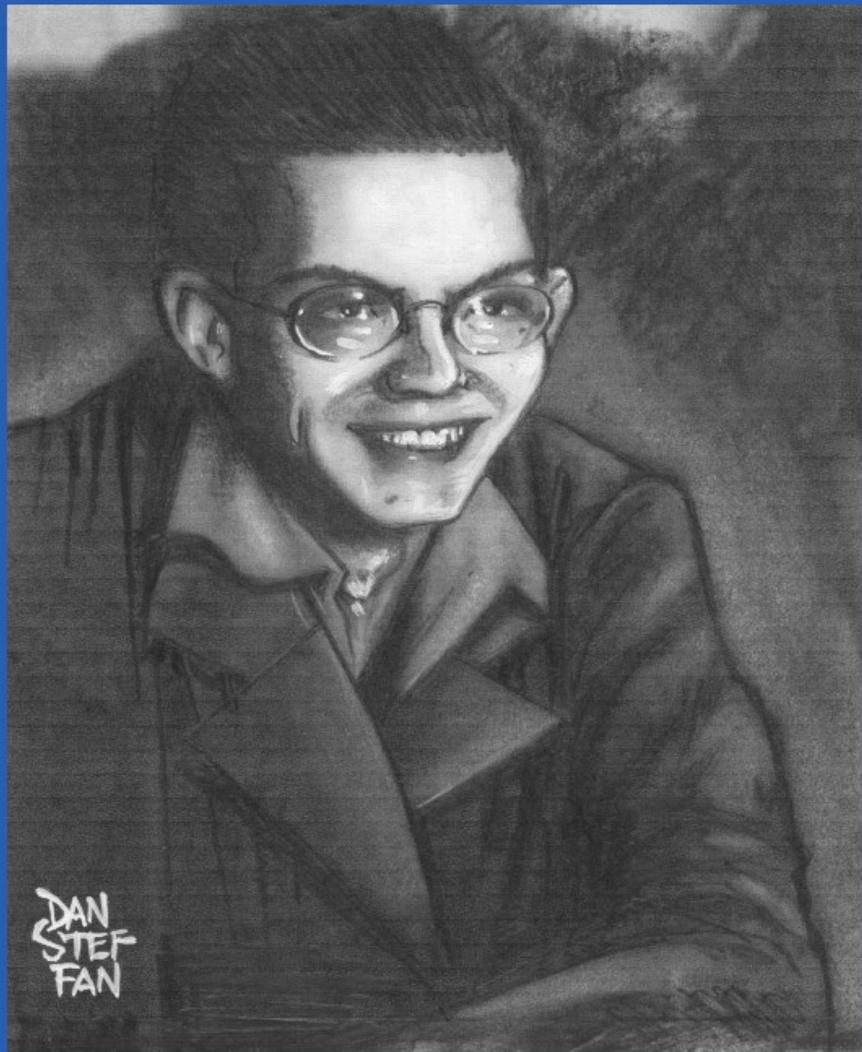


# AH! SWEET IDIOCY!



THE FAN MEMOIRS OF  
FRANCIS T. LANEY

# Ah! Sweet Idiocy!

## The Fan Memoirs of Francis T. Laney

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Cartoon of Francis T. Laney drawn by  
Virgil Partch for *Fan #1* (June 1945)  
edited by Walter J. Daugherty;  
enhanced by Dan Steffan in 2007.

# Introduction

## Harry Warner Jr

### All Our Yesterdays

Very often, today's fan is badly disappointed when he finally holds in his hands at last a copy of some famous fan publication of the past. I've heard about the disillusionment with *Spaceways* from contemporary fans who can't figure out why it used to win first place in polls during World War Two. *Quandry* was recently pooh-poohed as a badly overrated fanzine, by a fan who hadn't been active during its existence. Undoubtedly, every new fan who sees for the first time a copy of *The Enchanted Duplicator* must fight to conceal to himself or others the disappointment that he experiences to find that this scrawny and slightly inky thin booklet is the famed Willis production. There must be several causes for such reactions. In fandom as in other phases of life, too big a buildup is damaging to the topic; in imagination the unknown and desired object takes on proportions and qualities it couldn't hope to possess in actuality. Then there's the Zeitgeist factor. Today's fan can't see the famous publications of the past through yesterday's eyes. There is also a certain amount of general upgrading in the average appearance and literary quality of fan publications as the years pass. The publication that was outstanding a couple of decades ago is closer to the average of excellence today.

