

the adversaries

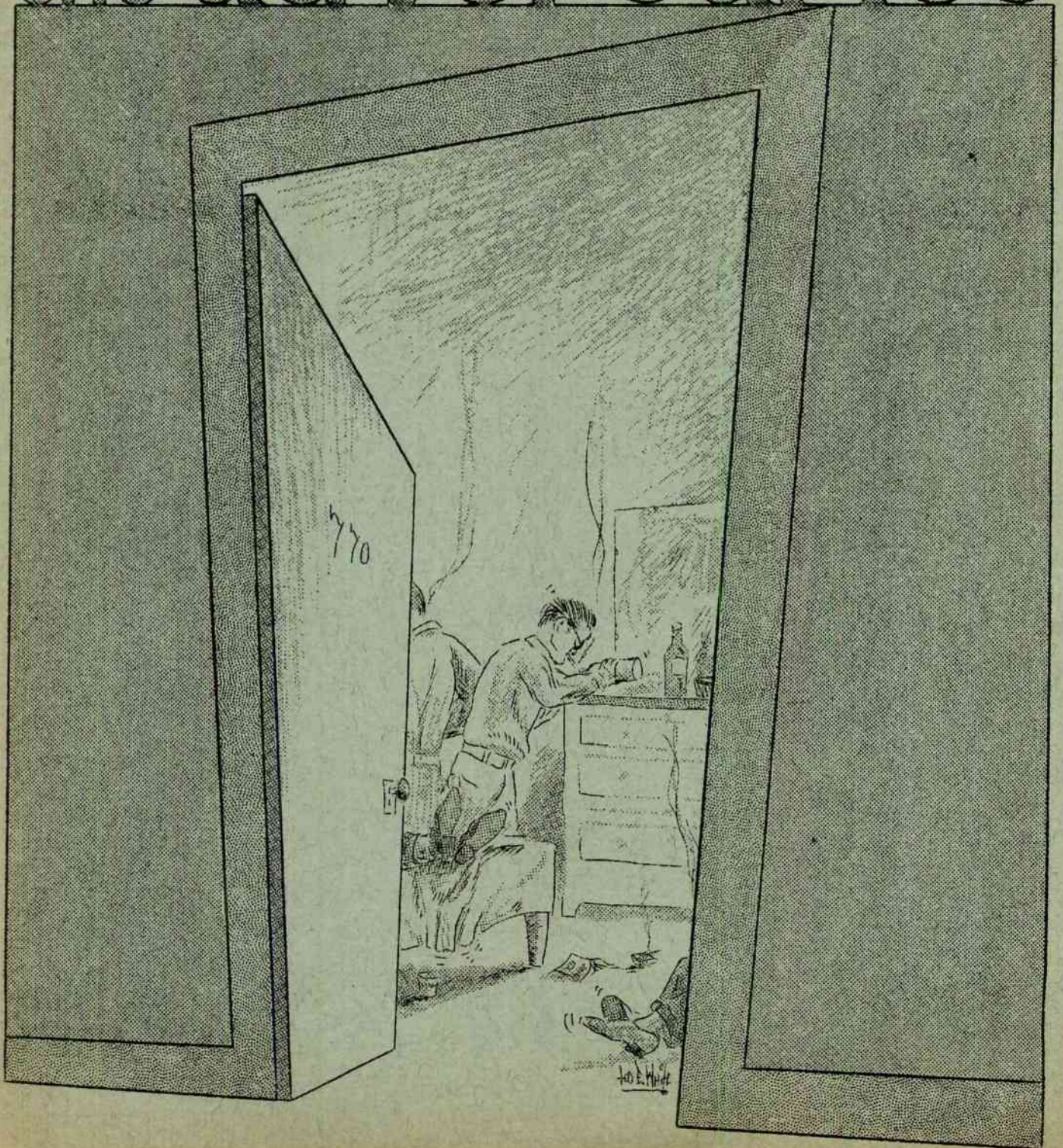
KENT MOOMAW

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a story by KENT MOOMAW:

the adversaries



THE ADVERSARIES by Kent Moomaw

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FOREWORD:

Kent Moomaw died on October 13th, 1958, by his own hand. He had just turned eighteen. He had been a fan for several years and was recognized to be among the leaders of the then "new generation" of fans. His fanzine, ABERRATION, in three issues had become a zine of real quality, and, had Kent's plans worked out, would be now a leader in the fanzine field. Unfortunately, Kent did not have the funds to produce the zine he wanted to produce, and rather than compromise, he let it lie dormant.

Kent was a total-fan. Apparently most of his social-life was spent in only fannish endeavor, and for him fandom was indeed a "way of life." Kent wanted to improve fandom to his liking, and sought to do this by improving his own output. His hopes, ambitions, and even his existence was tied up in fandom. And apparently the frustration of his goals, his lack of funds, coupled with his lack of interest in the world beyond fandom, led to the feeling of hopelessness and uselessness which culminated in his death.

