture in an issue of *Life* magazine.

Many of the bit parts I've had have been in science fiction, fantasy, and horror movies. I think that the main reason I'm in so many of them, including six by John Landis, is because for years I brought Halloween to the kids in the country in every issue of *Famous Monsters*. These kids grew up and turned out to be Stephen Spielberg, and George Lucas, and John Landis, and Joe Dante, and John Carpenter. They feel it's kind of amusing to have Uncle Forry in their films.

Some of my 'roles' in various movies have been interesting. One I was pleased with was in a movie called *Aftermath*, where I was the curator of the last museum on earth, after World War Three had destroyed civilization. I became President of the United States in *Amazon Women on the Moon*, and to follow that up in the next film, *Turkeys in Outer Space*, I became President of the World. Then I was out a job for four years, after which all I could get to be was a judge in *Nudist Colony of the Dead*. It was quite a comedown from President of the World. In all, I've had cameo appearances in fifty-two films. If you put them all together, I'd guess they last about an hour. Perhaps somebody will do that some day!



(from *Mimosa* 21, published in December 1997. Illo by Teddy Harvia.)

I have now seen *Metropolis*, my favorite film, a total of eighty-eight times. I hope to hit a hundred before I hit 100! I've been a movie fan for almost as long as I can remember. My dear maternal grandparents started me off on movies at the age of five-and-a-half. When I was growing up I was seeing films like *The Lost World*, *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, and *The Thief of Bagdad*. I enjoyed them immensely, but back then I wasn't paying any attention to the directors.

That changed when I was about thirteen years old. The year was 1929. I had seen *Metropolis* for the first time, and of course was thoroughly thrilled by it; soon afterwards I began hearing about another film from Germany called *The Woman in the Moon*. I was living in San Francisco then; unfortunately the film never got closer to me than Chicago. But in the meantime I'd seen yet another German film, *Siegfried*, and I suddenly realized, wait a minute, this one name keeps turning up – Fritz Lang, Fritz Lang, Fritz Lang... I found out he lived in Berlin so I decided to write him a letter. Quite some time passed but eventually, I think in 1931, I received a nice, inscribed photograph of him and some stills from *Die Frau im Mond* (*The Woman in the Moon*) and *Metropolis*.

After that I kept up a correspondence with Mr. Lang. He eventually emigrated to America in 1934, and soon after that he made his first film here, *Fury* with Spencer Tracy and Sylvia Sydney; that is one of my great favorite *non-science* fiction movies. Some years later, during World War Two, I was fortunate to be stationed only about 25 miles away from Hollywood and I read in the morning paper one day that he was to appear that evening about eight o'clock in conjunction with a private screening of a couple of his films. I managed to wangle a pass to leave the army base, just for the evening; I got up to Hollywood and I went to the address. Today that address is Ron Borst's science fiction and fantasy film shop, but at that time it was just a little meeting place for a film appreciation group of about thirty people. So there I arrived and the lady at the door said, "Oh, I'm sorry, sir, this is members only. I can't let you in." Well, I threw myself on her mercy: "Oh, *pleee-ease* let me in! I've got a one-night pass and I've come all the way from Fort MacArthur today just to meet Mr. Lang. Mr. Lang even knows me – I've been corresponding with him!"

Well, it must have worked. She said, “All right, I’ll tell you what we’ll do. When the lights go down, you just sneak in and find an empty chair.” And I did.

After the showing, Mr. Lang lectured for a while. I was in awe of him and when he and his lady secretary left, I followed for a couple of hundred feet along Hollywood Boulevard before I worked up enough nerve to approach him. Finally I caught up to him and introduced myself, and we stood in the doorway of a storefront to be out of the way of passing pedestrians while we talked for a while. I had brought with me a copy of the book *The Woman in the Moon*, and he inscribed it, ‘To Forrest Ackerman, in memory of the day that we first met’.

After that, we became very good friends, and over the years I was frequently invited to his home. In 1969, he and I were in that fabulous ten-day affair in Rio de Janeiro, the Fantasy Film Festival. Robert Heinlein was there, as was Arthur C. Clarke, Roger Zelazny, Sam Moskowitz, A.E. van Vogt, Robert Bloch, George Pal, Yvette Mimieux... There were so many luminaries of the science fiction world there. One of the most flattering occasions in my life happened the evening they showed *Metropolis*. Fritz was about 95% blind at that time, so he and I sat in the front row. When the lights went up, they wanted him to come up on the stage and fend some questions about *Metropolis*. But as he stood, he put his hand on my shoulder and addressed the audience, saying, “Anything you want to know about *Metropolis*, ask my friend Forry Ackerman. He knows more about it than I do.”

I remember on one occasion during that film festival that Fritz Lang told me that originally he had planned an ending for *Metropolis* where the boy and girl had got sick and tired of the whole situation in the big city and had gone off on a rocket to Mars. That obviously never happened, although it turns out that, through repeated takes, he photographed *forty-nine times* as much footage for *Metropolis* as ever reached the screen. His very favorite shots he made into a version that was released in Germany. Then he took the second-best, and made those into the version that was released in England. Other versions were made specifically for France, Australia, etc. I have chased that film all around the world; I’ve seen five or six different versions of it. The one I saw in Australia I call the ‘vitamin-enriched version’ because it seemed like scenes would start a minute or so before I was used to seeing them and would go on an extra minute or so afterwards. There’s one version that I just can’t wait to get my hands on, in videocassette, so that I can slow it down and look at it frame-by-frame. In that version, for one mad moment, we see citizens of *Metropolis* walking along a city street and they go right past a magazine stand. There appear to be *dozens* of magazines available in the year 2027. I want to freeze that and zoom in on it to see each and every magazine; I want to have a print of that frame to see just exactly what those magazines were all about!

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In 1932, my father did me a big favor; he got me a ticket to see Bela Lugosi live in San Francisco, at the Erlanger Theatre as I recall, doing *Dracula*. I never forgot that; I never *dreamed* that after Lugosi died I would inherit the cape that I saw him wearing on the stage and which he wore for the last time in that infamous film, *Plan 9 from Outer Space*. More than twenty years later there was a young boy, fifteen years old, who after he saw his first Lugosi film was so entranced by Bela that he went home and stood in front of the mirror putting the whammy on himself, doing his best to talk like Lugosi. And then this young chap, Dick Sheffield, to his great

surprise and pleasure, discovered that Bela, who was more or less forgotten by the world by then, was actually living in a nearby apartment house!

Well, the youngster didn't have the nerve to ring the doorbell of Dracula, so he got his aunt to call up and pretend to be a journalist who wanted to know if she could interview him. Once he said yes, she asked, "Can I bring my nephew along?"