All this leads up to the fact that you had better resign yourself to this chilling fact: you're going to be disappointed, if you have never seen *Ah! Sweet Idiocy!*, have heard much about it, and are destined someday to put your very own eyetracks on the famed Laney memoirs. This disappointment won't last very long, once you begin to read. But you'd better be prepared for a letdown, if you have thought of this one-shot as something glittering and sublime in appearance. There is nothing in it but typing – no illustrations, no lettering guides or handdrawn headings. It is mimeographed in legible but erratic style on a poor grade of paper that is turning brown from the edges inward, even though my copy has been kept in a light-tight envelope down through the years. There are no covers and there are some typing errors and

badly corrected strikeouts. But all those dreary details are forgotten, after you've plowed through the rather tiresome four-page preamble, and immerse yourself in the account of what Laney did in fandom.

*Ah! Sweet Idiocy!* got its major distribution through FAPA. The first 72 of its 129 pages were distributed in the spring 1948 mailing, and the remainder in the summer mailing of the same year. Later, Laney sold some additional copies to non-FAPA members. I don't know if there's any truth to the legend that he never possessed a stapled copy of his fan memoirs.

If your knowledge of fan history from this era shortly after the first atom bombs is shaky, you might assume some wrong things about *Ah! Sweet Idiocy!* It is not the final summing up of Laney's fan activities. He remained on the fringes of fandom for a half-dozen years after writing it, kept in contact with a few individuals for another year or two after that. Some of his most exciting FAPA hassles, for instance, occurred after the memoirs appeared. Neither is this something startlingly new and original that Laney introduced to fandom. He was following a hallowed tradition which most fans obeyed at this particular time: when you think you've had it in fandom, do something spectacular to call attention to your gaffiation. Often this took the form of a cynical and bitter letter to this or that fanzine, or an article blasting all fandom as a useless or dangerous institution. But there was a more direct and specific predecessor to Laney's mammoth article. This was *Memoirs of a Superfluous Fan* which T. Bruce Yerke had begun to distribute in FAPA in 1944. It was never completed, but it resembles strikingly the attitudes and general purposes of *Ah! Sweet Idiocy!* Laney undoubtedly had this as an either conscious or subconscious influence, when he sat down to cut stencils in the same city, writing about many of the same individuals whom Yerke had been concerned with.

Laney's stated reason for his magnum opus can be found in the preamble: "It occurred to me that if I were to start setting down my recollections it might help my self-analysis, would certainly give me something to keep me at home and away from money-spending temptations ... And it always had seemed silly to me to write anything on paper when it is just as easy to put it on stencils." This may be the first use of a philosophy that has been reiterated endlessly in fanzines since then: When in doubt, use a stencil. Originally, Laney and Ackerman planned to publish the memoirs with Fantasy Foundation money, putting the profits from the sale of copies back into that organization. A series of personality clashes in Los Angeles

kept this from occurring. In the end, with symbolism of frightening complexity, Laney traded his copy of *The Outsider and Others* for Al Ashley's mimeograph, and Laney and Burbee became the publishers.

Despite the volume's fame, no fan has seriously toyed with the idea of reprinting it. It is so long that even with elite type, it would be an enormous amount of work. Moreover, Laney possessed a magical immunity from libel action, and it isn't likely that any reprinter would fare so well. Laney names names in many narrations about matters which would undoubtedly have caused lawsuits to rain on the head of any fan who had less ability at striking back at enemies with the typewriter. In other places, he does not identify his topic but gives enough detail for anyone to deduce who was meant, and such circumstances are normally meat for the courts, too. Even so, *Ah! Sweet Idiocy!* is packed tightly with long sections which are sheer delight to read and absolutely safe to reprint. I would guess that it could be boiled down to a 50-page reprint version that would be much milder but still agreeable, by skipping the actionable portions and the duller blow-by-blow accounts of fan politics in Los Angeles.