Since then, many have eulogized him, mourned over this lost "promising talent", and have even bickered over his death and its meaning. That is not my purpose here.

During the period of July, August, and September of 1958, while he remained unable to publish his fanzine, Kent occupied his time in writing a story which remained unpublished at the time of his death, "The Adversaries." Greg Benford and I, two of Kent's closest friends, published it in VOID in two parts (issues 15 & 16), and it there elicited many comments which serve to illuminate Kent's way of writing, and the story itself.

Basically, "The Adversaries" is a story; not an allegory, satire, or an over-long joke. It is fanfiction: ie, fiction about fans. And it is, within the confines of the author's conception of fandom-as-a-whole, the least biased of any fanfiction I have ever read. Kent Moomaw had his likes and dislikes in fandom, his prejudices about various aspects of fandom, just as do we all, but he did not push them; they do not intrude.

The average piece of fanfiction usually is marred on some way by one or more of the following defects: a) the author is trying to prove a point --perhaps that fandom is a bunch of nonsense, perhaps that fandom is better than the outside world, or maybe that fans are disagreeable people to know--in some way moralizing about fandom; b) the piece suffers from the author's lack of knowledge of a particular facet of fandom--a convention scene, perhaps, described by a fan who has never attended a convention--which becomes a glaring error, or hole in the blanket of verisimilitude being woven; c) the story really doesn't concern fans at all, but describes scenes or situations foreign to fandom, in which fannish names are applied helter-skelter in an effort to make the story appealing to fans.

In "The Adversaries" Kent avoided all of these traps. The story presents two personalities of strong will, and opposite bent, personalities drawn in part from fandom-in-reality, and describes what happens when they meet at a convention. There is, in their meeting and the subsequent conflict, a story. And this is what Kent wrote. He wrote it so adroitly that--depending upon their positions and likes in fandom--various readers

have identified with and felt sympathetic towards one of either of the Adversaries.

Kent drew nearly everything in this story except the very story itself from fandom-in-reality, as he observed it. Various readers have identified Mariam G. Olds as both G.M.Carr and Marion Zimmer Bradley, yet she is really neither; she is a personality created by Kent, drawn from both fannes, and very probably from others. Likewise, Franklin Ford--so named so that Kent might draw upon the mythos already built up around STELLAR's "Franklin Hudson Ford"--is a character drawn from the prototypes of the fictitious fanzine-reviewer-Ford, Richard Elsberry, F.T.Laney, myself, and probably a bit of Kent himself.

Their first meeting, Ford's and Olds'? Various readers have cried, "That's the 1957 Midwestcon!" while others have said, equally positively, "That's the 1958 Southwestercon!" Kent had attended both.

This story was Kent's last effort, and his finest. If a memorial is needed, I think "The Adversaries" best supplies one.

--Ted E. White
publisher

THOUGH we had checked into 770 only an hour or so earlier, a number of people had already gathered there, and judging by the noise that spilled through the half-open door into the corridor, a full-fledged mid-morning con party was going on inside. I stepped out of the elevator, walked down to the room, and looked in.

"Ah, the BNF deigns to honor us with his presence at our humble orgy," said someone I didn't recognize, raising his beer can in my direction. I smiled at him uncertainly, and nodded hello to a couple of slightly familiar faces, people I'd be looking up for long conversations later on in the weekend.

"I'm looking for Frank," I announced to the room at large. "Is he around?"

Greg Benford walked over. "He ducked out with Ted White a few minutes ago. What's up?"

"Come on, let's go find Frank and I'll..." I turned and collided suddenly with someone just entering the room. It turned out to be Frank himself, the very person for whom I'd been searching.

"Ghod, man, watch it!" he said in that very surprising squeak of his. I'd corresponded with him for over a year, but his letters had in no way prepared me for the short, brash, crew-cut guy with the high-pitched voice who showed up at my house the day before the con. I was still a little agog. "Who's inside?" he said, gesturing at the door.

I waved my hand. "Nobody, Frank, nobody. But I've been looking all over for you! Frank, guess who's checking in downstairs!"

"Ah, come on, Kent, don't play games. Who is it, Tucker?"

"Nah, we saw him here last night, remember? Seriously, man, who of all people is the one we least expected to attend?"

"Christ, Kent, cut the riddles. C'mon, who is it? Walt Willis, Claude Degler? Pete Vorzimer? Who in hell is it?"

I paused for effect, and then, speaking in my best Boris Karloff manner, I rumbled, "M.G. Olds." He looked stunned. I couldn't blame him. I'd felt the same way when Ron Parker told me he'd seen her at the desk.

