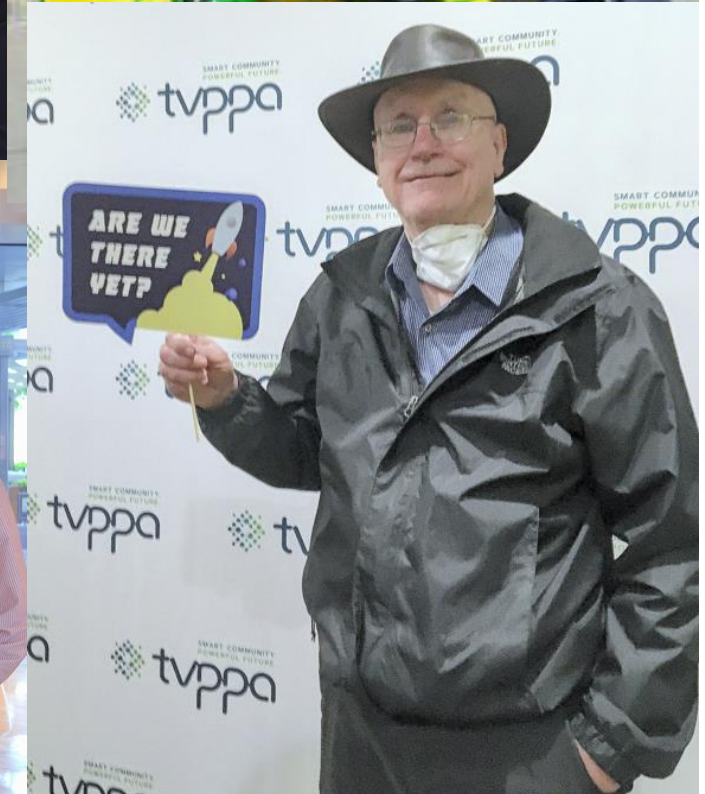


# My Back Pages 30 Rich Lynch



# My Back Pages 30

articles and essays by Rich Lynch

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As one of my cover photos wonders, are we there yet? And yes, we are! Once again, I present to you: Summer! (At least for all of us here in the Northern Hemisphere.) Back in 2000, my wife Nicki and I, in our Opening Comments to *Mimosa* 26, mentioned that we always thought of Summer as that period of the calendar between Memorial Day (at the end of May) and Labor Day (at the beginning of September). Or more to the point, the time between Disclave and Worldcon. But that no longer applies, since Disclave isn't a thing anymore and Worldcons usually no longer happen during Labor Day Weekend. But I think it's still a useful description for the time of year when we can switch from cold weather gear to shorts and pull-over shirts. (At least for all of us here in the Northern Hemisphere.)

So here are a set of essays that are season-appropriate for this time of year. And they all relate, either directly or tangentially, to various science fiction conventions that were held during the warm weather months. (At least for all of us here in the Northern Hemisphere.) First up is a report I wrote for the **File770.com** newsblog about a small one-day event held in Virginia last July that turned out to be pretty diverse and eclectic in its scope.

*Rich Lynch*  
*Gaithersburg, Maryland*  
*June 2024*

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*My Back Pages* now has a companion letterzine: *You're Still on My Mind*.  
All issues of both zines are archived at [efanzines.com](http://efanzines.com) and [fanac.org](http://fanac.org)



# Report from Spiral-Con II

I've been to a lot of conventions in my personal five decades of fandom, but very few of them as small as Spiral-Con II. It was a free one-day event, sponsored by Spiral Tower Press and held Saturday, July 15<sup>th</sup> on the campus of Christopher Newport University in Newport News, Virginia. I'm kind of embarrassed to say that I don't remember ever hearing about the first Spiral-Con, which had been held last August, even though (as I discovered belatedly) it had been a news item in **File770.com**. And I wouldn't have heard about this year's convention either if I hadn't been contacted by someone who was scheduled to be a program participant.

That would be my friend Rusty Burke, the current President of the Robert E. Howard Foundation which was founded in 2006 as a means of expanding the knowledge base about the author and his fiction. Rusty had emailed me at the beginning of July, asking if Nicki and I would like to appear on a fanzine-related panel during the convention. He was very well aware of our fanzine background – besides his status as a world-class Howard historian he is, or at least used to be, a pretty good fan artist. Way back when we all lived in eastern Tennessee he was a frequent contributor to our 1970s clubzine *Chat*. Turns out that two of the organizers of the convention are also Howard Foundation members, so the connection pathway from them to us was an easy one.

But enough about that. The convention drew a total of 17 people including participants but I guess that was probably about what was expected, given that the University was in the middle of summer break. Those of us who did attend witnessed an interesting single-track program that included five panels and a short awards presentation ceremony. The Trigon Awards, which according to the Spiral Tower Press website “celebrate the past, present, and future of science fiction, fantasy, and horror”, were the first thing on the schedule: the award for Scholarly Achievement went to Rusty for the breadth of his many activities within the Howard Foundation; the award for Literary Achievement went to *Old Moon Quarterly*, a relatively new online magazine devoted to dark fantasy and sword-and-sorcery fiction; and a Special Achievement award went to Toni Weisskopf of Baen Books who over the years has been “an unparalleled steward and champion of the pulp genres of sword and sorcery, military science fiction, and epic fantasy”.

The five panels were an eclectic mix. For the first one, the topic was the literary legacy of Robert E. Howard, which started out to be an interview of Rusty by Dr. Jason Ray Carney of CNU's English Department. But at about the halfway point the focus expanded and after that it became more about the Howard Foundation than the author. In particular, there was a lot of description about Howard Days, an annual event held in Howard's home town of Cross Plains, Texas. Some of the convention's program is held indoors, but other parts are held in an open air pavilion. And there are no hotels or motels in



the Robert E. Howard panel:  
(l-r) Jason Ray Carney and Rusty Burke

Cross Plains (the nearest ones are the better part of an hour's drive away) so the 200-or-so people who attend are firmly committed to preserving the history and learning more about the author, and are willing to persevere through the heat of hot Texas summers to do so. Now *that's* dedication!

The second panel was a change of pace – a literary analysis titled “Women and Modern Fantasy: History, Theory, and Analysis”. The presenter was CNU English Department student Shannon O’Keefe, who was introduced by her advisor, Dr. Nicole Emmelhainz. By all appearances it seemed to be a preview of a thesis on the topic, and the presentation skillfully walked us attendees through the history of feminism



the “Women and Modern Fantasy” panel:  
(l-r) Shannon O’Keefe and Nicole Emmelhainz

and its literary movement, focusing on how the feminist movement eventually resulted in many women authors writing genre fiction, including science fiction & fantasy. The reasons for this, we were informed, is that genre fiction can be used as a means to comment on societal issues and can be used to create worlds, situations, and characters for making such social commentary. More to the point, genre fiction allows female authors a good way to examine and explore the ‘what ifs’ of feminist political and social movements, including things like cultural expectations for women. There were several writers cited as examples, and the latter part of the panel turned out to be an in-depth analysis of a major work by one of them: R.F. Kuang’s *The Poppy War*. It’s ostensibly a dark fantasy with military overtones, but it’s also a journey of discovery and awakening for its main character, Rin. I haven’t read it yet, but after this I think I’m intrigued enough that I’ll want to.

There was another change in direction after that – the third panel was about the history of pulp magazines. Dr. Carney was again the moderator and the panelists were two experts with encyclopedic knowledge on the topic: historians Nathan Vernon and Josh LeHuray. Vernon is also a board member of The Pulp Magazine Project, which according to its website is “an open-access archive and digital research initiative for the study and preservation of one of the twentieth century's most influential print culture forms: the all-fiction pulpwood magazine.” Similar to the Howard panel earlier in the day, this one started out by walking us through the history of the pulp magazine era (which dates all the way back to 1896 when Frank A. Munsey published the first issue of *Argosy*) but eventually broadened to include discussion and description of PulpFest, the annual convention



the “History of Pulp Magazines” panel:  
(l-r) Jason Ray Carney, Nathan Vernon, and Josh LeHuray

which celebrates the history of that type of publication. Overall it was an opportunity to broaden my knowledge – I hadn’t known, for example, that during the pre-WWII years newsstands rented out space to the pulp publishers rather than entering into consignment or outright purchase agreements for the magazines. There were many well-known authors who wrote for pulp-era magazines including now-famous science fiction and fantasy writers such as Isaac Asimov, Poul Anderson, Murray Leinster, Edgar Rice Burroughs, Edmund Hamilton, C.L. Moore, and, yes, Robert E. Howard (to name just a few). Ray Bradbury also was published in pulp-era magazines, which segues nicely into the description of the next panel.

The fourth panel was the one Nicki and I had come to Spiral-Con for. It was titled “A Brief History of Zine Culture and its influence on Genre Fiction”, but for the purpose of this panel the focus was limited to science fiction fanzines. The moderator, Dr. Luke Dodd from Eastern Kentucky University (another Howard Foundation member), had informed me prior to the convention that a visual aid or two for the panel would be helpful so I’d created a PowerPoint which provided a few prominent



the “A Brief History of Zine Culture” panel: (l-r) Luke Dodd, Rusty Burke, me, and Nicki

examples of science fiction writers who had edited and published fanzines. One of them was Bradbury who in 1939-40 had published four issues of *Futura Fantasia*, which was an eclectic mix of essays, fiction and poetry. The second issue contained a short story by Bradbury that

<p><b>Ray Bradbury</b></p> <p><i>Futura Fantasia</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Published 1939-40; 4 issues</li> <li>•An eclectic mix of fiction, essays, and poetry</li> <li>•Contributions included short fiction by Damon Knight, Henry Kuttner, and Robert A. Heinlein; artwork by Hannes Bok</li> <li>•Issue #2 included a short story by Bradbury which was “the basis for his first paid, professional piece”. (Wikipedia)</li> <li>•All issues readable online: <a href="https://fanac.org/fanzines/FuturaFantasia/">https://fanac.org/fanzines/FuturaFantasia/</a></li> </ul>	
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the Bradbury slide from the PowerPoint presentation

probably became the basis for his first professional sale as a writer. What I had attempted to show was that zine culture of the 1930s through the end of the 1960s was a prime conduit for science fiction fans to become science fiction authors. But after that, there was pretty much a paradigm shift – new writers in the field had found other routes (such as writers workshops) to become professionals. There didn’t seem to be many people in attendance

who were very knowledgeable about science fiction fanzines, so Nicki, Rusty, and I described in general some of the different types (genzine, perzine, apas, etc.). And after that there were questions from audience members which indicated a genuine interest in learning more about fanzines and fanzine fandom. I hope they will follow up on it by visiting the two online sites where fanzines are archived – there’s much for them to discover.