She could. Well, after Dick Sheffield met Lugosi, he saw that Bela could use all the help he could get, so for the last three years of Lugosi's life he was quite devoted to him. He would go to the store for him, get his shoes re-soled, and buy his favorite cigars for him – just do anything he could to make Bela's life easier. So he proudly called me one evening, and he said, "Mr. Ackerman, Bela Lugosi is a friend of mine. Would you like to meet him?"

I said, "Why, I certainly would!" So my wife and I – and at the time we had a house guest, Tetsu Yano from Japan – the three of us went over there. I had the theater sound disks from Lugosi's film, *The Murders in the Rue Morgue*, so I took one of them with me and played it for Bela. He was rather deaf; he cupped his ear and smiled as he heard himself say, "*My NAME is Dr. Mirakle, and I am not duh YOO-shool sideshow charlatan. So if you're looking for duh YOO-shool HO-koos PO-koos, just GO to duh box office and get your money back!*" He laughed and left the room; when he came back he was wearing his Dracula cape. He put the whammy on Tetsu Yano and I took a photograph of it.

After that I realized, like Dick Sheffield, that Mr. Lugosi could use all the help he could get so I volunteered to take him a last time to get his shoes re-soled. Anybody else but Bela would have thrown them away seventeen soleings before, but they had come from Hungary and had sentimental value to him. As he got out of the car, he put his arm on my shoulder and said, "I don't understand why you young people are so good to me."

I said, "Well, Mr. Lugosi, you were good to us. You entertained us for so many years of our young lives." He shook his head and walked away.

I happened to be with him two weeks before he died; there was no intimation at all that in fourteen days he'd be on his deathbed. We were at the premiere of what was actually his final film, *The Black Sleep*. They had him play a deaf mute in it because, frankly, he couldn't remember his lines anymore and they didn't want to pressure him or embarrass him. I sat up in the mezzanine with him and young Sheffield. In public, Bela was very vain and would not wear glasses, so everything must have been a big blur to him as we were coming down the stairs. We knew they were set up in the lobby to interview him for television, so when we got Bela to the bottom of the stairs he said, "Boys, point me in the right direction." After we squared him around, we told him, "Now take about six steps forward and you'll be in the perfect position."

I hope that a kinescope of that still exists because it was kind of a minor miracle to see. Here was this dear old man who looked kind of like a concentration camp survivor (he was still on withdrawal from the morphine drugs that had been prescribed for him because of terrible sciatic pain). But the world wanted him one more time and this frail old man, just two weeks away from his deathbed...well, it seemed like he underwent a change before our very eyes. He straightened

up and filled out, took command of the situation, and strode toward the waiting television cameras – a tall, proud figure, Count Dracula one last time.

Lately, whenever I mention Lugosi, I'm always asked my opinion of the movie *Ed Wood*. I take exception to the way Lugosi was portrayed in *Ed Wood*. First of all, he was a real European gentleman; I never heard him say so much as a 'hell' or a 'damn', much less those dreadful scatological things. Everything was wrong about Lugosi except his appearance and the way he spoke; Martin Landau certainly deserved the Oscar for that. Lugosi never 'fought' with the prop octopus in the movie *Bride of the Monster*; that was done by George Becwar, a stunt double. He never walked into a theater of screaming maniacs tearing up the furniture; he didn't go out to find his automobile half destroyed, because he was in the hospital when all that was happening.

They didn't premiere *Plan 9* on Hollywood Boulevard at the prestigious Pantages Theater; the premiere took place out about 48th and Vermont, at a little theater that doesn't exist anymore. The two dogs they showed in the film were nothing like his. In particular, the funeral scene from the movie was all wrong. It showed only about eight people in a tiny little room. Actually, I was the 101st person to walk by his coffin. I stood there alone for about five minutes in silence; nobody else was around at the time. I thought, well, if you're looking over my shoulder in spirit form, Bela, I think you'll be very pleased with your final appearance.



(from *Mimosa* 22, published in June 1998. Illo by Teddy Harvia.)

As of 1998 I've been involved with science fiction for 72 years. I wasted the first nine years of my life but in October 1926, I got going in the world of science fiction. I never dreamed, as a boy of nine, one day I would meet the author of *The War of the Worlds* and *The Island of Dr. Moreau* and *The Time Machine*. But one day in 1939 – before the first World Science Fiction Convention was held later that year – Mr. Wells came to Los Angeles for a lecture, and you may be sure that I was one of the first people into the auditorium. I noticed that nobody seemed to be recording him; it was the short-lived period of the wire recorder rather than tape that we have today. I was reminded that when I was a youngster in school, a man whose grandfather heard Abraham Lincoln give the Gettysburg Address had been so impressed by it that he'd gone home and stood in front of a mirror, tried to take the Lincoln stance and speak like him, and now this was being passed on to us. So I thought, well, I had better be like the 'Lincoln' boy and capture H.G. Wells in my mind.

Well, because he was this incredible literary giant in the science fiction field, I guess I was expecting kind of an Orson Welles – a deep, booming impressive voice. So I was quite surprised by this squeaky voice that came out of this small roly-poly ruddy-complexioned gentleman with thin graying hair. He said, "*I am going to towk to you for about an 'owah. Today east is west and west is east, and they are coming togethuh with a bang.*" And indeed he was unfortunately quite prophetic because before long we were off and running into our war with Japan.

Well, I went up on the stage afterwards, took my copy of one of my favorite H.G. Wells novels, *Star Begotten*, and he signed it for me. Some years later, when I was visiting William F. Temple in England, he took me to a home that H.G. Wells had lived in which was now turned into a bed-and-breakfast affair. Each room was interesting. They would have the title on the room of one of Wells' works like *The Sea Lady* or *The War of the Worlds*. I believe my wife and I stayed in the *Sea Lady* Room, and we slept in a bed in which H.G. Wells' two sons had been born.

On another occasion, in London, I went outside to the city where he had written *The Time Machine* and just as in years before, when I went to Tarzana and asked where Edgar Rice Burroughs lived I met many people who raised their eyebrows and said, "Edgar Rice who?", I could not believe that, where H.G. Wells wrote *The Time Machine*, I couldn't just stop anybody

on the street and they would immediately direct me to it. I had to go to a library and even there it took some doing. All they could say was, “Well, he’s on that certain street, we don’t know just what number.” Finally, I rang a doorbell and the gentleman said, “Yes, this is where he had written *The Time Machine*.” And I guess that is about the sum of the substance of my connections to H.G. Wells!

Anyway, speaking of Edgar Rice Burroughs, as I said, I had tried to look him up in Tarzana where he lived and I was flabbergasted to find that the average citizen there didn’t seem to have heard of him. I knew that in 1912 his first work had appeared titled “Under the Moons of Mars” which nowadays we think of as *A Princess of Mars*. Back then he felt such a garish tale might embarrass his family so he came up with the pen name of ‘Normal Bean’. In 1912, ‘bean’ referred to your head so this was his way of telling his readers that his head was on straight. But unfortunately, one of his editors must not have thought that ‘Normal’ was a ‘normal’ name, and it got changed to ‘Norman’. And the whole point of the pun was lost.