"MGO? Mighod...that's incredible." He shook his head. "She lives 1500 miles away...in Arizona!" He cocked a quizzical eye up at me. "You must be kidding or something."

"I swear to ghod! Parker saw her signing the register, and was curious, and looked over her shoulder. Miriam G. Olds! Come on, Ben's finding out what room she's in for us. We're going down and spring you on her. Man, this is going to make fannish history!"

He stood there, seemingly incapable of believing any of what I'd told him. "Miriam G. Olds. Mighod. Fantastic."

"Let's go, Frank," said Benford. "This is going to be something!"

"All right, all right, I'm as curious as you are. Lemme get some cigarettes first." He went into 770 and I heard the same unknown guy who'd greeted me before giving precisely the same line

to Frank. Evidently he was already so crooked he couldn't tell one fan from another. And it was only 11:30 in the morning. Gad.

Greg paced up the hall a little way and back. "The meeting of MG Olds and Franklin Ford. They'll actually be in the same room! Kent, are you writing a con report? You gotta write this up for posterity. Or maybe I will. Where's Frank? Let's get down there!"

"Heck, maybe it won't come off." My latent pessimism was showing through. I remembered a MidwestCon once where Ron Ellik had raved to me about a fight between Dave Kyle and someone that was definitely going to occur. It never did. Kyle's antagonist never even showed up. Conventions are like that. "Maybe Parker was mistaken. He seemed sure he'd seen her, but then he's already had a couple of..."

Frank came out with a pack of cigarettes, stripping off the celophane. He was smiling in an evil sort of way, like something out of my EC collection. "Okay, men, we're off." He stalked away, and although I'm a head taller than Frank, and have correspondingly longer legs, I had to hustle to keep up with him. Greg was hard put, too.

While we were waiting for the elevator, Frank turned to me and said, "I wonder if she got the FAPA mailing before she left for the con. I mean, yours came day before yesterday, and if she came by train or bus, she would've had to leave at least a couple of days ago. If she's read my zine, this whole thing may wind up in a bloody brawl!" He placed a hand on my shoulder in mock seriousness. "You'll act as my second, of course. Make certain I get a loaded zap-gun."

The doors opened before I could reply and we entered. "Main floor," I said. "Ron's waiting for us at the desk. When I left to find you, he said he'd find out what room they had given her, and then we'll all be able to go up and heckle her together. Frank, how did this whole feud get started, anyway? I only got into FAPA with the summer mailing, y'-know. She's feuding with practically everyone, but why in such particular earnest with you?"

He grinned. "We've been going at it so long, damned if I can remember. No, actually it was like this: I was at a bheer bust a couple of years ago, before I'd even gotten into FAPA, and Carter Little was putting out an eleventh hour thing to save his membership, and had a bunch of us local club members writing things for the mag. A real drunken one-shot session. Ol' Carter Little, wow, what a fakefan!"

"Yeah, yeah," muttered Benford. "What about MGO?"

Frank turned and gave Greg one of his fabulous man-you-are-bugging-me looks, and then went on. "Yeah, well, like I said, I was pretty high. I'd seen lots of MGO fanzines before, and her illogical reasoning and narrow-mindedness had always crottled me, so when I wrote a review of a part of Carter's mailing, I came across this Olds mag. Ghod, what a mess. The bigotry, the pompousity, and those cruddy poems and old-maid type illos...she's married, I think, but they were still old-maid type illos. I was really disgusted. I should have given the damned thing a 'noted', or made some sort of subtle sarcastic remark, I suppose, but I was drunk and I went into my feelings over the zine in great detail, and called her a fugghead and a bigot and quite a few other things besides. Maybe I would have done it more deftly and smoothly if I hadn't had all that liquor under my belt, but basically I've always felt towards MGO just what I said in that review. I've never apologized and I never will."

"She read that zine, then?" I ventured.

"She read it. I didn't join FAPA myself until a few mailings after,

but I gather she took what I said rather hard. She was all set for me when I got in, and ripped my first zine to small shreds in her mailing review. Disagreed violently with practically everything I said. I'm a jazz fan, y'know, and she pounced on that with philosophy, theology, TAFF, censorship...ghod, what an old bat! We've argued everything from sex to the N3F!"

"As far as I can see, you've done nothing but call each other names ever since I joined, Frank," I said. "You'd better hope to ghod she hadn't read your FAPazine before she left for the con. That 'Why I Hate MG Olds' article was pretty raw."

"Bull," he snorted. "Y'know, I'm glad she's here. I'm gonna find out what makes that old woman tick, for once and for all!"

He was still chuckling when the doors opened. I saw Ron Parker across the lobby and we began walking in his direction. "Ron! I got Frank! Where is she?"