The final panel of the convention had been mislabeled in the program handout – it had been described as “The Literary Legacy of Space Opera: Literature, Film, and Gaming” but the actual focus was on military science fiction. The moderator was Baen Books assistant editor Sean Korsgaard (who earlier had accepted Toni Weiskopf’s Trigon Award), and the two panelists were Chase Folmar and Dr. John Balderi. Korsgaard and Balderi are retired U.S. military, and all of them had strong opinions about the topic. The panel was actually fairly wide-ranging, including call-outs to some of the more prominent military SF writers such as David Drake and David Weber, but what made it interesting to me was the back-and-forth



the military science fiction panel:  
(l-r) Sean Korsgaard, Chase Folmar, and John Balderi

with audience members which attempted to define just what qualified as military science fiction and what didn’t. *The Expanse*, for example, has a lot of military SF overtones but the overall plot of the series is much more about discovery and survival on a grandiose scale – in other words, it’s space opera. And there are some series which are, in fact, military science fiction even though the plots are not really pro-war – John Scalzi’s *Old Man’s War* is a good example of that. And there are other stories which have a militaristic basis or foundation but are not, strictly speaking, military science fiction – Keith Laumer’s original ‘Bolo’ story, “Night of the Trolls”, is a prime example of that. There were a lot of questions from the audience and it made for one of the more interesting panels I’ve attended lately.

I’m glad I went to Spiral-Con. The day was filled with good panels that showcased many of the diverse interest areas of science fiction and fantasy – it had made the traffic jam-filled drive down from Maryland and expenditure of Marriott points worthwhile. But I think the organizers need to figure out what they want the future of the convention to be – there’d been just enough publicity (via the Spiral Tower Press blog) to bring 17 people to the event, which seems barely enough to make it sustainable. But the meeting site at CNU probably couldn’t handle very many more than that – if the convention had been held when classes were in session there probably would have been way too many attendees for the meeting room facilities. I’ll be interested to see what direction they go with this. And I’ll also be more on the lookout, next year, for information about the convention! ☀

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## Afterword:

Well, I *have* been on the lookout and there’s been nothing on the Internet about a 2024 Spiral-Con. But even if there had been, it probably would have been difficult for us to work it into our July plans (which include a trip to Buffalo for the 2024 North American Science Fiction Convention). The NASFiC is taking the place of Worldcon for us – a trip to Glasgow (for various reasons) just isn’t going to happen. So instead of looking forward to that, let’s look backward to the previous time a Worldcon was in Europe. As you’ll read, it was truly epic.

# In Dublin's Fair City

**“Do not go there! Don't do it!”**

That's what the bouncer outside a downtown Dublin pub told Nicki and me one evening. We had just emerged from the establishment, a bit disappointed that the Irish music being performed inside, to a packed house, had consisted of a Dublin-area group playing American songs. We had expected to hear ballads like “Molly Malone” but instead were treated to “Take Me Home, Country Roads”. Which is ironic, since the inspiration for “Take Me Home...” was actually Clopper Road in Montgomery County, Maryland – a highway only two miles from where Nicki and I live.

So when we had asked the bouncer which pubs down in the touristy Temple Bar part of the city would offer authentic Irish music, he told us in no uncertain terms to just avoid the place entirely – it wasn't the ‘real’ Dublin. And most likely he was right – on a walk-through the previous day I had thought that Temple Bar seemed more than a little like a toned-down version of Bourbon Street in New Orleans. Probably not a very good place for a pleasant evening of food and song.

It wasn't until we happened across Peadar Browns, a neighborhood pub out near where we were staying and well away from the downtown area of the city, that we finally found some authentic Irish music. While we were seated at the bar, each of us enjoying a half pint, we noticed three guys, one with a guitar, singing ballad-like music over at one of the tables. We immediately came to the conclusion that it had to be traditional Irish music since we didn't recognize any of the lyrics. And we were right – the bartender told us that the place brought in local musicians a few nights a week for the enjoyment of Dubliners who lived nearby.



Peadar Browns pub in Dublin

But there's more than one kind of authentic Irish music. In the touristy areas, where you can find it, you hear light and relatively innocuous things like the Molly Malone song: “In Dublin's fair city, where the girls are so pretty, I first set my eyes on sweet Molly Malone...” On our last night in town we heard some of the other kind. Light and innocuous? *Ohh* no.

“Now Georgie and Pop they lie cold as stone, they died fighting for Derry, their own native home. So always remember and don't ever forget, they died fighting for Ireland and we owe them debt. So we'll raise up our hands, and we'll curse that British hand who tore out the very hearts of men who dared to cross their path. But my heart is broke in two, won't you tell me what to do, they couldn't stop poor George and Pop and they'll NEVER stop me and you.”

The singer/guitarist was a youngish guy who was part of a music group that was on hiatus. So on that evening he was doing his own gig at the pub. That he knew and could perform Irish rebel music was, to me, an indication on how deeply the antipathy is still felt about the long and sometimes bloody British rule of Ireland from about the beginning of the 1800s through the first two decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. So much so that it's an ingrained part of the Irish psyche.



the Irish rebel music singer

**“It’s been quite a while.”**

I said that to the concierge at our hotel after he’d asked if Nicki and I had ever been to Dublin before. And indeed it had been – our only previous time there was back in 2005 on a trip that included several days in Scotland for that year’s World Science Fiction Convention. I am Irish-American by heritage and it had been a desire to see a small bit of my ancestors’ homeland that had brought us to Dublin back then. But it had been a disappointing stay – near continuous rain the entire three days we were there had taken a toll on our stamina and enthusiasm, and we had ended up taking in only a very small part of what the city has to offer in terms of things to see and do. It was another Worldcon which had brought us back, this time – and for the first time ever, for that matter – right there in Dublin’s fair city. But we had come to Ireland to do a lot more than just attend a big convention and we got started on it less than three hours after we had deboarded the airplane.

It turned out that there were two whiskey distilleries located in close proximity to where we were staying. One of them, The Dublin Liberties Distillery, was literally right across the street but Nicki noticed that the distillery’s café had dead plants in the window. Her rule of thumb about a place is that: “If they can’t take care of plants or at least buy new ones when the old ones die, avoid it.” And so we did, instead going around the corner to the Teeling Distillery.



during the Teeling Distillery tour

Teeling is a new distillery, having been established only about four years ago. But it was the first new whiskey distillery to have opened in Dublin since before the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The tour was led by Julia, a stereotypical ginger-haired lass who, we found out to our surprise, had been born and raised in Connecticut. It was relatively short, lasting only a bit more than 40 minutes, but it walked us through the entire process, from malting the barley to fermenting to distillation. Teeling whiskey is triple-distilled, with the three large copper pot stills named after the three daughters of the owner. And these



were the iconic image of the tour. There was a tasting room, of course, and also a small museum that described the history of Dublin distilling all the way back to the Great Whiskey Fire of 1875 and which had a nice collection of Irish whiskey bottles that dated back many decades. It was there that I also found a much newer relic, constructed from the staves of whiskey barrels. I doubt the stuff they were drinking in King’s Landing and Winterfell was anywhere near this fine.

Nicki and I had chosen the least expensive tour option, which translated to the fewest number of whiskey samples in the tasting room. And that was probably a good thing, seeing as how we were more than a bit tired from the overnight flight from North America and had not yet been able to check into our hotel room. But it was so fine and smooth in taste that I do actually wish there had been more to drink. This must have seemed obvious to Julia who, just before she left us for the next tour group, asked me: “When’s the last time you’ve had whiskey this good?”

I thought for a few seconds. “It’s been quite a while,” I said.

### **“It’s all rubbish!”**

That was the opinion of an older woman who had seen us standing in a light rain outside of Bewley’s, staring longingly at a food display in the storefront window. Nicki asked her what she was referring to, and she pointed at the display. “That,” she said. “It’s too expensive, not worth the cost.” And then she raised her umbrella and stalked off.

Bewley’s is internationally known mainly for its coffee and tea, but in Dublin it operates an upscale café on Grafton Street, which is one of the most expensive shopping streets in the world. No wonder that the desserts we were drooling over seemed a tad expensive to that lady. Her comment put us off enough that we didn’t eat there that evening, but we did come back a few days later for an enjoyable and affordable dinner that included an extended conversation with two men from Slovakia who were at the table next to us – one of them a counselor of some kind at the Slovak Embassy and the other involved in the Irish foodservices industry.