When I visited him I took along “Under the Moons of Mars”, the first magazine publication of *Tarzan of the Apes*, and a rarity of the time, “Beyond Thirty”. I had wanted him to sign them with his pen name: “Mr. Burroughs, just this once would you sign this as ‘Normal Bean?’” He was agreeable: “Why, yes, certainly, young man.” But he was about 70 years old at the time; there were other fans present and he got distracted. His mind kind of wandered and before I knew it his hand had written ‘Edgar Rice Burroughs’, just as it had done thousands of times before.

One down and two to go. “Mr. Burroughs, could you sign this one as your pen name?”

He replied, “Oh, yes, of course, young man!” But somebody distracted him again, and there was ‘Edgar Rice Burroughs’ again. One more chance...

I turned around and hand-signaled the other fans to be quiet this time. I gave the magazine to Mr. Burroughs, and as I watched intently, he wrote: ‘to F.J. Bean...’, and then seeing his mistake, said, “Oh, no, what have I *done*?!”

It was clear that the fates had conspired against me. So I said, “All right, Mr. Burroughs, for you I will change my name.” And that eventually became one of my fifty or so pseudonyms: ‘F.J. Bean’.

Burroughs was not the first author I had become acquainted with who used a pseudonym, however. Many years earlier, before I had moved from San Francisco to Hollywood, I had read a series by an author named Aladra Septama, in *Amazing Stories Quarterly*, about an alien called ‘Tani of Ekkis’. After some investigation, I found that ‘Aladra Septama’ was actually a lawyer named Judson W. Reeves who lived right there in San Francisco! So, as a kid going to high school, I got enough nerve one Saturday morning to meet him. I had earlier phoned him and he had invited me over. When I walked in the door, my eyes bugged out; the first issue of *Amazing Stories* I had ever seen had been dated October 1926, but here was a May, and a July, and a June, and an April! I couldn’t believe it; I was really in Wonderland! And to top things off, he very graciously gave me my choice of a couple copies of those first year *Amazings*.

I should also mention something about one other writer who was very friendly with fans. That would be Dr. David H. Keller, who really was a pioneering science fiction author. His claim to fame was that he had in his stories more babies per square paragraph than any other author. In reading his work it always seemed to me like it was a translation, but not from French or German or Russian or anything. I didn't know from what. Well, when I met him I found it may have indeed been a translation. When he was born, his mother lavished all her love and attention on his little sister and paid virtually no attention to little David. So, as a result, he closed his ears and wouldn't pay any attention to anything she said; he wouldn't even learn English.

Instead, he *created* a language all his own, which he taught to his sister. And if anybody wanted to communicate with little David, they had to talk to the sister and she would translate it into their personal language. When he was five or six, he was sent home from school because they thought he was the village idiot. People would talk to him and he obviously didn't understand them, so he paid no attention. There's no telling how long this could have gone on, but when his sister was about seven or eight years old she suddenly died. After that, he was forced to learn English. He told me although he could not recall his personal language in his waking hours, he often dreamed in it. So I suppose you could say, in a way, in his fiction he was translating from his private language.

Anyway, as an adult, he became the superintendent of the insane asylum in Pennsylvania. He said there was one woman who could have lived out in society, but every once in a while, like Whistler's Mother, she would go off her rocker, so she decided it would be best if she lived in the asylum where when she had a spell they could take care of her. Well, Dr. Keller said he realized one time when she was going to have a spell because, he said, in real life there were very few women who found him very attractive. But when she was crazy she was crazy about *him!* So one night she began winking at him, being very flirty, so he warned his staff, "You better keep an eye on her, she's going to have one of her spells." Well, sure enough, about midnight he got an S.O.S. on the telephone from one of his staff; when he went to the asylum he found a semi-circle of the staff at the front of the building. She was up on the roof. During the day some repairmen had left a lot of bricks up there, and she was hurling bricks at everyone down there. Dr. Keller realized that anybody who climbed up there to try to talk her down might be risking their life. But after all, he was the superintendent, so he decided to go up there.

When he put his head up above roof level, he saw her standing there, brick in hand. One wrong word and he'd have had it! He said basically, he never lied to insane individuals, because they could always see right through you. But knowing how she felt about him when she was crazy, he threw his arms wide and cried out, "*Come* to me, my darling!" She dropped the brick and like an express train she ran across the roof and threw herself on him. The roof was sloped, and they began sliding down it. One of the members of the asylum staff finally had to come up there with a rope and lasso them to rescue them!

Dr. Keller, with a straight face, once told me, "I have such an ego, I pay people fifty cents an hour to let me brag about myself." As I mentioned, he liked science fiction fans a lot. I do believe he gave away more fiction for fanzines than he ever sold to paying publications!



(from *Mimosa* 23, published in January 1999. Illo by Teddy Harvia.)

I moved, without my parents, from San Francisco to Los Angeles in 1934 and I attended the very first meeting of the Los Angeles Science Fantasy Society, which was held in October of that year. Of course, it wasn't called that at first; LASFS originated as one of the branches of the old Science Fiction League.

That very first meeting of all was attended by nine people. There was a young fan named Roy Test; he was interested in Esperanto, so we called him 'Esperan-Test'. His mother, Wanda Test, was our first secretary. In those days of the 1930s, *Thrilling Wonder Stories* was on our minds so her minutes became known as 'Thrilling Wanda Stories'.

It's unfortunate that many of the fans who attended LASFS meetings during its first decade are not all that well remembered. There was Australian-born Russ Hodgkins, for instance, who became a director of the club in the late 1930s. There was T. Bruce Yerke. He created something called 'Kwerkean', a funny language all his own, and later wrote an early history of Los Angeles fandom called *Memoirs of a Superfluous Fan*. There was Morojo, Myrtle R. Douglas, about eight years older than I. She first came to my attention when we were together in a class learning Esperanto. For eight years, though (and we didn't have the term then), she was what we'd call my 'significant other'. We went to the first world convention in 1939 together. I'd dreamed up a futuristic costume to wear there, and she was responsible for all the sewing and whatnot on it. Together we put out about fifty issues of *Voice of the Imagi-Nation*, which in 1996 was awarded a retrospective Hugo Award.

And there was dear Paul Freehafer. He was not much to look at but, boy, he had a big heart. Unfortunately, I think his heart did him in. None of us had the slightest idea he had any cardiac problems when he went off back to Idaho in 1944, for a summer vacation. He never came back. He was a tireless worker for the club, always involved with projects that would make LASFS a more interesting and better organization. Whenever there was a feud in the club he was a peacemaker, an acceptable mediator to both sides. After he died he was mightily missed. He was just a grand fan.