Parker trotted over to us and chortled. "Wow, Frank, isn't this a gas? MGO came in with an old guy, her husband, I guess, about twenty minutes ago. I heard the clerk tell the bellhop to take their bags up to 419. She's probably up there right now. What're you two gonna do, Indian wrestle?"

"What a disgusting idea," said Frank, lighting a cigarette. "No, I figure we'll just go up and knock on her door, and one of you can introduce me. Then we'll just lay back and see what she does, come at me with a knife, or faint, or what. Let her put her foot in her own goddam mouth. She does it in print often enough."

"Ron isn't in FAPA," I said.

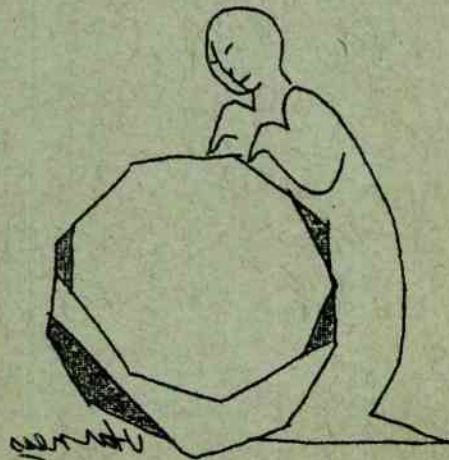
"No," Parker replied, "but I've heard rumors of the feud. This is really going to be a great convention!"

"What are we standing around for?" said Benford. "Let's go on up, Frank!"

"Sure, let's go." He strode off, and the rest of us scampered along behind.

AS I mentioned before, I'd been corresponding with Franklin Hudson Ford for more than a year. We'd both come into fandom at about the same time, both lived in cities with active clubs, and both published fanzines. His EN GARDE was at that time a very highly rated fmz, despite the fact that he brought it out no oftener than three or four times a year. He'd associated with fans and read a great many fanzines before he himself began publishing, and that experience, coupled with a natural talent, enabled him to make his mag a Top Ten choice practically from the start.

After meeting him, I could see the correlations between his true personality and the one which came through in his writing. He could be as faanish as hell when he felt like it, and most of his contacts in fandom were faanish types, as opposed to, say, the Bcgs type or the Indiana



anti-fans, but he was also a deep and serious person when the mood struck him.

EN GARDE, like Frank, was a curious mixture of faanish and serconishness. It carried fiction--good fiction, not the usual neozine crud--and serious articles just as often as it did satire, weird things like that Dave Rike essay, etc. I myself thought the mag was slightly terrific, and since it appealed to both sides in fandom, Frank would probably have been one of the most popular fans around if he hadn't also been one of the most controversial.

I don't think I need go into great detail. You must remember his fanzine review column in STELLAR, wherein he said exactly what he thought of inferior mags that came in, panned hell out of a few of the fanzines that were then in widespread favor, and generally acted the part of the Caustic Critic to the hilt. Most of acti-fandom ate his stuff up; it was a pleasure to see the crudzines and the neozines and all the junk that had been passed over in Rog Phillips type "reviews" getting the scathing they deserved. But lots of others didn't like the column, or Frank. Not only editors of mags he'd roasted--remember Johnny Holleman's infantile rebuttal in TWIG after Frank disposed of QUIRK?--but other fans besides. They condemned him in a body. Man, STELLAR's letter column really jumped in those days.

The review column wasn't all, either. Frank was a prolific letter hack too, and he treated fanzines in his comments to the editors just as he did in his reviews. If he liked the zine, if he thought it showed promise, he supported it to the hilt, offering ideas, contributing, mentioning the mag in his letters to other fans, and so forth. But if he found that indefinable spark of talent missing in the mag, which any seasoned observer can usually discern, if it exists, with one reading, he said so. In these instances he offered suggestions, but to do so he had to state in plain terms just what he felt was wrong with the fmz, and to many people, his comments in this vein were just plain destructive criticism.

In almost every case, the zines he thought promising came along. The others usually flopped. His percentage in this respect was fantastically high, if I'm any judge.

But since the number of new fanzines that really make it is always small, Frank made a lot of bitter enemies. A whole new generation of fans grew up hating the very guts of Franklin H. Ford.

The fringe-fans, of course, felt much the same. When Howard DeVore ran for TAFF and came in just a few votes behind Terry Carr, Frank was appalled. His editorial in EN GARDE on fringers and their place in TAFF was a classic, and most of us applauded it soundly. We'd all supported Terry, official editor of FAPA at that time and furiously active in both the apae and in general fandom, and were aghast at the closeness of the race when the final tallies were made.

Many of us felt just as strongly about the matter as Frank did, but the difference was that he felt compelled to say something about it, while the rest of us confined our grotchings to letters and private conversation for the most part.