Particularly valuable are the little word sketches of almost everyone who did anything in Los Angeles fandom during the 1940s. You'll find nothing like them anywhere else. Typical is the one about Morojo:

"She is very short, and in my opinion, very pretty. Since she herself has listed it publicly, I'll mention in passing that she is much older than most of the club members, having been born in 1904. She has led a fairly tough life, has been married and divorced twice, and the scramble of raising a strapping son and supporting herself has left her singularly without the ability to enjoy herself freely and casually, though others enjoy her company tremendously. Her chief interest in the club was her interest with Forrest J Ackerman, with whom she kept company for several years, and I hope he fully recognizes the extent of her services to him – keeping the club on a smooth financial keel throughout most of her membership, doing most of the drudgery of *VOM* and other Ackerman projects, and keeping the wolves from yapping about his heels in a score of other ways. Myrtle has an inquiring mind which is somewhat hampered by a too-conventional education, and thus is sometimes a sucker for something the least bit on the crackpot side. She is, however, an accomplished and stimulating conversationalist, and is well worth

knowing from the intellectual point of view. And beneath that occasionally austere facade, there is one of the most kind hearted persons in Los Angeles, as plenty of club members past and present could testify. She is the first person most of the older members think of when they are in trouble, and in this selfish civilization people like that are rare.”

Don't be astonished that this contains no awful disclosures about some nastiness. The person whom *Ah! Sweet Idiocy!* criticizes most severely is Francis T. Laney. He is very frank at describing the faults of others, but obviously was fond of most of them, makes it very clear that he likes Ackerman immensely after all the fusses, and he seems mainly sorry that these fine people have been led to do stupid things in fandom. The preamble even tries to bind up some of the wounds that E. Everett Evans receives from the pages in which Laney knocks him down and tramps on him. The preamble was written after the rest of the book, at a time when FTL had just learned about some extenuating circumstances involving EEE. But he is absolutely merciless toward his own failings, imagined or real. Sometimes he can look at them with amusement, such as what happened when he first discovered Merritt novels in the Munsey reprint magazines: “I started reading them. Meanwhile, nature called me, and I carried the darned magazines into the bathroom with me. Utterly oblivious to where I was and what I was doing, I sat there on that WC nearly all night, utterly lost in Graydon's weird adventures. When I finally finished *Snake Mother*, the spell broke, I tried to stand up, and was so cramped and cold that my legs would not support me. I collapsed into a heap, and lay there on the floor laughing at myself for being such a damned fool.” Some of his other anecdotes are less amusing, when he clinically describes how he rigged a FAPA election to make certain that his candidates would win, or the bad light that he casts on himself in his version of his troubles with his wife.

There is one more caution that I would like to leave with anybody who has come into fandom since the mid-1940s and reads the Laney memoirs. Even though *Ah! Sweet Idiocy!* is a superbly fascinating work, which had an inordinate influence on the whole course of fanzine publishing, it was written by a human being. Therefore it is not perfect. Some of the things it describes have been told better by other fans. Alva Rogers' account in *Innuendo* #11 of the famous night when Ackerman made his public debut as a drinking man is far superior to the reference to this event in Laney's work. Laney did not

possess Burbee's unique ability to make his readers burst into uncontrollable fits of laughter over the more remarkable actions of an Elmer Perdue or Al Ashley. Certain sections of *Ah! Sweet Idiocy!* indicate that Laney wasn't quite as free of the fannish dross as he believed himself to be after having been purged by the fire and the heat of the Los Angeles fusses. There is one incredible section dealing with a project that sounds as if it had emerged from the Cosmic Circle in a particularly hectic moment: Someone had proposed a Los Angeles science fiction organization complete with large club house which would actually be a secret hideaway for movie stars who would join it as a means of escaping from their public. The Laney who was so quick to see through the illusions that others set up for themselves thought that this was a marvelous scheme and was deeply hurt when other fans in the city failed to be respectful to the individuals who wanted to promote the deal. Laney could be very wrong about things, too. In one chapter, he tells of the delight that he found when he paid regular visits to the home of a quite prominent writer of murder mysteries. He contrasts by implication the ability of the habitués of this writer to handle liquor with the juvenilities of the LASFS. Only a year or two after Laney's work was published, this writer was in an asylum for chronic alcoholism. Laney repeats that old error about Al Ashley's IQ of 194. It wasn't an IQ of 194; it was a score of 194 on a test that Speer was giving to various fans.