And speaking of 'Big Heart', there was Walter J. Daugherty. Walt's first appearance at LASFS was at about the sixth meeting. For some reason, we had gotten off on the wrong foot with each other and were a bit antagonistic toward each other for a year or two. But after that, Walt has been one of my dearest, closest friends, to this very day. We mutually created the 'Big Heart' Award shortly after E. Everett Evans died in 1958. Evans was an elderly fan; he didn't have much money but was extremely generous. At Worldcons, if he saw a young fan who he realized wasn't going to be able to attend the banquet, a ticket would appear under the kid's door. Walt and I decided we didn't want E. Everett Evans to be forgotten so we created the award that's presented at the Worldcon each year. Frankly, in the beginning, I just kind of played God; I knew that Evans would have appreciated Doc Smith being a winner, and also Bob Bloch, and Dr. Keller. But when we had eight or ten people who had gotten the award, I would send out postcards to them with two or three potential names, or ask them to suggest someone. So after a while, the selection began to actually be by choice rather than just my personal opinion.

To this day, Walt Daugherty physically gets the awards created; I only tell him what wording to put on them. He's very good at 'individualizing' the awards; in the case of John L. Coker III, who received the Big Heart in 1996, he being a photographer, there was something symbolic of photography on the award. I think Walt has kind of a world record for being a hobbyist; he has something like 52 major hobbies. He retired, I think in 1946, as the dance champion of America in waltz I believe, and he's very knowledgeable about Egypt. He did fanzines in his day, and in 1941, at the World Convention, he was the first person to record speeches, in particular Heinlein's "Discovery of the Future" talk as it was called.

The first meetings of the club were held in what was called the Pacific Electric Building in downtown Los Angeles. I think that once a month, a man who worked there was able to get the seventh or eighth floor free for us. Then we moved to Clifton's Cafeteria, a feature of which was their free limeade and lime juice. Some of the members who didn't have more than a nickel or dime to spend guzzled a lot of that free juice.

In those earliest days of the club, we science fiction fans had hardly ever laid eyes on a real live author. So when Arthur J. Burks came to the club one evening, it was an Event, and he didn't let us down. He was kind of a fiction factory; he said, "Just throw out a word." When someone said "lampshade" he was off and running, and made up a whole saleable story right then and there. There were other notables who visited the club after that. Dr. Keller came to town with a young Julius Schwartz and his friend Mort Weisinger. Another author, Bob Olson, actually lived in town; Bob Olson was the greatest friend ants ever had – he practically wrote 'sci-ants fiction'. It's true! The short-lived magazine *Miracle Science and Fantasy Stories*, in its second issue, advertised: "Don't miss the great science fiction novel in our next issue!" But it turned out there never *was* a next issue! So for some years, fans wondered what in the world that 'great science fiction novel' was. Well, Bob Olson later told me he had sold a novel to them titled *Ant with a Human Soul*. He said it had been accepted via Western Union; the telephone operator had read him a telegram that said "Offer two-hundred dollars for *Ant with a Human Soul*," then said "Excuse my curiosity, sir. I've heard of trained fleas in flea circuses, but is that possible? An ant with a human soul?"

At any rate, I've been to about 1,500 of the over 3,000 meetings of LASFS. I was at the 3,000th, and as part of the program that night I reminisced about some of those early meetings. At various times I was a director, treasurer, secretary, librarian, club organ publisher, pariah, and even janitor. It's been a fascinating six decades!



(from *Mimosa 24*, published in August 1999. Illo by Teddy Harvia.)

Knock, knock. Who's there? Soviet. Soviet who? Ve vere hungry, so ve et.

Back in 1978, in the days when Russia was still the Eeee-veal Empire, a couple dozen of us sci-fi folk decided we would all go there en masse. The group included Cylvia Margulies, who was associated with a magazine called *Fantastic Universe*. There was Joe Haldeman and his wife Gay, and Lil Neville, the widow of Kris Neville and who had collaborated with him on at least one science fiction story. There was the long-time science fiction fan Art Widner, and Tom & Terri Pinckard, who were creators of the Pinckard Science Fiction Writers Salon. There was Charles Brown of *Locus*, the French fan and writer Georges Gallet, eofan Clifton Amsbury, and, of course, me and my wife Wendayne.

We were told in advance, when we were planning the trip, that since we expected to meet a number of science fiction authors and fans to bring along any books or fanzines or things we would like to make gifts of. So I went out and spent about a hundred dollars for copies of a book I had published called *Science Fiction Movie Gold*.

Well, when I got to the customs inspection in Moscow there was a young kid there looking very officious, somebody I wouldn't have given the time of day, necessarily, in L.A., but I wasn't about to fool around with Russian customs inspectors. He immediately wanted me to open the package of *Science Fiction Movie Gold*. Immediately, a frown appeared upon his face; he looked very unhappy and pressed a red button. A very dignified-looking soldier with all kinds of medals and ribbons on his uniform came over; as he paged through one of the books it was obvious he didn't know or even think much of science fiction, so in desperation I began throwing out names I thought he might recognize ("Movies? *Solaris*? Stanislaw Lem?"). But this didn't seem to impress him at all; he kept looking through the package and frowning: "Monsters, monsters – *Nyet! Nyet! Confiscata!*!" Now, I don't know any Russian at all, but I could understand what that meant!

So that was the end of my hundred dollars worth of movie magazines. I imagine they immediately went on the black market – or maybe the *red* market. Cylvia Margulies was infuriated. "Why, don't they realize you are Mr. Science Fiction? You go right over there and demand your books back!" But I was only expecting to visit Moscow, Leningrad, and Kiev – I didn't want to get a free trip to Siberia!

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Despite of that rather rude greeting we actually did manage to have a memorable time of it while we were there. I came back with my share of adventures and even some misadventures. In Kiev, I thought I would look up an old Sci-Fi Esperantist friend and surprise him by greeting him over the phone in Esperanto. But unfortunately, there were no telephone books! (Sorry, Dmetrio Viktorov Chekovitch!) And while we were watching the armored might of the May Day parade in Moscow, I was spotted by a radio interviewer who told me just that morning from Washington he had heard Ray Bradbury!

I've had many international science fiction experiences besides that one, of course. I've already mentioned the first one, my trip to England for the International Science Fiction Convention in 1951. And just recently I got back from a ten-day visit to China. We had learned that China was going to jump the gun on the year 2000 and celebrate it in advance. This appealed to science fiction people, of course, and it was arranged where we could go there for ten days to exchange ideas. And it was more than just Americans. There were a couple of Japanese there, one Australian, and some Russians besides the half a dozen of us from the States. And it was more than just the science fiction genre represented – there was an American astronaut, Shannon Lucid, and three Russian cosmonauts.