Irish food is good, no surprise there, and we were able to attest to that on our second day in Dublin. A few weeks earlier, when we were planning for what we might want to do on our five free days in the city, the thing that immediately jumped to the forefront was a foodie walking tour. There are several available and the one we decided on was also a history tour. The guide, a young woman named Hannah, was really knowledgeable about Dublin both past and present. And she welcomed our questions, telling us that she’d only once ever been asked what she considered a dumb one: “Does Ireland have beaches?” Her answer had been: “Of *course* it has beaches! It’s an *island!*”



on the Teeling Throne

When we heard that, Nicki almost immediately came up with a follow-on query: “Ireland has beaches, but does it have *surfing*?” The answer was that yes, it does! But the water is pretty cold so surfers are usually togged out in all-body wetsuits. As for the foodie tour, it surfed us through three restaurants. The first one was Gallagher’s Boxty House, a vintage café that was famous for its potato appetizers made several different ways. They were all pretty good and the beer even better, and at that point I realized the tour was going to require a bit of stamina – the stomach as well as the legs!



at Gallagher’s Boxty House  
(potatoes are growing in planter boxes  
above the storefront)

After that we moved on to The Oak, where the Beef and Guinness Pie



Hannah leads the Irish coffee workshop

presented me a daunting challenge in terms of being able to eat it all. And we finished up with a dessert course at a Czech-themed bar that also provided all of us in the tour an impromptu workshop on making Irish coffee. The ingredients are hot coffee, Irish whiskey, sugar, and heavy cream, and there is a specific way of putting them all together. But, as I found out, there are no specific amounts on how much of each to use. The jigger for measuring out the whiskey allowed for two different volumes, and when I inquired with Hannah if we should use the small or the large size, she came back with: “You have to *ask??* More is better!” I’m guessing that’s probably the *second*-dumbest question she’s ever answered. But hey, I’m a newbie.

**“How they manage those big, double-decker buses through all those tiny streets, I’ll never know.”**

Nicki made that comment after observing the skill of tour bus drivers in getting around Dublin. When we were originally planning our Ireland trip, we had considered seeing as much of the country as we were able. There are several commercial tours for doing just that, and there was even one put together specifically for people who would be attending the Worldcon. But, we had decided, if we did that, it would severely limit our time in Dublin to explore places we’d missed the previous time. So we revised our thinking and decided that we’d stay in Dublin and maybe take a day trip tour or two outside the city.

But then we did a reality check and decided that no, we *didn’t* want to get up at six o’clock in the morning so that we could make it to the tour embarkation point by seven. And that there were plenty of interesting things to do right there in the city that would easily take up most if not



all of our available time, at a pace we were comfortable with. So remain in Dublin we did. Yet another example of evolution in action, at least as far as trip planning goes.

For a couple of days we used those big double-decker buses to get around the city. There was a good seniors rate, and the bus route went near just about all of the places we were interested in seeing. One of them was the National Leprechaun Museum. I'd expected to find it lightweight and intended for children, but that's not really what it turned out to be. And that's because of the guide. Sometimes a museum is only as good as its guide and we had a *really* good one. She was an expert at Irish folklore and as she walked us through the various rooms of the museum she told elaborate tales involving leprechauns and other supernatural beings which reside in the Irish countryside. From what I could see, the adults were enjoying it even more than the kids.



the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow in the National Leprechaun Museum



our guide describes the Jonathan Swift exhibit

writer and satirist Jonathan Swift, who occupied that position for more than 30 years in the early 1700s and whose burial site is located within the Cathedral. His *Gulliver's Travels* was one of the earliest fantasy tales, and it seemed appropriate that we paid our respects at his crypt on the eve of a Worldcon.

The very best guided tour of all, though, was the one at the Little Museum of Dublin. The place befits its name, as it occupies only a relative small amount of space in an 18<sup>th</sup> century Georgian-architecture townhouse that's owned by the Dublin City Council. It's actually a

We also had pretty good luck with the other guided tours we took. The one for St. Patrick's Cathedral was led by a soft-spoken gentleman who described the church and its place in history throughout the more than 800 years of its existence. The cathedral was originally Catholic, but became Anglican in the early 1500s during the Reformation. Today it's the National Cathedral of the Church of Ireland, with its 'Dean', or senior cleric, elected by the cathedral's 'Chapter', the body of clergy which has the responsibility of guiding the ministry and mission of the Cathedral. The most famous Dean was the



Jonathan Swift's crypt





the docent tour of the Little Museum

“people’s museum”, as many if not most of the artifacts and curios there have been donated or loaned by Dublin residents. The museum requires that your entry be part of a guided tour, and with good reason. The walls of each room are so covered with ephemera – old photographs, posters, framed newspaper articles, personal correspondence, and art prints – that it’s impossible to make any sense of it all without a guide. But *with* a guide it’s a marvelous experience. Each item has its own connection to something in Dublin’s past, be it a signed U2 album cover, or artist Jim Fitzpatrick’s iconic poster of Ernesto “Che” Guevara (whose ancestry includes an Irishman named Patrick Lynch and who therefore just *might* be a very distant relative of mine), or photographs of some of the Irish rebels killed in the Easter Rising of 1916. It was all skillfully woven together into a narrative that described Dublin during the years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and it provided me a deeper understanding of not only the city, but also the people who lived there.

**“The oldest book here is a bible.”**

We were informed of that by one of the security people in the Old Library of Trinity College. It dates back to the early 1700s and is famous not only for its architectural design but also because of the more than 200,000 volumes it holds, a few of them dating back before the time of Columbus’s voyages to the New World. The main chamber of the Old Library is the so-called ‘Long Room’, and it is certainly that at nearly 65 meters in length. We were told by the security guy that it’s still a working library and is used almost every day for various kinds of historical research. But it must be a formidable task to even locate any particular book or manuscript, not only because of the sheer number of them archived there but also because the place has become a prime tourist attraction – the day we were there the wide corridor which bisects the room was shoulder-to-shoulder with sightseers. We also observed that the Long Room contains more things than just books and tourists. One of them is an old Gaelic harp which dates back about the 15<sup>th</sup> century. It’s the national symbol of



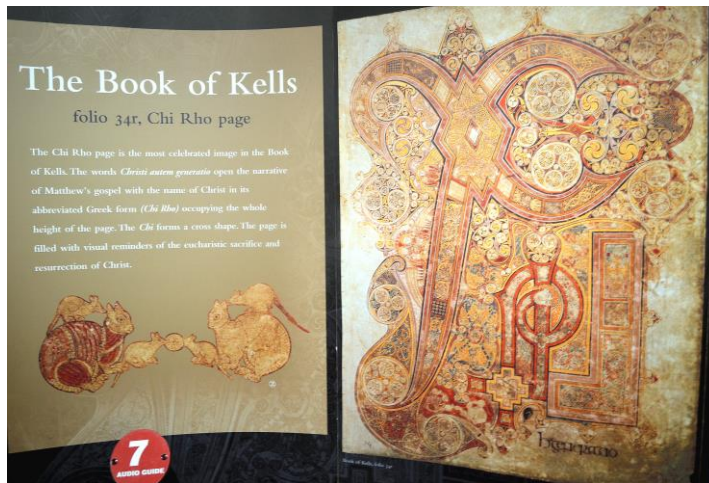
the Long Room of the Old Library

Ireland, and its likeness appears on Euro coins minted in Ireland. And there are also marble busts of great philosophers, scientists, and writers which line both sides of the central corridor – all of them of men. I guess we weren't really surprised to find that out. Back in the 1700s, when the first of these were commissioned, women's place in history had not yet been recognized.

As for how far back in time the contents of the Old Library encompasses, the security guy had been referring to an Irish bible which had been printed just a few years after the Gutenberg Bibles. But he could just as well have been describing the greatest cultural treasure in all of Ireland – the Book of Kells. It's the world's most famous illuminated manuscript – a calligraphic transcription of the first four books of the New Testament (in Latin) with religious-themed artwork and ornate Celtic illustrations adorning many of the pages. It dates back to



bust of Aristotle in the Long Room



part of the Book of Kells exhibition, enlarging and annotating one of the pages

about the end of the 8<sup>th</sup> century and, as you'd expect, is kept under lock and key. But there is a continuing exhibition that includes display of parts of the manuscript, four pages at a time, that's located downstairs from the Long Room. We were told by one of the exhibition's curators that if you're patient enough it's possible to view the entire Book of Kells, as the four pages on display are changed out every three months. But you'd have to be very, very patient – the entire manuscript consists of 680 pages, so a complete viewing would take more than 40 years.

### “I wonder if they can play ‘Dueling Bagpipes’.”

That was my thought when Nicki and I came upon a couple of pipers on one of our walks across Dublin. They were busking in St. Patrick's Park, not far from the Cathedral, and as you'd expect, we heard them long before we saw them. It turned out that most places in Dublin that we wanted to visit were no more than about a 25 minute walk from our hotel. And frequently, during those walks, we happened across interesting stuff.

After a few days of this I came to the conclusion that Dublin itself could probably be considered as much a museum as any of the individual museums located within its city limits. Practically everywhere we went there was a place of historical interest, an example of this being an inscribed stone marker on Fishamble Street where Neale's Musick Hall once stood. It was the place where, in



pipers in the park



April 1742, George Frideric Handel's famous oratorio *Messiah* was first performed.

And there were also plenty of noteworthy things to see on those walks, many of them picturesque. For instance, the Ha'penny Bridge which spans the River Liffey. It's the sole pedestrian-only bridge over the river and dates back to 1816, though it's undergone renovation several times during its existence. Its name refers to a toll that was charged by the builder, after the bridge opened, to offset the construction cost. Today it's free passage, and is the most popular and busiest pedestrian crossing of the river. As well as the most iconic.



the famous Ha'penny Bridge

The biggest museum by far that we visited was also the most eclectic. The National Museum of Ireland has three branches in Dublin, two of which (Archeology and Natural History) we had visited on our previous trip back in 2005. So we completed the trifecta by taking in the Decorative Arts and History branch, which is housed in a former military barracks that provides it enough room for many



the micromosaic necklace

kinds of exhibits. Maybe too many. There are displays on everything from furniture (both historic and modern) to Asian art. A large section of the museum has military-related objects on display, some of them dating back to the 1500s, but we mostly skipped that. As for the decorative arts part of the museum, Nicki was a bit disappointed that it wasn't as extensive as she'd hoped, but

there was one piece she had great admiration for – a necklace featuring nine different exquisite micromosaic recreations of famous sites in Rome. Some superb craftsmanship went into that. But how it ended up in Dublin is anybody's guess.