DeVore and his contingent were understandably angry, and Howard went as far as to threaten to punch Frank in the nose if he ever met him in person. For a time the very name Franklin Ford was looked upon as a bad word in N3F and SAPS.

People now tend to remember Frank only as a critic. Actually, while all the controversy was raging, Frank was a frequent contributor to a number of fanmags, and wrote some really fine stuff. His takeoffs on prozine-

stories are among the finest ever done, I think, and his column of opinions on timely fannish subjects that appeared in the monthly John Hitchcock began after he folded UMBRA and got married was just Too Much.

Franklin Hudson Ford was afflicted with one great obsession: a desire to weed out and eliminate the inferior, the shoddy, the crass, the second-rate.

During his early fanning, this sense led him to express himself rather crudely; I've seen since the original Carter Little FAPazine in which Frank cut MG Olds low, and even I must admit that it is pretty savage. But at the time of the convention, his writing prowess had so improved that he could wield a stilleto with the best of them. He was still criticizing, but he was doing it so damned skillfully that even Boyd Raeburn admitted at one time that he'd met his master.

This, then, was the fellow who led us upstairs. He'd written me two weeks before the con (which the local club was staging--but you didn't catch me on any con committee!) saying that he was coming out by bus, and asking if it would be all right for him to bunk at my place for a couple of days before the convention got under way. I'd just graduated high school that summer, and since Dad was out of town on business, we had plenty of room. I invited him to come right to the house as soon as he arrived, and told him that perhaps we could rent a room together at the hotel once the con started so as to eliminate shuttling back and forth to and from my house over the three-day weekend. He agreed, and I sat back to await his coming.

After over a year of reading his fanzine, receiving his letters, and being personally embroiled in the battle he waged with the neos and fringe-ers, I suppose I'd formed something of a mental picture of Franklin Ford. Tall, I saw him, tall and lean. I knew he was a college sophomore, and I pictured him with dark horn-rims and a pipe and an intense, Dostoevskian look. I'd seen his articles on Proust and William Faulkner in DASH, and despite the large quantity of fannish material he turned out, I'd always regarded him as very much the stereotyped intellectual. This image was totally shattered when he arrived at Chase Avenue, fresh off the Greyhound.

He was short, for chrissake. Five-five or -six at the most. He had a round, boyish face topped by a brush of light brown hair, and wore flashy clothes. No glasses at all. He smoked, not a pipe, but cigarettes, one after another, and his voice was not the well-modulated rumble I'd come to anticipate, but a fairly high, almost adolescent squeak. I was shocked.

Once we began talking, though, I realized that here indeed was the fan behind EN GARDE and the STELLAR column. He was a fascinating guy, in short: restless, full of nervous energy, off-beat in his aptness to discuss Albert Camus or Colin Wilson as FAPA gossip or other fanstuff. I found him brash, but not overly so, prone to an occasional obscenity (which bothered me around the house only because my mother was around), but capable of turning on the most polished manners imaginable when the need arose, willing to carry on a vapid conversation with my mother at the supper table out of sheer graciousness.

I liked him a lot.

I came in on the tail-end of the FAPA feud between Frank and MG Olds, but I can imagine how it went, knowing both Frank and Mrs. Olds. Miriam Olds is about 40, and a semi-pro writer...that is, she's sold a half dozen stories, none particularly outstanding. She's intelligent, but incredibly narrow-minded, almost to the point of bigotry. Things like that--a

smart person who refuses to examine both sides of a question--make Frank furious.

MG Olds probably began arguing in her fantastic sans-logic manner with Frank out of sheer spite, having been against him in every way since that unfortunate bit of his in Carter Little's mag. Frank loves to argue, and no doubt entered into it with gusto, but when he saw how futile it was to attempt rational discussion with her, how she twisted what he said to ridicule him and serve her own ends, distorting his expressed opinions, ignoring those which were most important to concentrate on side issues... well, it probably crottled him but good.

From there on out it was strictly hammer and tongs.

By the time I entered FAPA, the feud had reached horrible proportions. It was, frankly, becoming disgusting to those of us sitting on the sidelines, observing. Imagine that battle between Dave Mason and George Wetzel that went on in WENDIGO some years back, then magnify it two or three times in intensity, and you have at least some idea of how far it had gone.

All of us felt that if the two ever came face to face, it would have to end with a visit from the riot squad. Too much had gone before for them to have ever reconciled their differences.



Harness

But when Frank arrived at my house, two days before the con, none of us expected to see MG Olds at all. She came up in conversation only once or twice. Usually I would bring her up, and Frank would snort and mutter a curse.