It turned out that nobody there was familiar with *Frankenstein* or *Dracula*. I was also surprised they didn't know of Ray Bradbury or Isaac Asimov or H.G. Wells. I was given a gift of about twenty science fiction books, and can you imagine what one of them was? It was Hugo Gernsback's *Ralph 124C 41+*. Of course, the book's title is a pun – 'one to foresee for one plus' but I don't know how that came across in Chinese. It must have appealed to them because there was so much about simple science.

There are one billion two hundred million potential readers of science fiction in China. The first science fiction magazine had been created there by a woman. The first time her science fiction magazine went on sale it sold 600 copies. But she has kept right with it – I think it's called *World Science Fiction* – and she's had me interviewed in it along with my picture so I was rather well known to a number of Chinese. We went to her office – we couldn't believe our ears, that she'd only sold 600 copies of the first issue. Nowadays she's up to 250,000 and we thought, well, she must be living quite high on the hog. But she didn't get a penny more – it wouldn't matter if she sold a million or even ten million. She would make the same salary. There was absolutely no financial incentive for her to make the magazine better and more successful from a marketing perspective – it must have been her love of the subject matter. I was really astonished to see that's the way their society works.

It may be that they are attempting via their science fiction magazine to do as Hugo Gernsback tried to do back in the 1920s – sugar-coat science and get a generation interested in becoming chemists and physicists and astronomers and so on. They may be trying to get children interested in science via science fiction. At one point, at a pre-arranged event in a giant auditorium in the city of Chengdu, I was literally deluged by little children. And after two and a half hours of signing autographs, one of them said, "How many times have you been in space, Mr. Ackerman?" And I realized they had thought I was an astronaut!

I had a good time in China. There are one billion two hundred million people there, and I think there were eight or ten who didn't get my autograph. They practically chased me up the Great Wall of China. Now I had not counted the number of steps going up but going back down I had nothing better to do, so just to amuse myself I did count, and how many steps had I climbed? Not 450, not 452... Thank you Ray Bradbury – 451!



(from *Mimosa* 25, published in April 2000. Illo by Teddy Harvia.)

I wish it had been in Stockholm, it would have made such an ideal headline for this article, but it was instead the little town of Lund, Sweden, where I spent the week of September 22-26, 1999, at the 5th Fantastisk Film Festival. I was head of the Festival's Jury that week, and had expected to see half a dozen films a day from various countries, but it seemed like half the films scheduled never showed up. One was held by customs in Finland, and another never reached us in time because it was delayed (are you ready for this?) by a *bomb scare*!

The very first film on opening night was a bomb all by itself: *Komodo*, with giant digital dragon lizards on the loose. No one cared for it. But *Night Time*, *Beowulf*, and *Fear/Faith/Revenge* made up for it, as did the remarkable shorts *Billy's Balloon*, *Devil Doll/Ring Pull* (a U.S. entry that captivated festival fans in Cannes) and *The Wedding Night*, a 12-minute tour-de-farce of loveable Astaire/Rogers-like zombies with a vocal assist from Ol' Blue Eyes Sinatra singing "Fly Me to the Moon". Most eagerly anticipated by the Swedes was *Rock 'n Roll Frankenstein*, which a U.S. festival had earlier refused to show on the grounds of being too gross. I agree. If *Reanimator* was your cup of glee, you're welcome to gorge your gorge on this phallic Frankfurter that revives Elvis, Liberace, and various R&R personalities into one bawdy body. The film probably belongs in the *Guinness Book of World Records* for the greatest number of uses of the 'F' word in a motion picture.

The film festival sponsors threw me a curve by announcing in the souvenir book that I would be giving a two-hour seminar each evening from six to eight o'clock! *Splrfsk!* (That's a fan-language expletive coined by the late Phil Bronson meaning "Yoicks!") A 'seminar' to me promises a teaching session. I was not prepared to teach anyone how to write scripts, direct pictures, or anything of that sort, so I had to valiantly fill in with anecdotes about Karloff, Lugosi, Lorre, Price, Lang, Carradine, *Metropolis*, and some of my sixty-two movie cameos. Whew!

I went to Sweden thinking I would be drowned in blue-eyed blondes (what a way to die!). Tilt! Everywhere were brunettes and redheads! It seems 55% of the country is now populated by immigrants from Turkey, Yugoslavia, Indonesia, and Africa. A Swedish fan was driving me around one day when suddenly he pointed: "Look! A blonde!" One genuine blue-eyed blonde *Svenska flicka* I met while I was in Sweden was an avid fantafilm fan who spoke Swedish, English, French, Indonesian, and I think a couple of other languages, and who also understood

when I spoke to her in Esperanto. She made an indelible impression on me when she said, “I am very impressed of you.” *Tak se mycket, Svenska flicka!* (Thanks a million, Swedish girl!) Maybe I should start a fan club in Sweden!

Anyway, we stopped during our drive at about half a dozen second-hand book and magazine shops, where at one of them I found a copy of the Swedish science fiction magazine *Hapna!* with a photo of myself on the cover! (Talk about hitting the ‘Ackpot’!) But a few days later, an even more extraordinary thing happened. I was out in the countryside being treated to a real Swedish smorgasbord by a Swedish fan, Kristina Hallind (with her husband) when Kristina’s husband began telling me about the Swedish sci-fi mags of the past. He mentioned one I was unfamiliar with: *DAS Magazine*. If I’d been in Germany I would have assumed it simply meant ‘The Magazine’. But he explained it stood for ‘Detective Action Scientifiction’, kind of a combination fiction periodical like *Argosy* in the days of Stanley Gardner, Murray Leinster, Ray Cummings, *et. al.* in the 1920s and `30s. He had just finished telling me he didn’t know if it was still being published when a gentleman at a table next to us said, “Pardon me, I couldn’t help overhearing you. Yes, it’s still being published – *I am the publisher!*” Well, he had me pose with him for a picture for his next issue and even volunteered to send me a number of back issues. What a lucky coincidence!

To conclude my Swedish saga, while I had a captive audience at one of my two-hour ‘seminars’, I told them a tale which I don’t believe I’ve ever put into print before. Years ago, I picked up the phone and an accented mannish voice in a lilting singsong said, “My name is Karl Gustav Chindberg. I yoost flew in from Schvaiden. I vunder cood I meet chu?”

“Why, yes,” I said. “Where are you?”

“Noo Yourk.”

“Well, I guess you aren’t going to be here in the next ten minutes then!”

When he eventually arrived at the Los Angeles airport, my wife Wendy and I picked him up there and immediately warmed up to him. We kept him in our home for two or three days and on our last night together we were driving down what is known as Restaurant Row, a mile-long stretch with about a hundred different eating establishments on it, Karl said, “I vunder, vood chu like a midnight snake?”