We exited through the gift shop, as is the case with most museums, but before we did we saw a familiar face. Or rather, he saw us. It turned out that our friend Chris Garcia and his wife Vanessa Applegate (whom we'd not previously met) were also visiting the museum at the same time we were! It's an indication of how big the place is that we nearly missed each other. But we knew we'd see Chris again, and soon – he was on the Worldcon's program.



Chris and Vanessa in the museum's gift shop



**“Sixteen years after winning a sixth Hugo, and we’re now chopped liver.”**

I said that to Nicki a couple of weeks prior to the trip, after we were reminded that, basically, we were yesterday’s news. We had both volunteered to be on panels at the Worldcon, and had even offered suggestions on what types of programming would match our interests and skillsets. What I ended up with was a single panel. One. And Nicki didn’t have any at all. It was the same as last year’s Worldcon, where it was Nicki who had ended up on just one panel while I was completely shut out. I’m now thinking that we must be past our sell-by dates, at least in terms of how Worldcons perceive us. But, in the end, it wasn’t wholly bad news because not having any programming commitments allowed us more flexibility to find interesting things to see and do on our own. That is, if we could actually get in to where they were being held.

It only took a few hours into the first day of the Worldcon for the realization to set in that the Dublin Convention Centre was just not spacious enough. Breakout rooms were relatively small and the corridors to access them were narrow. This resulted in a chaotic scene near the top of each hour, with hallways packed by those trying to exit rooms where panels had just ended and others wanting to get into those same rooms for the next round of panels. Convention Centre staff had to become the traffic police in a mostly vain attempt to keep everybody moving. By the second day the chaos had abated a bit – overnight, each floor of the Convention Centre had been taped off into queue lanes, one designated for each breakout room. But this created added confusion until, finally, everybody started to figure it all out.



the Dublin Convention Centre



queuing up

Given the circumstances, it was probably the best solution. But while it lessened the turmoil in the hallways, it undoubtedly increased the number of frayed tempers. The rules of the game had become that everybody had to leave the breakout room after a panel had ended. And once they were all out, the people who had queued up for the next panel in that room were then allowed in. This meant that it became near impossible to attend two panels in a row, at least those that had large audiences, as after you exited a breakout room you had to go to the back of the queue for whatever event you wanted to see next. And quite often the queues for those events exceeded the room capacities.

For me, it didn’t turn out to be such a problem, as most of what I attended was specialized enough (i.e., about fan-related topics such as fanzines) that overcrowding was rarely an issue. But unhappy were the people who had wanted to be at two media-related panels in a row. In the end, they had to decide which one they more wanted to see.

One other thing I observed was that the traffic police were not to be messed with! More than one person was firmly directed to clear out of an area where queues would be forming. And clear out they did. I don’t think anybody dared to jump a line after seeing them in action!

**“Some panels are being held in a repurposed cinemaplex.”**

I emailed that info with an accompanying photo to Mike Glycer for his **File770.com** newsblog, as he wasn't able to attend the Dublin Worldcon but still wanted as much coverage as he could get. So I became an ad hoc photojournalist for him, and he published about 40 of my photos over the course of the convention. There was not enough space in the Convention Centre, so some panels (including much of the 'Science' track of programming) were over in a converted movie theater multiplex about a 15 minute walk from the rest of the Worldcon. While there was plenty of room in the individual theaters, the configurations resulted in some unusual perspectives and sightlines. For the “How to Manage Finite Natural Resources” panel the participants were dwarfed by the large blue-lit movie screen behind them.



the “How to Manage Finite Natural Resources” panel



the irrepressible Chris Garcia

Chris Garcia had better luck with his Computer History Museum talk, which was in a much smaller theater. It was actually compact enough where he could be his irrepressible self directly in front of the audience rather than half a county away like it seemed in the other theater. Chris had been caught up in a round of layoffs at the museum back about the beginning of June. (“And yes I’m still EXTREMELY bitter!” as he put it.) Which is a damn shame as he took with him not only years of institutional familiarity about the museum and its collection but also an encyclopedic knowledge of the history of computing going all the way back to Babbage’s Difference Engine. He filled his hour with vignettes about some of the luminaries of the computing field such as Marvin Minsky, but it was Chris himself who entertained us the most with his arm-waving over-the-

top speaking style. It’s an experience (to say the least!) to sit through one of his one-man shows.

Those were the only two panels I attended in the multiplex, and they were both on the first day of the convention. In the end it was just too inconvenient to head over there, especially when it meant that I’d miss getting into other panels I wanted to see at the Convention Centre. But that didn’t stop a lot of other people, especially those who wanted to get books autographed by authors who were at the convention. Autographing was one of the things that had gotten moved over to the multiplex, and the one day I was there I saw that a *very* long line had formed for a signing by George R.R. Martin. I was surprised to find out that the line had started forming an hour and a half earlier for an autographing session that was still an hour in the future.

Or maybe I wasn't. The *Game of Thrones / Song of Fire and Ice* franchise has made Martin immensely famous, and this was just further evidence that he has a lot of very loyal and determined fans!

**“I’m pretty sure they would not want to give up any of the spacecraft’s resources and mission plan for something like that.”**

David Clements, who is both a science fiction writer and an astrophysicist, told me that in reply to my question during the “Really Big Telescopes” panel. Different ways of doing astrometry, the science of precisely measuring star positions in order to determine their distance via parallax, was one of the topics that had been



Jocelyn Bell Burnell (at left) in the “Really Big Telescopes” panel

discussed. During the Q&A part of the panel I had I had wondered if the Juno spacecraft in orbit around Jupiter could be repurposed do that since the diameter of Jupiter’s orbit is far greater than that of the Earth’s and would provide an immensely longer baseline. But the four panelists unanimously shot that one down, with Clements’ reply the most succinct.

I had the good fortune of snagging a front row seat for that panel. I’d arrived at the meeting room just after everyone had been seated, and the moderator had motioned me to an empty chair at the front that somehow had not been claimed. Astronomy is an interest of mine, but what really made me want to attend the panel was the presence of one of the convention’s Guests of Honor: astronomer Jocelyn Bell Burnell. Back in 1967, when she was a graduate student at the University of Cambridge, she had identified an anomaly in a radio astronomy data chart which turned out to be the first pulsar ever discovered. That achievement was recognized in 1974 with the Nobel Prize for Physics, but it was her research advisor, not her, who was a recipient. That injustice did not discourage her, however, and she has gone on to have a stellar career (no pun intended) with many awards including an OBE. And now she has enjoyed the ultimate career honor, being a Guest of Honor at a World Science Fiction Convention. Maybe not *quite* the same as a Nobel, but in my opinion pretty damn close.

The only other Guests of Honor that I crossed paths with at the convention were the Fan Guests, Bill and Mary Burns. And that happened many times. I don’t think I’d ever met Mary before but I’ve known Bill for years, as he hosts and manages the **efanzines.com** website. It’s one of the two most important online locations where fanzines are being archived, including many of mine. In these days of egregious mailing costs, printed fanzines are on the verge of becoming extinct. But thanks to **efanzines.com**, their PDF equivalents are readily available. So much so that many fanzine publishers no longer do a dead tree equivalent, or if they do it’s a very small print run.



the Fan Guests, Mary and Bill Burns





Gerri Sullivan and Bill Burns at the [efanzines.com](http://efanzines.com) panel

There was a show-and-tell program item about the [efanzines.com](http://efanzines.com) website which was moderated by this year's TAFF delegate, Geri Sullivan. Bill founded it back in the year 2000 and he now has more than 300 different fanzine titles archived there, some with dozens of issues. For the Worldcon, a small portion of the website had been directly downloaded to a notebook computer prior to the convention because the Dublin Convention Centre's Internet speed wasn't good enough for a real-time exploration of the archive. As a result, only a very few fanzines could be shown and described. The one that got the most screen

time was my friend Guy Lillian's *The Zine Dump*, probably because of its meta-ness – *TZD* is currently the only fanzine which attempts to describe and review every other science fiction-oriented fanzine published in the English language. But Guy did not make the trip to Dublin and when I emailed him that his was the featured zine and had even been praised by Geri, I got back an uncharacteristically subdued response: "Please tell Geri thanks for me." If it were me I'm pretty sure I'd have been a bit more woohoo-ish.

**"They're saving fan history one page at a time."**

That was my description of a photo I sent to Mike Glycer for the [File770.com](http://File770.com) newsblog. There was nothing even remotely woohoo-ish about what was going on for the other major online fanzine archive. Or maybe there was. The Fanac Fan History Project has also been archiving fanzines, lots and lots of them, at its [fanac.org](http://fanac.org) website. Whereas [efanzines.com](http://efanzines.com) caters mostly to current-day fanzine publishers, the [fanac.org](http://fanac.org) online collection consists largely of fanzines that had been published decades ago. Until recently, all of these old fanzines had been digitized as image files for historical accuracy sake. Which meant that there had been no way to do text searches of those fanzines' contents. But that's now changed. There is a relatively new software program called 'FineReader' which can process an image file containing text and convert it into a searchable PDF file. This is truly game-changing for researchers as many of the old fanzines archived at [fanac.org](http://fanac.org) are newszines, some of them dating back more than 80 years. Converting them from image files into searchable PDFs, as was happening right then and there at the Dublin Worldcon, was definitely gosh-wow. If you're a fan historian, that is.