I had packed a bag the previous afternoon and together we'd conquered the confusing public transportation system of the city and made it to the hotel. We fell into the company of fans who'd already arrived almost immediately, and partied with them on the eve of the con until quite late. We slept on the floor of someone's room--the Berkeley group's, I believe--until ten the next morning, and then, with Frank, I went downstairs and got us a room.

We checked into the hotel officially, and prepared ourselves for a long weekend

of fannish kicks.

And then came MG Olds.

BY the time we reached the fourth floor, our little group had collected a number of hangers-on. Some I knew, some I didn't. Most of the fans we'd been with the night before were still in bed, and some of the people we especially wanted to meet hadn't yet put in an appearance. A few neos, undoubtedly up since the crack of dawn for fear they'd miss something, recognized Frank from the photo cover on the last issue of EN GARDE and joined our party in hopes of getting into the Inner Circle. I think Randy Brown was there, and John Champion, and Greg, and Ron, and maybe one or two others. In any case, there were some six or eight fans with us when we came to a halt outside 419.

For a moment, we all sort of looked at each other. Ron grinned and knocked twice. A woman's voice said, "Yes? Who is it?"

Ron looked around at us. I shrugged.

"Some fans, Mrs Olds," he replied. "Are you busy?"

The door opened suddenly, and there she was. Fortyish; a face not yet resigned to wrinkles but evidently giving the whole thing some thought, rather jowly but not unusually so. Her hair had once been golden blonde, it seemed to me; now it was merely a pleasant mousy brown. She wore glasses, the kind with plastic rims that have little imitation rhinestones in them. A conservative dress.

She smiled and waved at the room behind her. "I just arrived. With my husband, that is. My, you boys certainly got to me quickly. Come in, won't you?"

Frank, Ron, and Greg walked in, but I lagged behind for a moment to inform the neos that there wasn't room for everyone inside, and that we had something important to discuss with Mrs Olds. They sneered and clomped off down the hall. Randy, John, and I followed the rest inside. As I closed the door, I found everyone quiet. Ron said, "It's no good, Kent. She recognizes Frank, too."

Mrs Olds laughed, a nice, warm sort of laugh. "Of course. I get EN GARDE the same as the rest of you." She looked slyly at Frank. "I think he sends me copies just to annoy me." No malice, no sarcasm. It was just a kind of opening gambit.

"Yeah, I'm always interested in your reactions to my writings, Mrs Olds," Frank said. I sat there thinking of the names that had been called, the insults hurled.

Were they just fencing, awaiting an opportunity to lunge, or could it be that they might actually get along with one another?

There was an awkward silence, and then I said, "Uh, did you get the new FAPA mailing before you left Arizona, Mrs Olds?" I didn't know what Frank would do if she had, but I had to ask the question and get it out of my system.

"No, I didn't...uh..."

"Kent Moomaw."

"Oh, yes, of course. How are you?"

"Fine, Mrs Olds." There was a brief interlude while she got the names of the other fans in the room, and shook hands with each of them, beaming.

"Well," she said, "you see, I left home three days ago with Robert, and we've been riding busses ever since. Is the mailing out? I didn't think Ron Ellick would be this efficient as OE."

"It's out." I didn't bring up Frank's article, and nobody else in the room knew of it but him and me. "I enjoyed your mag very much," I said, as an excuse for having asked about the mailing in the first place.

Ron said, "You're one person we never expected to see at this convention. When did you decide to come?"

"As a matter of fact, not until about a week ago. Bob didn't expect to get his vacation at the plant until sometime next spring, but there was a sudden mixup of some sort and he was forced to take it now or not at all. It came as quite a surprise to me; I never expected to be here myself! This is my very first convention, by the way. Bob's downstairs on something or other. He isn't a fan, but I'm sure you'll enjoy meeting him." ← start

We all mumbled something about yes, we would. There was another uncomfortable break in the conversation. We'd walked in prepared for the worst, and now that Frank and MG had seen each other and nothing was happening, we didn't know exactly what to do next.

Mrs Olds is no dummy. I think she sensed our confusion, and looked over at Frank again.

"I suppose you're all amazed that I didn't pull out a gun and shoot Franklin as soon as he walked through the door."

We laughed politely, but she had been closer to the truth with that remark than she ever knew.

She smiled. I was beginning to like that smile very much. "No, no, you boys have misjudged me. I like to argue as well as anyone, and Franklin and I have certainly had some doosies. But I certainly don't see why we should spoil this convention for ourselves by continuing our disagreements throughout the weekend, though. I came here to have a good time. What about you, Franklin?"

"Suits me," he said. I looked over at him. He was smiling too. Mi-ghod. "We'd better agree not to discuss politics or religion or anything too controversial, though, Mrs Olds. Don't you think?"

"Perhaps that would be best, Franklin. You hold some very peculiar views along those lines, don't you?"