*Ah! Sweet Idiocy!* is in the public domain. I would dearly love to see the printable kernel of it reprinted in a volume that might also contain selections from the numerous other autobiographical articles that Laney published here and there. They would give a very accurate estimate of the writing ability and the character of the only fan who has ever been compared with Dean Swift without creating a storm of laughter.

Harry Warner Jr  
Void #26, August 1961



Francis T. Laney as seen on page 132 of *All Our Yesterdays* (Advent:Publishers, 1969) by Harry Warner Jr. Most probably from the photo collection of either Wilson (Bob) Tucker or Ed Wood.

# Ah! Sweet Idiocy!

Published by Francis T. Laney and Charles Burbee for FAPA at Los Angeles, Anno Domini 1948. This book is hand-set in Underwood Pica and printed on special sulphite base paper with little or no rag content. Like the fine books of the 18th and early 19th centuries, it is published unbound, so that gentlemen may have it embellished to match their libraries.

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\* Francis T. Laney's own contents list from the title page of Ah! Sweet Idiocy! appears here to provide original page-number references (one corrected: the sixth chapter begins on page 55, not 54 as typed). It omits the four-page [Preamble](#) (separately numbered i to iv) and single-page [Epilogue](#) (page 129). [Ed.]

# Preamble

When an individual announces that he is through with fandom, that he is quitting the field; and then implements his withdrawal by producing what is probably the largest one man project in fandom's entire history, it is evident that he owes someone an explanation of such contradictory conduct.

My motivation for writing these memoirs was a decidedly mixed one. Very probably the strongest single incentive was to try to explain to myself the inexplicable, to resolve if possible in my own mind the reasons which caused me to get so deeply involved in the amazing happenings which this book chronicles. Once the scales had completely fallen from my eyes and I saw fandom with pitiless objective clarity, I looked back upon Laney the fan with much the same sense of disbelief that a civilized man would feel upon being thrust suddenly face to face with a Yahoo. Why did this earlier Laney disregard the mountain of evidence to the contrary and persist for years in considering fandom to be a group of wonderful, intelligent, worthwhile, and integrated people; to be an instrumentality for his own redemption and advancement? Why did he stay embroiled in the cess pool that is the LASFS? Why did he permit himself to associate with psychic misfits and social outcasts of every description – thieves, truants, dead-beats, psycho-pathic drinkers, communists, crackpots, homosexuals – because they were fans and belonged to the LASFS? Why did he squander untold hours and days and weeks of his best energies toward the advancement of this outre microcosmos? Why indeed? The answering of these and similar questions very shortly became one of my most crying needs.

At the time I wrote the main body of these memoirs in the winter and spring of 1946-47, I was driving out to Covina to see Cecile between three and four times a week. That is nearly an hour's drive, and on those long lonely return trips I used to stew at a great rate as to the whys and wherefores of my sojourn in fandom. From stewing it was but a short step to recalling whole episodes and the recalling merged readily into exhaustive critical analysis.

One night, it occurred to me that if I were to start setting down my recollections it might help my self-analysis, would certainly give me something to keep me at home and away from money-spending temptations

on the nights I did not head Covina-wards. And it always had seemed silly to me to write anything on paper when it is just as easy to put it on stencils.