“Huh?!”

“You know, a little something to eat – a midnight snake.”

Well, we didn’t let on he was mispronouncing ‘snack’ and accepted his offer. The next day we were wrapping gifts of some duplicate books and magazines from my collection to mail home to him when he noticed my return address (at that time): 915 S. Sherbourne Dr. He looked puzzled. “Who vas Doktor Sherbourne?” he asked.

I realized he was confusing the abbreviation for ‘Drive’ with the medical profession, and so with a straight face, explained, “Oh, he was the man who drove all the midnight snakes out of this territory!”

Several years later, Wendy and I were in Sweden and visited Karl in his baronial manor. There was a lake and a forest on his land and a private cemetery where for 200 years servants had been buried. After a sumptuous dinner and a chat, I was waiting out in the auto when Wendy came running to me and cried, "Come! You have to see this!" Karl, with a quixotic sense of humor, had had a wall painted like a mural with a knight on a horse chasing midnight snakes!

This is not a shaggy dog story, it's absolutely true! But with that, I say *Hej då, Adjö*, or Farewell, to Sweden, with happy memories of Sci-Fi Forry Fans who are real Swedenhearts!



(from *Mimosa* 26, published in December 2000. Illo by Teddy Harvia.)

In 1929, three years after that first issue of *Amazing Stories* jumped off the newsstand and grabbed hold of me, the first sign appeared that I was destined to become a science fiction collector. In those days magazines more or less spoke to me and said things like, ‘Take me home, little boy, you will love me!’ How true that turned out to be! But in 1929 my mother was quite concerned; she told me, “Son, do you realize how many of those magazines you have? I just counted them. Why, you have twenty-seven! By the time you’re a grown man you might have a hundred!”

####

People think the house I live in now, the Ackermansion, is where my collection has always been housed, but that’s not so. It was once crowded into a much smaller place, a thirteen room home that had also been called the Ackermansion. About thirty years ago, one night when my wife Wendy opened the refrigerator, instead of food she found cans of film. It was then she realized the end had come and it was time to look for a bigger place to live. She located two homes that seemed ideal, one which I preferred and one which she preferred. But we thought, this is not going to be satisfactory; whoever gives up will always be moaning that the other would have been better.

We almost didn’t end up in my current home on Glendower Avenue. We had decided, finally, to buy one of those two houses and were about eleven days into a twelve-day option period when I received a telephone call from Wendy: “Quick, come here!”

I went, and ‘here’ turned out to be an eighteen-room home in which the movie actor Jon Hall originally lived. And it turned out that Jon Hall had a connection to science fiction and fantasy! He played the poor man’s Tarzan, Ramar of the Jungle, on television and was in at least one science fiction movie, a film about an invisible man and Nazis that was written by Curt Siodmak. The place was spacious, with lots of room for my collection; it was absolutely ideal, and we both loved it. It took 2,000 boxes full of material, a fairly large truck, and the help of some fans to move everything. The night when we moved in I gave a symbolic kiss to the lock on the front door and said, “I christen thee ‘Son of Ackermansion’.” It turned out, though, that the ‘Son’ part

didn't last very long; nowadays everybody once again calls it the Ackermansion or sometimes the Ackermuseum.

I've always enjoyed having people visit me, even before moving into the present Ackermansion. Ever since 1951, I've been holding an open house about forty times a year. On a recent Saturday, thirty-five fans were here; on this past Fourth of July, several fans from Italy turned up and two of them were celebrating their honeymoon! I have an interlocutor at my desk, so when fans arrive and I hear a buzz from the gate I say, in a deep voice, "Who *dares* disturb the sleep of the Acker-monster!?" Generally, after hearing that, there's a lot of laughter out there, so then I say, "This is no laughing matter!" More laughter. Then I buzz them in, and as they come down the stairway I intone to them, "Leave the gate open for the next victims!"

The first room you enter in the Ackermansion after the entrance hallway (which I call the 'Paul-way' after the famous artist Frank R. Paul) is the living room. And the first thing you notice, once you're there, is that you're not alone – with you is Ultima Futura Automaton, a recreation of the robotrix from the film *Metropolis* that was produced by its original creator, Walter Schultze-Mittendorf. But there's more in the living room than just her – across from her, on the north wall of the living room, I have one wall entirely of Virgil Finlay's artwork. And on the south wall, there's artwork by Hannes Bok and an illustration by Elliott Dold, Jr.

Somebody once asked me what was the first piece of original art I ever acquired; it's the frontispiece, "Midnight Mail Goes to Mars", from the first of only two issues of *Miracle Science and Fantasy Stories* back in 1931. You might wonder how on earth I got hold of that treasure. In those days, when a kid wrote to an artist to tell him how much he or she admired an illustration or painting; sometimes the artist was so flattered he would just give it to the first person who asked for it. That's exactly what happened when I sent a letter to Elliott Dold, Jr., and now I have that piece of art. The most famous Bok piece I have is sadly not an original, or even by Bok, though it is an outstanding piece of art.

When I first met Hannes Bok, before he was known at all, he was just a young man thrilling us in the Los Angeles Science Fantasy Society with his drawings and paintings. I acquired one of his originals, but in 1939 it was stolen right off the wall of the living room in my apartment. I've never seen it again. Fortunately, I had made an eight-by-ten black & white of it which I let Ray Bradbury use for the 4th and final issue of his fanzine, *Futura Fantasia*, and that's where the piece has gotten its fame, as that cover. A few years ago I got out that black & white and gave it to a Texas artist, Anton Brzezinski, and described to him as best as I could remember what the coloring had been. It was just magnificent how he brought that Bok to life. Somewhere in the world I suppose some villain has my original which, with time, probably has deteriorated somewhat and the colors have faded. I'm still disappointed that I don't have it, but this Brzezinski is really a prize winner.

At this point, my visitors are usually ooh-ing and ahh-ing, so I tell them, "Now, don't get too excited, you've still got seventeen rooms to go!"

Then we move on into the dining room where I have 255 different editions, in various languages, of *Frankenstein* and about the same number of *Dracula*. Behind glass, I have a unique edition of *Dracula*. This one is a first edition, signed by the author, Bram Stoker, but that's not what makes it unique; it's also signed by Bela Lugosi, and Vincent Price, and Christopher Lee, and John Carradine, and Lon Chaney, Jr., and just about every other motion

picture person who ever played the role or characters associated with the role. I even took it to Dracula's castle in Transylvania, in Romania, and had the curator there sign it! In that same case is another rarity; I've got an edition of *Frankenstein* where the title was changed to *The Man Demon*. In it I've laid in the signature of the teenager, Mary Shelley, who wrote it, as well as a leaf from her garden in Switzerland, where she dreamed it up, and even a leaf that was atop her tomb in England. It's an incredibly unusual copy.