I cringed. Tension permeated the air for a second.

"Your views seem quite peculiar to me, Mrs Olds, as you must be aware."

"Yes indeed. I certainly am." We laughed again. "But we'd better keep off this line of talk if we don't want to begin scrapping. I don't think my husband would appreciate your beating up his only wife. At least I think I'm the only one..."

And on it went. We chatted lightly with Mrs Olds until her husband returned, about ten minutes later, and met him. They seemed like extremely nice people, and I found it difficult to conceive of this warm, friendly woman sitting behind a typewriter, turning out the material that had filled MARGO and FREBBLE, and all the other MG Olds fanzines FAPA had seen during the past five years...long before any of the rest of us had even heard of science fiction, much less fandom.

We left to allow them time to unpack and settle themselves, promising to see both of them later in the day. At the door, Mrs Olds shook our hands again, Frank included, and said she had been very glad to meet all of us and looked forward to seeing us later.

We stood outside the door for nearly a full minute after she closed it, even more stunned than ever before.

"That was incredible," I managed after a time.

"Ghod," said Benford.

"Frank," said Ron, "I can't believe it."

"Hell, what're you so dumbfounded about? Did you actually expect her to throttle me with her bare hands?"

He was trying to pass off lightly what had happened, but I could tell that it had amazed him as much as the rest of us. It seemed impossible that her personalities, paper and real, could be so far removed.

"To be truthful, yes," I replied.

Frank smiled wryly. "So did I, Kent, so did I."

SAW little of Frank during the rest of the day. We were both anxious to meet and talk to as many different people as possible, and aside from interludes in which we happened to wind up in the same room, our quests carried us to different parts of the hotel.

That evening, I walked out of the evening session just before a re-showing of "The Day The Earth Stood Still" and went down to 770 to see anything was happening there.

I found the door open and the last remnants of a party inside: a half dozen empty glasses at various places, a couple of full ashtrays, and three men engaged in an intense game of gin rummy on the bed. One of them was Frank Brown, and I asked him what the hell had been happening.

"Ford had a party going here an hour or so ago, but it broke up. He's drunk as a skunk. Everybody began excusing himself about the time he began acting obnoxious." He gestured at a bottle of gin on the nightstand, two-thirds empty. "A good part of that is inside ol' FHF right now."

"Y'know where he went?" I asked.

"Hell yes, he made it plain enough. He said he was going to find MG Olds, and 'iron out their difficulties' or something. Talk things over with her, he said. Are they feuding or something?"

"Yeah," I muttered, "something like that. He said he was going down to 419?"

"That her room? I guess so. What's going on upstairs?"

"Nothing much. Look, Rich, if Frank comes back here, tell him to wait around for me, eh?"

"Sure, Kent. Gin, Fleischman."

I was outside, heading for the elevator, before Marty Fleischman could get to the door.

I knew that Frank, drunk or sober, could take care of himself, and that I really had no business nosing in, but I couldn't shake the feeling that with Frank and MG Olds together and Frank high, there might be trouble. I waited impatiently for the elevator.

When I got to 419, I found Greg Benford standing just outside the door. There were loud voices inside. "What in hell's going on in there?" I asked.

"Franklin Ford and Mrs. Olds. I came down here with him from a party held in 770. He was raving about how he was gonna talk things over with her in a 'sensible manner' or something like that. He's really stewed, they're arguing to beat hell now."

"What are you standing out here for?"

"Heck, I told him to take it easy, and he practically threw me out. The old girl tried to keep the peace for a while, but after a while she was going at him in earnest. As if that false front she put on this morning was stretched to the breaking point."

"Where's Mr. Olds?"

"Up watching the movie, I imagine. What'll we do?"

"Let's go in and break this thing up."

I pushed the door open cautiously and found them there, Frank wobbling in a chair, talking rapidly, and Mrs. Olds seated on the edge of the bed, mentally quite disturbed.

"...-stand, MG. The thing is this: when you give a group like that the chance to determine...oh, hi, Kent. We're jus' having a friendly li'l discussion."

He was grinning at me sloppily.

"Frank, don't you think you ought to get some air? Let's go back to the room, or up to the movie, or somewhere."

He waved his hand and shook his head. "Nuts. Now, Mrs. Olds, as I was saying..."

She wasn't drunk or anything, ghod knows, but she seemed to be just

as deeply involved in the wrangling over censorship as he was.

"Franklin, you're not looking at this thing objectively at all. You're intelligent. You're able to take care of yourself. But you must remember that there are some people who simply must be protected from the sort of thing you're..."

"Mrs. Olds," I interrupted. "Frank's drunk. I'm sure you'll be able to finish this tomorrow..."