So I tackled Forrest J Ackerman, outlined a 75-80 page brochure of memoirs, and suggested that if the Fantasy Foundation cared to furnish the supplies they could have the profits. We both remembered the \$100 plus net profit on Speer's *Fancylopedia*, so it was not difficult to get this backing. The only difference in opinion between us was that I wanted enough copies so I could put it in FAPA while Ackie wanted them all for sale. The final agreement (until Ackerman renigged [*sic*] as I shall describe subsequently) was that I would run off 175 copies, keeping ten for my own use, and all proceeds from the remainder would go to the Foundation, which in turn agreed to absorb every penny of the expense of production.

The casual reader will naturally assume that the writing and publishing of a book such as this is a monstrous task. In a sense it is. It must be remembered, however, that I had been a *fan*. The body of this book was written on the stencils in somewhat less time than Laney the fan would have devoted to his correspondence during the same length of time ... something like four to seven hours per week. I invariably spent Monday evenings on it, and about two-thirds of the time Friday evenings as well. A working evening ran from about 6:30 until about 9:00 or 9:30. This regime followed for not quite five months resulted in 136 pages of text.

Back to motivations.

I had never really seen fandom as it is until I started my critical analyses of it. It was patent to me that I'd never have been a very active fan if I'd been able to see both fandom and *myself* in an objective light. It naturally enough follows that I began to wonder just how many other fans would remain in the field if they ran head on into a revelation. So there was a certain amount of altruism involved. In furtherance of this aim, I early resolved not to snare myself in the least; to set down just what happened as accurately as possible regardless of what kind of a braying jackass it might make the Fan Laney. Perhaps, I reasoned, if I use myself as a horrible example it may help some of the other fans to see the light, and analyse their own participation in the microcosmos. An objective and factual analysis of this nature is apt to chill one's interest in fandom very ruthlessly.

So there has been no intentional elision or omission. On the contrary, I have tried to set down everything just exactly as it happened. This of course makes some of the actors in the narrative considerably less than supermen.

And I have tried to hold down editorializing to a minimum. My aim has been to set down what happened and let the reader draw his own conclusions. With the exception of several digressions as to my own underlying motivations at different times, I believe I've usually succeeded in this aim.

One motivation that I've not as yet touched on is a strong desire to expose the LASFS. There is something about this group – with its banality, futility, and downright viciousness – that affects many people most unfavorably. Those who have little previous involvement with fandom and hence no roots in the field simply turn and run, fade out of the picture. Established fans who get to see the LASFS as it is react in one of three ways. A few will do as I did for years, deliberately close their eyes and ignore the club's worthless vileness. The less aggressive types will quit the club, and in many cases fandom itself; they will scorn and despise the LASFS but will not as a rule take any overt steps against the group, though chortling gleefully when a Yerke or a Laney starts waving his shillelagh. These are people like Liebscher or Wiedenbeck or Burbee. An aggressive person who has gotten deeply involved in fandom will tend to so lose his sense of perspective as to regard the destruction of the LASFS as almost a duty to his integrity and self-respect. It is mighty hard to justify to one's self one's participation in a fandom which boasts the LASFS as a Shangri La utopia. Among those who have at various times felt very strongly that the LASFS should be destroyed are Yerke, Bronson, Ashley, and Laney.

Despite this motivation on my part, my memoirs are not fabricated, or exaggerated or slanted. I could write pages of invective, and they would not be nearly so much of a body blow to the LASFS as the objective ticking off of the daily happenings around the Bixelstrasse, the good along with the bad.

The writing of the memoirs themselves was concluded in June 1947. I let them lie fallow for two or three months and then commenced reading them over with a view to correcting the more glaring errors. It was possible to make many corrections directly on the stencils, but subsequent information on one matter requires an additional footnote.

This is the strange case of E. Everett Evans. This individual went to prison on a morals charge while president of the NFFF, and information emanating from the midwest indicated that he had been called to the colors for top-secret navy work. The truth of the story very shortly leaked out, and I, among many others, was utterly revolted at the hypocrisy involved. My disgust was not abated by the subsequent appearance of Evans' magazine,

*The Timebinder*, with its quaintly homespun, love-thy-brother, philosophy. On him it just didn't look good, this air of sanctity and Christ-like patience and pose of moral rectitude. On him it stank to high heaven of the most blatant kind of hypocrisy.