And then we move on to a room that I have dedicated entirely to Lon Chaney. I'd seen his now-lost film, *London After Midnight*, the very first day it played, back in 1927. It was the only movie he ever appeared in where he played a vampire. I have the beaver hat that he wore in that film, and also the ghoulish teeth. In that room you are totally surrounded by 'The Man of 1,000 Faces'. There are various paintings of him, and I even have an edition of a newspaper which announced his death.

After that, I usually take my visitors downstairs into my office where there are 125,000 stills from *Frankenstein*, *Dracula*, *Metropolis*, *Close Encounters*, *King Kong*, and other fantastic films of the last hundred years from all around the world. I've also collected all of the books that have been made into these fantastic movies. And, also in my office, there are complete runs not only of the more famous science fiction, horror, and fantasy magazines such as *Weird Tales*, *Amazing Stories*, *Science Wonder*, *Galaxy*, and *Analog*, but also all of the minor magazines like *Astonishing*, *Super Science Stories*, and *Spaceway*.

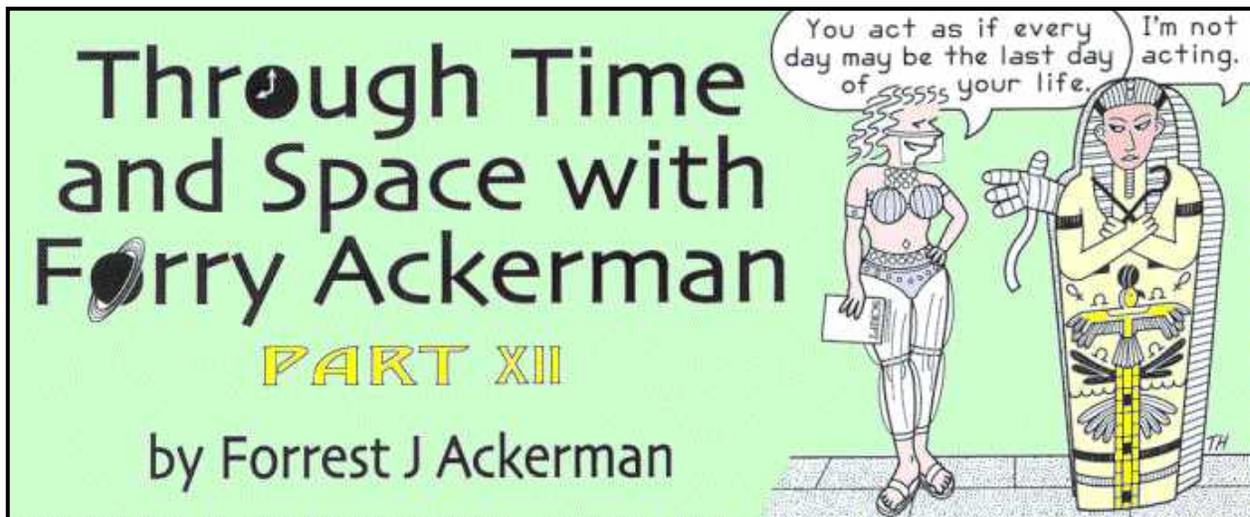
There's much in the Ackermansion about the movies. There's a room of artifacts, and there you see the last Martian machine from *War of the Worlds*, and from *King Kong* the Pteranodon that was trying to fly away with Fay Wray and the Brontosaurus that chased the ill-fated man up the tree. I have many three-dimensional models created for the movies by Ray Harryhausen, from the animated dinosaur that he made when he was 13 years old that ruined the Golden Gate Bridge in *It Came From Beneath the Sea* to the models of the Washington Monument and the dome of the U.S. Capitol with flying saucers crashed into them for *Earth vs. the Flying Saucers*.

And there's more! I have life masks of Karloff, Lugosi, Carradine, Price, Peter Lorre, Lon Chaney, Jr., Charles Laughton, Tor Johnson, and even the Golem, Paul Wegener. I like to point out the top row, between Karloff and Lugosi, where there's also a mask of me when I was alive! And from Japan I have a little puppet of Yoda. I point out to people that this was made by automobile manufacturers, so it's obviously a 'Toy Yoda'. Then I ask if anybody has ever heard of the artificial language, Esperanto. Usually, some have and some haven't; I give them a little sample of it and then I show them some of the books I have that are in Esperanto. The Tolkien books have been translated into Esperanto, as have some by Edgar Allan Poe, E.R. Burroughs, H.G. Wells, and Harry Harrison. Then we continue along the hall and we come to a bathroom, and I say that this house was originally owned by Jon Hall. And with that, I open the door and say, "In his honor, this is the 'John' Hall."

As I mentioned, there's much in the Ackermansion about the movies but besides that, many of the rooms are devoted to books and I've got many themed sub-collections. In one room, for instance, there are more than 600 books about Atlantis; in another, there's my 'numbered' collection, from *Zero* by Collinson Owen to *Twenty Trillion Light Years Through Space* by Leo Virg. A trip through the Ackermansion takes a couple of hours to see everything, and by the time my visitors finish the tour, they've seen probably the largest collection of science fiction books

and memorabilia in existence. But before they leave to go home, inevitably, somebody asks me, “Surely, Mr. Ackerman, you haven’t read *all* these books?!?”

And they usually look incredulous when I say, “I’ve read every last word in every book in my collection.” And it’s true! When I get a new book I turn to the last page – and read the last word!



(from *Mimosa 27*, published in December 2001. Illo by Teddy Harvia.)

Boris Karloff, dear Boris, when he was nearly 80 years old made his final four films in five weeks in a little hell-hole out in Hollywood – I don’t even know if they had the nerve to call it a studio. He would get directly out of his chauffeured limousine into a wheelchair. He had a tank of oxygen by his side and metal braces on his legs, and was getting by on just half a lung. But he was a consummate actor.

Some of us who were there almost spoiled a scene by not being familiar with the script. Boris was busy being the mad doctor in his laboratory when he suddenly clutched his heart and fell against a wall. We were ready to run in and give him first aid. There were four little children who were very anxious to come on the set with me and meet Mr. Karloff. But mom and pop, rightly so, thought that four kids was about three too many underfoot.

The lucky one chosen was little Ricky; he was a little Korean War orphan whose G.I. father had abandoned him. The magic moment came for this little 9-year-old child to meet Boris Karloff. I took him by the hand; he was trembling and swallowing, and as he came forward he said, “Oh, Mr. Karloff, I’ve waited for this moment all my life!”

###

I’ve been in Boris’s company nine times in my life, but I never really had him sort of all to myself. Robert Bloch was a very close friend of his so I asked Bob, “Would it be possible for you to have him to your home, and have your wife put on a little dinner for us?”