Joe Siclari, Edie Stern, and Mark Olson at the [Fanac Fan History Project](http://fanac.org) table

Fanac was represented at the Dublin Worldcon by three of its founders: Joe Siclari, Edie Stern, and Mark Olson. They usually do special activities at Worldcons, but in Dublin they were concentrating almost entirely on fanzine preservation. Physical archives of old fanzines exist at several locations in the British Isles, and some of these ancient fan publications were brought to the Worldcon so that they could be scanned into searchable PDFs. Which is a time-consuming process. So much so that to do all the scanning, Mark, Joe, or Edie (and quite often all three of them) were usually anchored to the Fanac table in the concourse area of the convention. But there was some serendipity in that arrangement – since they weren't always able to go to other parts of the convention, the convention came to them instead. All convention long the Fanac table became a temporal nexus, where fans who had been prominent in previous eras stopped by to visit. It was a good place to find old friends.



Nicki with our old friend Perry Middlemiss at the Fanac Fan History Project table

The concourse area was not as large as for some other Worldcons, but there was still a lot that was going on. The Dealers Room occupied most of the space, with tables for special interest groups such as the Fanac Fan History Project set up around the periphery. Right across from the Fanac table was site selection for the 2021 Worldcon and that turned out to be a high traffic area. There have been Worldcons where site selection has been a contest between two, three, and sometimes even four competing bids, but not this time. The only bidder, and the ultimate winner, was the D.C. committee, and for the first time ever since Nicki and I have been attending these conventions there will be a Worldcon that we can travel to via local public transportation. Maybe they'll let me be on more panels than just one.



the busy-as-a-bee site selection tables

### **“Is it still possible for ordinary people like us to change the world?”**

I was moderator for my lone panel of the convention and it wasn't scheduled until the next-to-last day of the convention, so I had plenty of time to figure out how I wanted it to go. The title was “How Science and Ordinary People Can Change the Future”. Which really didn't make sense to me – how can you change the future if it hasn't yet happened? So instead, I kept the topic in the present with my opening question and invited my panelists to comment on it. And very quickly the panel became focused on the concept of citizen science – what can the common man (or woman) do to advance science and technology? There are many examples of this



throughout recorded history, of people who did make a difference, be it in good or bad ways: Fritz Haber, Ada Lovelace, Robert Goddard, George Washington Carver, and Richard Gatling, for instance, all did things or devised inventions which have had profound effects on civilization.

It was pointed out that today, the Internet has pretty much changed the concept of citizen science. It's no longer 'science by the common man'. Instead, it's become 'science by the masses'. In this era of Big Data and powerful personal computers,



my "How Science and Technology Can Change the Future" panel  
(l-r) Bo Balder, Klaus Mogensen, me, and Gerald Kilby

there are discoveries out there to be made and theories to be substantiated (or in some cases refuted) simply by sifting through enormous amounts of information that has been collected and archived over the years. One of the most obvious examples of this is 'SETI@home', where an army of volunteers have been using their PCs and Macs to download and analyze radio telescope data to look for signals from alien civilizations. And there are many other citizen science initiatives – 'Planet Hunters'. for example, allows volunteers to examine light curves of stars recorded by the Kepler Space Telescope, which has resulted in the discovery of many new extrasolar planets. And closer to home, 'Asteroid Zoo' has had volunteers looking at photographs from the Catalina Sky Survey and the Hubble Telescope to look for moving objects that could be as yet undiscovered asteroids. There are literally dozens of Internet-based citizen science initiatives, and not only in astronomy. And it was truly enlightening to find out, from a show of hands, that more than half of the attendees of the panel had participated in these kinds of crowdsourced projects.

It was a good panel, with knowledgeable people on either side of me and a large, interactive audience. It was also one of the more informative roundtable discussions I've ever participated in, which made it easy for me to close the panel by answering my own question: "Yes, it's *absolutely* possible for people like us to change the world!" The millions of people who participate in citizen science initiatives obviously believe so, too.

I found it a bit ironic that my one panel was part of the science track of programming, when just about all of my activity in fandom has to do with fanzines and fan history. There were a lot of panels devoted to that, including the very first one of the convention. It had the attention-getting title "Fanzines Now!" with a description that asked the question: "What are the best new fanzines, and what classic fanzines are still putting out new content?" The panelists all seemed to me up to the task of taking on this topic, as two of them had actually published non-media fanzines while the other three had been involved in other kinds of science fiction publications and at least knew what fanzines were. Or maybe they really didn't, because much of the discussion centered on blogs.

Just about everybody has hot button issues. One of mine is the growing belief in fandom that a blog, where a single web page is updated with new material as time goes on, is the same thing as a fanzine. No, it isn't! Fanzines are discrete publications, and there's nothing discrete about an online journal that's constantly changing. And yet, ever since about 2014, blogs have

succeeded in mostly hijacking the ‘Best Fanzine’ Hugo Award category even though the eligibility rules state that to be considered, a fanzine must have at least four issues published. For the Dublin Worldcon, the ‘Best Fanzine’ finalists consisted of one fanzine and five blogs. Really good blogs, but blogs nonetheless. So, in the Q&A part of the panel, I found myself compelled to point this out.

I wasn’t surprised that some of the panelists took potshots at my opinion and it was a bit disappointing that one of the fanzine publishers, John Coxon, was a potshooter. (I think I’m going to have to improve my powers of persuasion since I can’t even bring a true fanzine



the “Fanzines Now!” panel. (l-r) Joe Siclari, John Coxon, Phoebe Wagner, Greg Hullender, and Philippa Ryder

publisher over to my side.) But I *was* gratified that one of the blog publishers, Greg Hullender, showed some understanding. He is co-editor of *Rocket Stack Rank*, which does great service to science fiction readers by reviewing current short fiction and, indeed, was one of the six ‘Best Fanzine’ finalists in Dublin. After the panel concluded I was able to briefly chat with Greg and urged him to consider publishing a digest fanzine every month, collecting the best of the reviews with some new transitional contextual remarks to tie it all together. I think it would be an awesome publication, and I’m counting it as a win that he said he would consider doing that. I’ll take my victories, even the small ones, whenever I can get them.

### “Mi showxa xunyam Lang Belta.” (“I speak a little Lang Belta.”)

Actually Nicki and I don’t, but that didn’t stop us from sitting in on what was possibly the most unusual panel of the Worldcon – a **full immersion** workshop on Lang Belta, the language of *The Expanse*. Or make that ‘standing in’, since the workshop was so full that every seat in the room was taken. But the event happened late enough in the convention that by then the traffic police had relaxed the rules on room occupancy. Or maybe they were just looking the other way when we made our late entry.



in the Lang Belta full immersion workshop

*The Expanse*, as I hope most everyone is aware by now, is an immensely popular series of science fiction novels that has been successfully transitioned over into a really good television series. It’s space opera, which is usually considered a derogatory term, I know, but in this case it’s really sense-of-wonder inducing. The main storyline follows what happens when a fragile truce between the three major powers of the solar system, Earth, Mars, and the Outer Planets



Alliance (a.k.a. ‘the Belters’), is threatened by a conspiracy involving the discovery and weaponizing of an alien infectious agent, the so-called ‘protomolecule’.

One of the things that makes both the novels and the TV series as good as they are is the painstaking attention to detail by the novels’ authors and the TV series’ showrunners. And not only for the space science stuff but societal aspects as well. The Belters are depicted as having their own language, a Creole called ‘Lang Belta’ that’s somewhat derived from English but with many bits and pieces from several other languages fused in. It was originally created for the novel series by Nick Farmer, a linguist and author who lives in California, but the language is continuing to grow and evolve with help from its users.

The description of the workshop stated that: “This course will give you hands-on practice, teaching you to understand spoken Lang Belta and to produce new, original Belta sentences of your own.” And it really did, though the one-hour time allotment didn’t allow for getting very much past the basics. Nicki and I had never taken part in a full immersion language workshop before and I was afraid that we’d be completely lost after about ten minutes, but it turned out to be easier than we had expected. The two moderators made use of visual aids to help things along, and by the end of the hour I felt confident enough that I participated in one of the practice dialog sessions. As we were leaving we were given a cheat sheet of Lang Belta phrases, should we ever be thinking of taking a trip to the asteroid Ceres. Given that it was after 5:00pm, one phrase seemed apropos: “Ketim ora xush du sherú?” (“When does the Happy Hour start?”) As the saying goes, it’s always five o’clock somewhere, even all the way out in the Belt.

The Dublin Worldcon actually had its own pub, Martin’s, named in honour of the late Martin Hoare, a noted British fan who often hosted real ale bars at conventions he helped organize. It was located on the third floor of the Convention Centre and, as expected, it turned out to be a popular albeit loud hangout. Nicki and I were there on the final night of the convention watching the video feed from the Hugo Awards event when we noticed that the speech recognition software they were using was doing wonky things that made some of the closed captioning more than a bit strange and at times unintentionally humorous. Which prevented us from taking notice that Jeannette Ng blew up the Awards Ceremony.



watching the Hugo Awards Ceremony video feed in Martin’s

She was the winner of the John W. Campbell Award for Best New Writer, and in her acceptance speech she heatedly called out Campbell, who has been considered one of the science fiction genre’s most respected and influential editors: “John W. Campbell, for whom this award was named, was a fucking fascist. ... He was responsible for setting a tone for science fiction

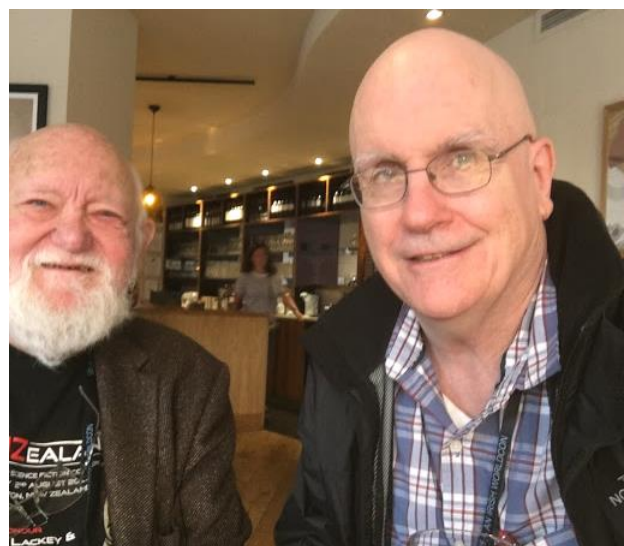
which haunts this genre to this very day. Sterile. Male. White. Exalting the ambitions of imperialists and colonizers, settlers and industrialists.” She later went on to say that Campbell, who edited *Astounding Science Fiction* back in the 1940s and had published stories by famous authors such as Isaac Asimov and Robert A. Heinlein, probably would not have published any of her fiction. Which might very well be accurate, though maybe not because she is a woman of color. Her acclaimed debut novel *Under the Pendulum Sun* is a lot more fantasy than science fiction. Under Campbell, *Astounding* published hundreds of science fiction stories and essentially zero fantasy. But be that as it may, she was actually right that Campbell’s character (as displayed by some of his editorials in *Astounding*) does have the appearance of being bigoted and atrocious – during the 1960s his essays at times took on racist viewpoints such as supporting segregated schools and claiming that slavery had actually been a *good* thing because slaves in the antebellum American South had a higher standard of living than they would have had in their African homelands. And yet...