So I was pretty avidly anti-Evans. (In justice to him, it is only fair to point out that he claims to have been framed, and, more to the point, that I have never seen him do anything or heard him say anything which could point even remotely to any taint of homosexuality on his part – on the contrary he appears far more masculine than most of the LASFS members, including some known heterosexuals.)

But there were still plenty of objective grounds for taking a dim view of the gentleman, particularly that hypocrisy. So a couple of us started working along a line of attack designed to put Evans on such a spot that his past would out publicly, with the idea both of showing him up for what he is and of making the LASFS a bit too hot, to hold him. A clean-up squad, in other words.

The end result of our maneuvers was that Evans largely vindicated himself.

At the LASFS meeting of September 11, 1947, Evans was so maneuvered into the open that he admitted publicly his incarceration and what it was for, though maintaining his insistence that he was framed. He went on to point out that he meant to quit both the NFFF presidency and fandom at that time, but that he was talked into reconsidering, and that the statement to the NFFF on his behalf was prepared without his knowledge until after the event. An individual was present who was an actor in these matters; he backed Evans up, testified as to the truth of this statement.

In other words, Evans was made the victim of a stupendous double-cross. An alibi was prepared for him by his midwestern associates, an alibi which committed Evans most thoroughly. Then these associates, or some of them, apparently worked overtime spreading the rumor of where Evans actually was and why. Evans was still in prison when I first heard of it, so it is evident that shadowy but unequivocal statements were circulating long before Evans got out and started telling about it himself, as he is reputed to have done in private conversations.

What a way to ruin someone – fix him up with a public alibi and then tear it down privately!

For some time I seriously considered suppressing all mention of Evans'

mishaps from the memoirs, but thorough consideration not only pointed out that he was still the same as always but also drove home the fact that his having been made the recipient of some thoroughly despicable treatment did not in the least palliate his numerous shortcomings. After all, though he did propose to do the right thing and quit fandom and the NFFF rather than to manufacture a lying alibi, he was not at all reluctant to use the alibi once it had been set for him. The difference between a deliberate hypocrite and a fortuitous hypocrite is only one of degree, not of kind.

(It may be wondered what I think Evans should have done. He should have been honest. He should have issued a statement telling fandom what had happened to him, giving heavy stress to his claim of having been framed, and asked a vote of confidence in the NFFF. It is not at all unlikely that fandom as a whole would have sympathized with him and sustained him; had they cast him out he would at least have had the inner satisfaction of having acted honestly and honorably, of having acted in complete accord with the philosophic precepts which he pretends to espouse.)

I believe that these additional remarks give the Evans case the overall truthful accuracy which I have striven for throughout these memoirs.

---ooOoo---

The actual publication of this volume has been fraught with difficulties. As was pointed out in *Fan-Dango* #16, the LASFS allowed Daugherty to ban me from using the club mimeograph. So then Burbee and I worked out a deal for me to borrow Rotsler's mimeograph. This machine proved unworkable. After a deal of casting around, I finally traded my *Outsider* for Al Ashley's mimeograph, an ink-smear'd relic of another era. If you are not reading this, it means that the ex-Ashley mimeograph didn't work either and I threw the stencils in the incinerator.

Then, on 10 Nov 47, Ackerman wrote me as follows:

"I am personally refunding to the Foundation the money it has laid out so far on the project. Several supporters have counselled, that, despite its total lack of intention, inevitable mention of Foundation money used for the production of the Memoirs might be misinterpreted by enemies to mean approbation of a document which in all probability the Foundation would frown upon. As you know, I was thinking only of a means by which the treasury might profit. After I see the TLM, it probably will make me unhappy to contemplate that *my* money made issuance of the item possible. But between throwing mud at the Foundation and at that leading

paranoid/schizoid (take your choice) FJAckerman, fandom has had more practice throwing mud at me..." etc. He also did not wish his name used as sponsor, so I won't.