"Shut up!" he snarled at me suddenly. "Mind your own business, willya? Mrs. Olds, I can't put it strongly enough that..."

"No, no, you're all confused. I think this pseudo-liberalism of yours is just a front. Deep down you know I'm talking sense, but you've been so brainwashed by all the left-wing propaganda you young men receive that you can't think straight anymore. Franklin, don't you recognize a Communist environment when you..."

They went on like this for five minutes or so, getting steadily stronger in their arguments, more heated in their rebuttals. Greg and I stood there watching them, unable to act, unnoticed by these adversaries as they warmed to the combat.

At last, MG Olds, her face flushed, leaped to her feet and cried, "Franklin, you're a hopeless ignoramus!"

And Frank, in his stupor, got to his feet and said in an equally loud voice, "And you, Mrs. Olds, are nothing but a goddam fugghead!"

"What was that?"

The voice had come from behind me. I turned. Greg had left the door open, and standing there framed in it, scowling at Frank, was Robert Olds.

He was wearing a baggy grey suit, with an open-necked sport shirt exposing his prominent breastbone, which was in keeping with the rest of his tall, lean frame. His steel-rimmed glasses were pushed forward on his nose, and his sparse grey-brown hair appeared ruffled. I cannot, even now, say for certain whether or not he was drunk too.

I winced as he came into the room.

"I said what did you call my wife?" he shouted, grabbing Frank by the arm. "Answer me, boy!"

"G'evening, Mr. Olds. Your wife and I were jus' having a friendly li'l..." I doubt if he even knew what was going on at that point.

"Shut up, you punk! I heard that word. I don't care who you are, you can't say things like that and get away with it!"

It was obvious that Olds had misunderstood Frank. I stepped over and said, "Look, there's been a mistake, Mr. Olds. Frank merely said..."

"I heard what he said!" The man was livid with rage, which he seemed to extend towards all of us. He frightened me; I thought he might have a heart attack or something. The cords stood out in his neck, and his face was a brilliant red.

Before I could react, he reached out and backhanded Frank across the face. His ring gouged into the flesh of Frank's cheek, and a tiny streak of blood appeared. I stood paralyzed, unbelieving.

He pushed Frank towards me, and before Frank could try to hit Olds, I grabbed his arm and hustled him over to the door.

"There was no reason for that," I seethed. "I could get the house dick up here for that!"

"Yeah? Try it, sonny, just try it. I'm sure he'd agree that a drunken snot can't go around shooting off his dirty mouth at a respectable woman and get away with it. Yeah, let's just get that house dick up here!"

I visualized explaining the word "fugghead" to a complete stranger

for a second, and then Miriam Olds spoke for the first time. "Bob, you really don't...?"

"Keep out of this, Miriam. I've always stood for your engaging in this stupid hobby if you wanted to, and I even agreed to use my vacation so you could come out here and meet these people, but when some fresh young snot hardly out of short pants comes around with his foul mouth--"

Greg took Frank's other arm and we backed him out the door. I mumbled a couple of obscene phrases addressed towards Mr. Olds, but not so he could hear them. There was nothing we could do, but I had to say something. I could see Frank's face as the larger man's hand sliced across his nose, and the blood, and most of all the look of utter surprise in Frank's eyes when he was hit.

"I hope you're real proud, Olds. You're a great big man, beating up a guy six inches shorter'n you and who's so blind drunk he can't even fight back. That sure takes guts, Mister Olds!"

"GET OUT!!" he screamed.

He slammed the door so hard in our faces that I had to jump back.

The last thing I saw inside was Miriam Olds.

She was standing just behind her husband, her hands knotted together.

I think she was crying.

I'm not going to end this like a Marion Zimmer Bradley story or anything, and tell you that both Miriam Olds and Franklin Ford gafiated after this incident and were never heard from again. It didn't happen that way at all.

Frank and MG stayed on in FAPA for some time; they both stayed on at the convention, too. Mr. Olds, though, didn't venture out of his room until he and his wife were ready to check out, which was just as well.

I saw Miriam Olds and Frank within twenty feet of each other only once more during that weekend, and they made no notice of seeing each other.

I didn't mention the incident to anyone, and I don't think Greg did either. It was such a disgusting affair that I think we all preferred just to forget it. I'm really glad that Robert Olds wasn't around though. I don't know what we'd have done.

Of course, Frank is now a pro writer. He dropped out of FAPA recently due to lack of time, and has been selling regularly for the past year. I see him at cons once or twice a year, and he's the same weird guy.

Miriam Olds is still in FAPA, and argues as much as ever with the other members. But in that time between the con and Frank's resignation, the Olds-Ford feud was never continued.

They never even mentioned one another's mags in their mailing reviews. Not once.

Oh well. La vie en fandom, and all like that.

-Kent Moomaw, 1958