And yet, just three days earlier, that same John W. Campbell had been voted the ‘Best Editor’ Retrospective Hugo Award for the year 1944 by the same Worldcon membership that went on to raucously applaud Ng’s angry acceptance speech. It was presented by former Ace Books editor-in-chief Ginjer Buchanan, and when Campbell’s grandson came onstage to accept the award he received a warm ovation from the large audience that was present. Go figure.

### “Mmmmm.... This looks good!”

I made that remark to Nicki about the cottage pie we had for lunch. Besides the beer there was food available in Martin’s, and also in other parts of the Convention Centre, and we found that it exceeded our expectations. By a lot. But the best meals were still in places outside the convention. One of them was a little café intriguingly named the Insomnia Coffee Company, which was located on the walking route to the multiplex. There was good stuff to drink, but even better was the apple tart which was so tasty and filling that Nicki and I didn’t need much supper after that. There was also an above-average Italian restaurant, Milano, which was only a very short walk from the Convention Centre. I had dinner there three times, twice with Nicki and once with my Australian friend Robin Johnson.

Robin is arguably Australia’s most renowned science fiction fan. He was Chair of the 1975 Aussiecon, which was the first time a Worldcon had been staged Down Under, and he was a Guest of Honor at Aussiecon Four back in 2010. He has become the elder statesman of Australian fandom, and is truly a joy to be around. Nicki and I have known Robin for many years but as far away as he lives from us, Worldcons are the only times we ever cross paths. So it was very much a pleasure to have the opportunity to share a meal with him and exchange some of our travel and convention stories. And talk about places yet to be visited. There still are many, even at our ages.



at dinner with Robin Johnson



After programming ended each day, some of the meeting rooms were used for parties which promoted bids for future Worldcons. There was stuff to eat in those as well, though it mostly turned out to be snack food. The best party we attended was actually sited about a mile away from the convention. And for Nicki, it featured one of her favorite foods: chili.

This was the 45<sup>th</sup> year that Keith Kato has hosted a chili party. He started it back when he was new to fandom, out in Los Angeles, as he had thought it would be a good way to meet fans and authors. It proved to be so big a success that over the years it has acquired a life of its own, and it's now one of the premiere parties at Worldcons. It's not private, but it's also not publicized and we found out about it by word of mouth. Kato is a Past President of The Heinlein Society which uses the party to help publicize their activities, and this year the Center for Ray Bradbury Studies also was a co-sponsor. He wasn't able to reach agreement with the Convention Centre for a room to site the party, so instead he found a place out in the city. And a famous place it was – the childhood home of the famous Irish poet and playwright, Oscar Wilde.



bust of Oscar Wilde  
inside his childhood home



Amy Thomson, Nicki, and Edd Vick at the chili party

It's now owned by the American College Dublin, and it functions as both an academic center and a cultural museum of sorts. It's open to outsiders only for advanced-booked group tours of 25 or more and for private functions, so Nicki and I considered the chili party a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to visit the place. I discovered, too late, that there are docent tours, but we were actually there to soak in some of the historical ambience of the place as much as to eat. And also to reconnect with friends that we do not see very often anymore.

For us, Worldcons are great events for reconnecting with old friends. And they are really about the only means we have of meeting up with science fiction fan friends who live in faraway places. It was a pleasant surprise, for instance, to find Amy Thomson and Edd Vick at the chili party. We've known them for many decades, going way back to when they were single and aspiring writers. They're now married to each other and are both successful writers, Amy a winner of the John W. Campbell Award back in 1994. Edd was using the event to celebrate the publication his new fiction anthology, *True Love and Other Lies*. And, geez, neither looked to have aged very much in all those years. Which seems appropriate, now that I come to think of it. Oscar Wilde wrote a fantasy novel, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, which describes one way to avoid aging. I'm wondering if I should have asked if they have a painting of themselves up in their attic.

### “Finally, a Janice Gelb sighting!”

That was my caption for a photo that I sent to Mike Glyer from the Fan Funds Auction. Janice is also an old friend – Nicki and I have known her for more than 30 years – but she’s not the easiest person to find at a Worldcon. And that’s because she is a Program Ops maven – she has become famous within science fiction fandom for becoming so deeply involved at the program operations room during Worldcons, helping to oversee the myriad number of last-minute changes to the programming that invariably happen, that she rarely comes up for air. So it was almost a shock to see her at the auction. She was one of the ‘runners’, the auctioneer helpers who take items up for bid around the room for closer inspection by prospective bidders. But I don’t think she saw me, even though at one point she was just a few steps away.



Janice Gelb at the Fan Funds auction

Janice is an American expat who now lives in Australia, and is married to another well-known Aussie fan, Stephen Boucher. He was also so deeply involved in the nuts-and-bolts of making the Dublin Worldcon happen that I didn’t catch sight of him until literally the last few minutes of the convention. While most of the fans still there, late on that final day, were ensconced in the Convention Center’s auditorium taking in the closing ceremonies, a very weary-looking Stephen showed up in the nearly deserted entrance foyer, where registration and badging had been ongoing almost nonstop for several days, to decompress and relax a bit. And then he was gone again, like a wraith, on his way to meet up with Janice somewhere.



Stephen Boucher appears!  
OK, the convention can end now...

And soon after that Nicki and I were gone too, taking a taxi back to our hotel so we could get a start on preparing for the next day’s flight back to the States. It had been a magnificent ten days in Dublin, filled with memorable things we’d seen and done.

And it hadn’t even rained that much!



## “Would I want to live in Dublin?”

I think I asked myself that several times during the trip. Lots of European cities are expensive places to live but the part of Dublin out where we stayed seemed reasonably affordable. One of the streets near our hotel looked like all the row houses there had been rehabbed and typical prices for that kind of residence, after I checked, are in the \$250-400K range. True, there would have to be some changes of lifestyle, in particular some rather significant downsizing, and from what I could see the only air conditioning available would be to open an upstairs window and let in the breeze. But we probably wouldn't need a car! That's gotta count for something.

Nicki and I know that's not going to happen – we like living where we are too much. But even though we won't be moving to Ireland, we may yet find ourselves there again someday. And next time, we'll plan for seeing more of the country than just its capital city. But for this trip, we're left with many, many pleasant memories of what we did get to see and do. And that includes the times we got to talk to the local residents.

A good place for doing that turned out to be Peadar Browns. Our first time there we sat at the bar next to a middle age gent who struck up a conversation by wondering why I was drinking a lager instead of a Guinness. (I replied that I was working my way up toward that by sampling some of the other local brews first.) Turns out that he is a long-haul trucker whose travels have taken him through many parts of Europe. He had married a Polish woman who also drove trucks, and their son also has become a trucker – in the United States! We had intended to stay only a little while to take in some of the live music there that evening, but the conversation was so pleasant that we hadn't even noticed when the musicians finished their set, packed up and left.

In the end we went home wishing we had done a bit more, as is usually the case with a good vacation trip. But what we did get to experience was fabulous – the history, the glorious old buildings, the Irish culture and folklore, the culinary delights, and the people. Not only that, there was also this huge, interesting convention where we shared many pleasant moments with friends too seldom seen. Truly memorable.

It all happened in Dublin's fair city. ☀

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## Afterword:

There will most likely be another Worldcon in Dublin in 2029 and if Nicki and I are still able I'm pretty sure we'll want to go back there. As for the 2019 visit, I mentioned that I had spotted a small historical marker on Fishamble Street that denoted the location of a now-demolished music hall where, in 1742, the debut of a very famous oratorio took place. The equally-famous composer of the work was the subject of an essay I wrote back in 2005 in celebration of his 321<sup>st</sup> birthday. Here it is again...



one of the many colorful row house fronts on a street near our hotel

# Happy Birthday to a Legendary Composer of Fire and Water

Today is the birthday of the famous Baroque era composer George Frideric Handel (1684-1759), who was born nearly a third of a millennium ago in the Saxony town of Halle in central Germany. His parents were not musically inclined so it is fortunate that, by about age 10, they found that the boy had a real



George Frideric Handel (portrait by Thomas Hudson)

talent for and interest in music. What followed next was several years of informal instruction from the town organist, and by his mid teens Handel's abilities had evolved to the point where he became seriously interested in composing. In 1703, when he was 18, Handel moved to the city of Hamburg, then the operatic focal point in Germany, where he finished his first opera the following year. Following that, on the invitation of Prince Ferdinando de' Medici, son and heir of the Grand Duke of Tuscany, it was on to Italy for several years where he enjoyed both success as a composer of operas and oratorios as well as (more importantly) patronage from the nobility there.