“Absolutely, Forry!” he said. “But we ought to have a quartet. Who would you suggest as a fourth person?”

Well, I thought for a minute and then suggested Fritz Lang, who was about the same age as Boris. I thought that, with any luck, maybe they could be persuaded to talk about some of the classic movies they’d been associated with. So when the magic evening came, I sat down at a table with Robert Bloch across from me, Boris Karloff to the left, and Fritz Lang to the right. What an evening! Ordinarily, Bob and I could be depended on for all of the conversation, but that night we just zipped our lips and opened our ears. Boris and Fritz were great company, not only for us but also for each other; they laughed and remarked to each other, “Here we are, two old dinosaurs who have survived.” And I sure wish I’d had a tape recorder under the table

because there was some marvelous conversation – all kinds of reminiscences, of *Frankenstein* and *Metropolis* and a lot more.

I actually have many memories about Boris Karloff. Once, I had a telephone call from a friend, Verne Langdon, who said, “Boris Karloff is in town. Don’t you think it would be great if we could get him to do a phonograph album?”

And I said, “Well, I certainly agree with you!”

He said, “I’ve written a script. Would you take a look at it and let me know if you think he would find it satisfactory?”

So he sent it over and I read through it fairly quickly. It started out with a creaky door opening, and Boris would say “I bid you welcome... oh, be careful of the spiders, they’re my friends, you know.” Well, it looked okay to me – after all, Boris had been doing some funny stuff like *The Comedy of Terrors* and *The Raven*. He seemed to like scripts with humor in them.

But that night I got a phone call from Verne, and it seemed like tears were coming out of the phone. “Oh, dear, Mr. Karloff let me down very gently. He said, ‘No, no, dear boy, this is not my cup of tea’.” So I commiserated with him, and he kind of surprised me when he told me he’d be right over.

I said, “But, it’s eleven o’clock!” And not only that, the crying towel seemed like it was soaking wet – what else could I do for him?

But then he said, “Mr. Karloff told me that if, by nine o’clock tomorrow morning, I could show him a new script, one that he likes, he would stay an extra day and record it.”

And then I made a mistake. I said to Verne, “But where in God’s name are you going to get a new script before nine o’clock tomorrow morning?” I figured he’d need to find a couple of good professional script writers, and they would need about six months before they’d finally they’d have a rough script that Karloff might not reject.

There came the dreaded words over the phone: “*You’re going to do it!*”

“*I’m going to do it??* I’ve never written a script for a phonograph album in my life! I don’t know anything about the format, or...”

He cut me off: “Yes, yes, you can do it! I know you can!”

Well, he must have been very persuasive because by half past eleven he had arrived. All I could think of was that if Mr. Karloff didn’t like the funny stuff, maybe I could remember some things that had pleased him over the years – maybe if I could sort of feed his words back to him he’d feel comfortable. The fellow wanted to watch the magic words come out of my fingers, but I said, “No, no... go to the piano and give me some mood music from *The Mummy*.” So he sat down and played some of the Tchaikovsky theme from *Swan Lake* that had been used in *The Mummy*. It was kind of settling, actually. I found that I was able to make rapid work of it and finally, at 2:30 in the morning, I wrote ‘The End’. And I thought that, boy, the world should never know that something like this was even attempted; it was all too ridiculous.

Anyway, the next evening I got a call: “Karloff loves it! His wife loves it, his agent loves it! The front office says ‘Great!’ Be here at nine o’clock tomorrow morning and you can hear it recorded!” So, for one magic hour the next day, every word that came out of Boris Karloff’s mouth was a word I had put into it.

And he was just magnificent! He’d run a finger over a few lines, give the signal to the guy in the studio, and then record it flawlessly. He came to only one word he was unfamiliar with; it was then I realized that while he had been the Frankenstein monster and Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, he had never played a werewolf – I had used the fancy term, ‘lycanthrope’. Suddenly, the spotlight was on me; I told him how to pronounce it, and he did it just perfectly.

Afterwards, we all clustered around him and somebody said, “Mr. Karloff, we’re aware of your advanced age, and you performed like a man of about one-third your age. Could you give us any helpful hints about how you accomplished that?”

And he said, with mock seriousness, “Well, I don’t know, gentlemen, I guess it’s just good clean living.” And then he smiled. “Up to the age of 6.”

A Farewell to Forry

Those occasions at Worldcons that I had met up with Forry for audiotaping sessions were very special times for me, as you can well imagine. But back then I don't think I ever really wrapped my mind around the inevitability that they would one day end. I was never able to connect up with Forry, at the 2002 Worldcon in San Jose, to tape a remembrance for the final issue of *Mimosa* and the last time I ever saw Forry was at the 2006 Worldcon in Anaheim. It was in the aftermath of the Hugo Award ceremony, and I was in a rush to meet up with a friend at one of the parties that evening. As I was hurrying out of the arena where the ceremony had just ended, there was Forry, seated in a wheelchair and looking very frail. It took about 20 paces after that for my brain to shift into gear and get the rest of me to stop and go back, but by then he had disappeared into the mass of people who were working their way toward the exits.

I have many memories of the relatively short time I knew Forry, but the one I treasure the most is from 1996, when Nicki and I visited him at his Ackermansion home in the Hollywood Hills section of Los Angeles. It took an effort to get there, located as it was halfway up the twisty narrow road rather generously named Glendower 'Avenue', but it lived up to our expectations. Every room in the house was chock-full of books, paintings, posters, and memorabilia, even including the outdoor storage rooms. As one might expect, there was much emphasis on fantastic cinema, from which he gained fame outside fandom as a magazine editor. But it was easy to see that Forry had not lost track of his fan roots – there were many mementos and artifacts from decades past and he had, at that time, probably the second- or third-largest collection of fanzines in existence, including many from the 1930s when science fiction fanzines were first being published.

And now he's gone, departing the world on December 4, 2008 of a heart-related illness. History will remember Forrest J Ackerman as perhaps the most famous and influential fan of all time, and justifiably so. Dave Kyle once referred to Forry as "The Fan for All Seasons" and that's true – Forry wasn't just a famous fan, he *lived* fandom, all the time, for the last 82 years of his life. But it was another famous fan, Walter Willis, who way back in 1951 so accurately described Forry in just a few words: "Forry Ackerman is a true fan in a way that most of us don't come within a mile of being. Forry really *believes* in fandom. ... There are two things that every neofan learns: one is that John W. Campbell, Jr. is the editor of *Astounding Science Fiction* and the other is that Forrest J Ackerman is the No.1 Fan. For my money, Ackerman's position is infinitely stronger. I am sold on Ackerman."

That goes for me too. It was an honor to have known Forry. Very much so.