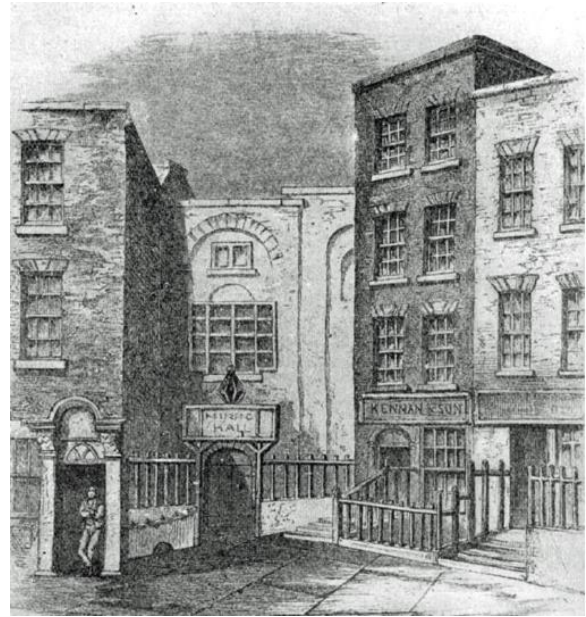
Handel returned to Germany in 1710 to take the position of court composer and conductor in Hanover, but within a year he had left that for greener pastures, this time in London, where he lived for the rest of his life. His life in England might have very well have been difficult – not long after he moved there his former benefactor in Hanover became King George I of England, and the new king was a bit displeased that Handel had left Hanover so abruptly. What reconciled them was an orchestral composition Handel debuted for the king during a royal party on a barge in the Thames River in 1717, and it remains famous and popular to this day – the first *Water Music* suite.

After that, the road to success and prosperity was secure for Handel. He became a naturalized British subject in 1738, and the two decades before that were mostly spent writing operas and oratorios. But it wasn't until 1742 that Handel achieved his greatest success in what is the most famous oratorio of all time. Handel had received, in 1741, an invitation from the Lord Lieutenant in Dublin, Ireland, to write a new oratorio for debut there the following April. It was to be religious in theme, so Handel wrote it in three sections, about the birth, passion, and



resurrection of Christ. Some of the libretto was derived from the Bible and some from the Church of England *Book of Common Prayer*. It became known as *Messiah*.

After that, Handel's compositions were mostly oratorios, and he wrote them at a prodigious rate of about two per year. He still found time for some orchestral compositions, though, and in 1749 created another ever-famous and popular work, the *Music for the Royal Fireworks*, for a festival in celebration of the Treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle that ended the War of the Austrian Succession. About 1751, Handel started to lose his eyesight due to encroaching cataracts. Medical science was not advanced to the point where it could provide any help, and, indeed, a series of operations that attempted to save his vision instead left him completely blind. After that he was still able to continue to conduct orchestras, and also (with the aid of a close friend) revise some of his earlier compositions. But on April 6, 1759, he became ill while conducting a performance of *Messiah* and died a few days later. Thousands attended his funeral and according to his wishes, he was buried at Westminster Abbey.



drawing of the now-demolished Neale's Musick Hall, where Handel's "Messiah" was first performed

As you might expect, the legacy of George Frideric Handel is huge, almost larger than life: according to one biographer, "The wide range of expression at [Handel's] command is shown not only in the operas, with their rich and varied arias, but also in the form he created, the English oratorio, where it is applied to the fates of nations as well as individuals." Instead, I think I prefer what another biographer wrote: "Handel's legacy lies in the dramatic power and lyrical beauty inherent in all his music." More than a quarter of a millennium after his death, his music remains timeless and immortal. And it will no doubt remain so for at least the next quarter of a millennium. ☀

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## Afterword:

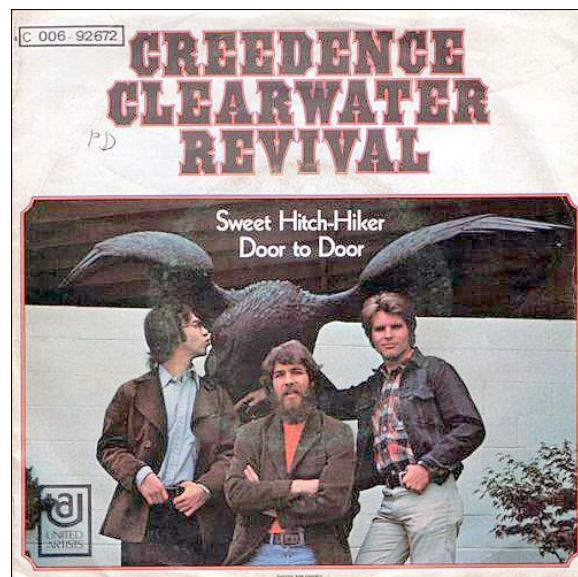
I've read that every year on the anniversary of the first performance of *Messiah*, there is a free public performance of it out on Fishamble Street near where the Musick Hall once stood. It's sponsored by the Dublin City Council and features one of Dublin's Choral Societies accompanied by the city's Handelian Orchestra. And as you might expect, it's an immensely popular event that draws a crowd large enough to fill the street. It must be an amazing spectacle, and I'm actually a little bit surprised that none of the after-hours musical events at the Dublin Worldcon attempted their own recreations.

Sixteen years prior to Dublin was another memorable Worldcon, this one in Toronto. It was especially so for Nicki and me, as we were presented our sixth "Best Fanzine" Hugo (for *Mimosa*). But what made it *really* memorable for me was that on the way back home after the convention, we stopped to visit an old college friend whom I'd not seen in many decades – as you'll read next, not since I'd taken an epic trip of a different sort.

# Won't You Give a Poor Boy a Ride?

I'd been noodling around on Google, exploring random rabbit holes of information about some of my favorite rock groups of the 1960s and 1970s, when I landed on the music video of "Sweet Hitch-Hiker" by Creedence Clearwater Revival. It was a pleasant three minutes that took me back to my youth. And after all these years, provided some clarity. I like the singing voice of John Fogerty but at times the lyrics of CCR songs can be a bit difficult to decipher due to his twangy accent, so the closed captioning feature of video finally helped me to figure out the complete narrative of the song. And partway through there was this lyric:

*"Was busted up along the highway. / I'm the saddest ridin' fool alive. / Wondering if you're goin' my way. / Won't you give a poor boy a ride?"*



And that brought me to remember back to my one-and-only experience with long-distance hitchhiking.

It happened in 1972, when I was a graduate student at Clarkson College up in the wilds of New York State's North Country. There was a long Summer weekend and I had several days where I didn't need to be involved with either classes or research. So I decided I wanted to travel downstate to spend time with my friend Jeff Mahr. We'd both graduated from Clarkson a couple of years earlier and, like me, he was also a graduate student but at a college a few hundred miles away from where I was. I'd met him as an undergraduate when he and I had swapped roommates (and the less I remember about that the better). And when we discovered we'd been born on the exact same day it created a bond of sorts that quickly became friendship.

Back then I didn't yet own a car so there were really only two possible ways to make the trip – Greyhound and hitchhiking. But that narrowed down to one after I perused the bus schedules and found out how bad they were for my needs. So hitchhike it would be! I had the advantage of tapping into the experience of my brother, who had done some hitching a few months earlier, and the best piece of advice I got from him was: carry a destination sign. More specifically, DO NOT get out there and just stick out your thumb – drivers would be much more apt to stop for someone who let them know upfront where he wants to go. I took that guidance one better and made a sequence of signs for possible drop-off points along the way, as I couldn't really expect a straight-through ride from whoever would stop to pick me up.

It mostly worked! It took maybe five minutes to get my first ride, which took me all the way down to an Interstate exit about 20 miles north of Syracuse. There was pleasant conversation along the way and I remember thinking to myself that this was really easy! But after that...

It took a long time before I got my next lift, and it was almost with a Sheriff's deputy. He drove up and saw me loitering at the top of the Interstate on-ramp, and then asked me a few



pointed questions about what I was doing. I stretched the truth a bit by saying that I was expecting a ride from a friend, but that it was starting to look like he wasn't going to appear. He then told me, in no uncertain terms, that hitchhiking was illegal and that I needed to leave the area. To which I replied, "That's what I'm trying to do!" I remember that he smiled at that and pointed me toward the nearby state road that paralleled the Interstate, and said that I might have better luck there. And I did. The rest of the hitch, including the return a couple of days later, went pretty much without incident.

The weekend with my friend Jeff also went pretty well, with lots of talk and beer-drinking, and I stayed at his parents' house in a spare bedroom. It was many years after that before I next saw him, though we did keep in touch by mail for several years before we fell out of contact after one of his many job-related moves. Eventually the World Wide Web came into existence and with it, a means to re-connect. It was in 2003 when for no particular reason I decided to see if anyone I knew in college had an online presence, and it took maybe all of three minutes before I located him and his contact information. (I then emailed him, "Are you you?" and he responded: "As far as I know.")

He and his family were living in a suburb of Syracuse, which turned out to be pretty convenient as it was directly on the way home from the Toronto Worldcon. And it was a pleasant stopover for Nicki and me. He insisted we stay for dinner, a cookout of some very fine steaks. We spent a lot of time talking about what we'd been doing over the years. And then it was time to leave. We did keep in touch after that, though it was mostly via annual holiday cards. Until one year, when instead of a card Nicki and I received a letter from his widow.



visiting my friend Jeff in 2003

I miss Jeff and I'm always going to. And I regret never visiting him again. But I still have all the memories from way back then. A few months after that hitchhiking adventure I finally bought myself a car – a beat-up 1963 Ford Falcon which had the propensity of breaking down in out-of-the-way places so often that I named her Pauline, as in 'The Perils of Pauline'. But you know, no drive I've ever taken, in Pauline or any other car, has been as epic as that memorable 1972 hitchhike. ☀

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## Afterword:

As I mentioned earlier, Nicki and I won't be attending this year's Worldcon in Glasgow. Nor did we attend the 2023 Worldcon in China. And we also didn't go to the 2022 Worldcon in Chicago. Of the three, Chicon 8 is by far the one I feel most badly about, especially since two of the **fanac.org** founders were Guests of Honor. We had attending memberships, but Nicki was still recovering from a cardiac procedure she'd undergone a couple of weeks earlier and at that point of the pandemic we were still a bit hesitant to immerse ourselves in large crowds. The best I could do, a couple of days before the convention, was to write a fan historical essay for **File770.com** that looked back toward one of the earliest Chicago Worldcons to remember one of the many notable fans of that era.

# The Fan Who Had a Disease Named After Him

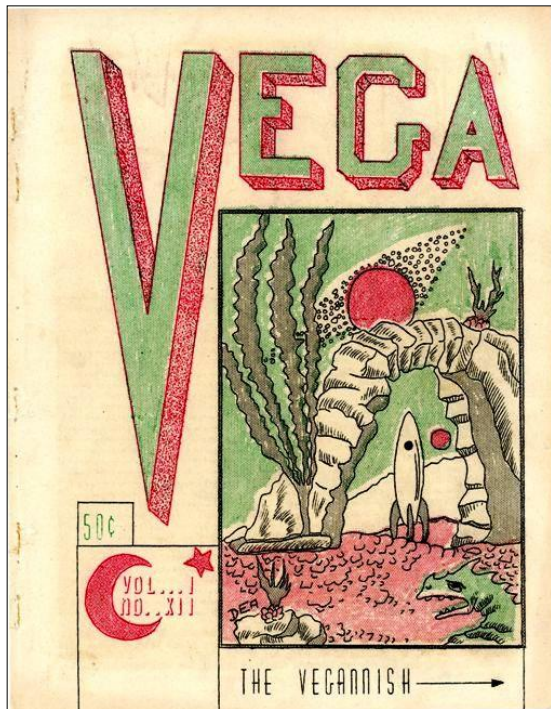
Once in a while, just for the fun of it, I do Internet research to find out what happened to science fiction fans who were active in past decades. And with Chicon 8 now looming on the temporal horizon it seems appropriate to tell you about someone whose relatively brief stay in fandom began in the same year as the second Chicon.

His name is Joel Nydahl, and back about the time of that Chicon he was a 14-year-old neofan who lived with his parents on a farm near Marquette, Michigan. He was an avid science fiction reader and at some point in 1952 decided to publish a fanzine. It was a good one.

He named it *Vega*, after the bright star, and after a modest first few issues it gained enough acclaim where he was able to get contributions from some of the most famous fans of the day: Marion Zimmer Bradley, Dean Grennell, Juanita Wellons, Lynn Hickman, Ted White, Bill Venable, Jack Harness, Wilkie Conner, Fred Chappell, Shelby Vick, Gregg Calkins, Bob Tucker, Robert Bloch, Bob Silverberg, and Harlan Ellison. By the middle of 1953, *Vega* had become known as the best monthly fanzine and for a crowning achievement (after huge amounts



Joel Nydahl in 1953



cover of the Vegannish

of effort and no small expense) Nydahl published his 12<sup>th</sup> issue as an over-the-top ‘annish’ to mark a full year of its existence. At 100 pages of top-notch material and with a wonderful three-color cover by Margaret Dominick it was something the likes of which had rarely ever been seen in fandom before.

But there had been a cost. Even though it had resulted in “letters of the wildest praise”, as Nydahl described it, there was never another issue after that – he dropped from sight and departed fandom. Nydahl much later wrote that “I remember only that once the Vegannish was in the mail, I had no interest in putting out a thirteenth issue; nor, strangely, did I have an urge to read any more science fiction.” His departure from fandom was so precipitous that the cause became known as Nydahl’s Disease, which according to Fancyclopedia 3 is “the diagnosis of any fan who gafiates amid or immediately after any big fannish project”.



Nothing further was heard from Nydahl for another 48 years and then, at the 2001 Philadelphia Worldcon, he resurfaced. Several weeks prior to the convention he had been located by an Internet search and had then been contacted via email by both Robert Lichtman and Ted White. This had intrigued him sufficiently to where he decided to attend Philcon because, as he described it, he found he was interested “in meeting old friends and rehashing old times with individuals whom I fondly remembered”. Nydahl was at the convention for only one day, but his presence was almost immediately noticed with amazement by several fanzine publishers and fan historians who were there. And after that he was gone again, back to his life in mundania as head of the English Department at Broward College in Florida. But he left us all a parting gift, an article in Lichtman’s fanzine *Trap Door* (issue 21, March 2002) which described in detail his brief career in fandom and what he had experienced during his one day at Philcon. It’s a good read.

And now, twenty years later, I found Joel Nydahl’s obituary in a web search – he had passed away on May 15, 2019 “following a brief illness”. Turns out that after departing fandom in 1953 he had turned his attention to academia and other interests. Following graduation from high school he went on to earn a degree in English from the University of Michigan and some years later a doctorate in American Studies. His obit describes him as having had a “sense of adventure and curiosity [which] took him from his hometown of Marquette, MI, to more than 15 countries around the world where he lived and taught English”. The obit concluded by stating that: “Joel had a terrific sense of humor, occasional corny jokes included, was a loving and sensitive husband and will be greatly missed and always loved by his wife and their many friends.”



Joel Nydahl later in life

I’m glad I got to meet him, if only briefly – I was one of those amazed fan publishers and fan historians at Philcon. We talked just for a couple of minutes, as he was heading off to try to find someone he knew during his days in fandom. I remember that Ted White took a photo of the two of us, but alas I can no longer find it. No matter, the memory of the encounter is enough.

I’m writing this because I want you all to remember him too. Vicariously, in this case, as I very much doubt there are many people left in fandom who have ever met him in person. Joel Nydahl was one of the many notable fans of the fabulous 1950s, and fandom was blessed by his presence. He was a bright shining star – just like Vega. ☀

(Note: You can read Joel Nydahl’s *Trap Door* essay at [fanac.org](https://www.fanac.org): [https://www.fanac.org/fanzines/Trap\\_Door/Trap\\_Door21.pdf](https://www.fanac.org/fanzines/Trap_Door/Trap_Door21.pdf). Issues of *Vega* are also online at [fanac.org](https://fanac.org): <https://fanac.org/fanzines/Vega/> )

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## Afterword:

I received a nice comment on the essay from Melanie Stormm, who told me that: “This was wonderful, Rich. Thanks for paying such an appropriate tribute.” And Ted White added an important correction: “Rich left out one important fact: Joel had a story published in the prozine *Imagination* when he was 14. I envied him that at the time.”

One more essay to end this issue. The fabulous 1950s can rightly be described as fandom’s Golden Age, and Joel Nydahl was just one of the many noteworthy fans of that decade. Another was Les Cole, who had an entirely different sort of claim to fame. An *actual* claim, in fact.

# The Man Who Claimed the Moon

It was back on Christmas day that an email from an old friend arrived which provided some sad news. Esther Cole let me know that: “You probably know that Les died in late September. He had been very sick for a long time. Still, he hung on, and was 93 when I kissed him goodbye, the night before he died.”

I actually hadn't known, and apparently neither had anybody else in science fiction fandom. Esther had not sent an obit to the local newspaper and Ventura is far enough off the beaten track, at least for most fans, that I may have been the first person in fandom to learn of Les's passing. We had been friends for a long time.

It was back in 1991 that I first became acquainted with Lester and Esther Cole. I was doing some research for a new edition of Harry Warner, Jr.'s book *A Wealth of Fable*, an informal history of 1950s science fiction fandom, and had contacted them to gather additional information about the 1954 World Science Fiction Convention, which had been held in San Francisco that year. (Les had been co-chair and Esther the treasurer.) It was two years later, at the 1993 Worldcon (also in San Francisco), that Nicki and I got to meet them – they had attended to participate in several discussion panels about fandom from that fabulous decade of the 1950s. I was moderator for the panel about the '54 Worldcon and I remember that it was highly informative and also really entertaining, so much so that I am hoping that an audio recording will someday surface.



Esther and Lester Cole  
at the 1954 Worldcon

Nicki and I became friends with the Coles at the 1993 Worldcon, and following the convention we persuaded them to contribute essays to our fanzine *Mimosa*. Esther's appeared in the 16<sup>th</sup> issue, in December 1994, and described the half century that she and Lester had been science fiction fans. It was titled, appropriately, “I Married a Science Fiction” and evoked a comment from another fanzine publisher that this was the kind of article he would want to build an issue around. But it was Les' article, which appeared in the 18<sup>th</sup> issue in May 1995, which was of even greater historical interest because it provided an inside story about the time, in February 1952, when the Little Men's science fiction club of Berkeley, California (of which he was President) had staked a claim for a tract of land on the moon. It had resulted in mainstream news coverage around the world.

And now he's gone. Nicki and I had visited the Coles several times at their home in Ventura in the years since that 1993 Worldcon, the last time in the summer of 2018 on our way up the California coast to Worldcon 76 in San Jose. Les had just returned from a short stay in the hospital and was not feeling well, so we spent most of our time talking to Esther. We departed fearing that we may not see Les again, and maybe not Esther either since we don't get out that way very often. But when I told her gently that I this might be the last time we'd ever cross paths, she just smiled and told me: “We won't let it be.”

I'm sorry that I won't be seeing Les again, and I'm missing him. But as for Esther, I'm going to try very much to make sure she is right. ☀