Well, I was quite willing to do all this work for nothing and let the Foundation have the profit. I am not willing to do this work for Ackerman or any other individual. Consequently, I shall reimburse Ackerman for the money he has advanced (as an instrumentality of the Foundation) and publish the book for my own inscrutable ends and profit if any.

Oddly enough, this Foundation withdrawal merely underlines what I said along about page 128\* about the Foundation and its futility as it is presently being operated. What is that sum of nearly \$400 for, Mr. Ackerman?

---

*\* In [Chapter XI: Death of a Fan](#), though only indirectly and not on that particular page. [Ed.]*

---ooOoo---

Well, that about winds us up. At this writing, my only fan interest is FAPA – I may be active in that group for years yet and I may not. As long as I still feel the yen for occasional written self-expression, I'll probably be around. But not as an active fan, no sir!

*Francis T. Laney  
February 5, 1948*

# Chapter One

## The Golden Dawn

Unlike most reminiscing fans, I am unable to point with pride to a long, pre-fan acquaintance with fantasy. My reading tastes have always been quite catholic, and during the days that my contemporaries were going quietly berserk over Gernsback and Sloane, I was quite happily reading and collecting a much more varied bunch of stuff. At that time, my chief fictional interest centered around seafaring tales, and these were but second choice reading as compared with non-fiction dealing with such things as naval history, zoology, entomology, psychology, eugenics, and the American Civil War.

There was a faint amount of fantasy present, however. When I was very little, I read and reread nearly all of the Oz books, and along about 1925, when I was eleven years old, I was completely swept off my feet by Thomas Janvier's *In the Sargasso Sea*, the Moscow Public library copy of which I must have read at least a dozen times. I can also recall reading one installment of Ray Cummings' *Into the Fourth Dimension* in a stray copy of *Science and Invention* which my father had brought home for some of the shop notes. *Jekyll and Hyde* and "The Phantom Rickshaw" were also in my bookcase, though neither of them held a particularly high spot in my esteem.

In the fall of 1929, as I started my junior year in high school, I was given the opportunity to take journalism, a course which was ordinarily limited to seniors. Very quickly, I developed a deep interest in writing generally and in the school paper in particular, a trend which led me to editorial writer, feature writer, copy editor, and finally, in my senior year, to the editorship of the paper. Sixteen issues were published under my aegis, and while they strike me today as being excessively lousy, even for high school papers, there can be no doubt that the training I received at that time made fan journalism possible for me. The teacher, Mary E.S. Fox, not only ironed the more obvious flaws out of my writing, but through a most unusually sympathetic approach gave me what will probably always be an abiding interest in writing and publishing.

From 1931 until 1936, nothing happened to me which even remotely

could be said to lead toward fannish paths. I completed my University course, stepped out into the world as a young would-be adult, and finally got a job. My interests at this time centered entirely around drinking and dating; though I did a certain amount of reading, most of my time and energy was spent tripping joyously down the rosebud trail. I averaged perhaps two evenings a month at home – the rest of the time I was chasing.

Sometime in the middle part of 1936, a girl piano player in a Lewiston, Idaho tavern introduced me to Duane Rimel. Both of them were quite drunk at the time, as was I. Neither Duane nor I made any especial impression on each other at the time, though from then on we moved in much the same crowd, and gradually became better acquainted. I can recall only one Rimel-esque anecdote definitely dating from this period – a pinochle party which Duane and his gal friend punctuated with too much beer, with the result that my first wife and I had to take care of them.

During my association, off and on, with Duane, I had gradually become aware of the fact that he had not only written but sold some stories to some magazine, but I more or less brushed the idea off. In 1939, after my divorce, I had blossomed out with a new record player and a number of Louis Armstrong records. One Saturday afternoon, I ran into Duane in a beer parlor, the record under my arm attracted his attention (*What Is This Thing Called Swing and Jeepers Creepers* by Louis Armstrong), and the upshot of it all was that we went up to my apartment and had our first joint bash. From then on, we were increasingly friendly, but still, somehow, the matter of writing was never mentioned.

As a result of remarrying in 1939, I moved into a small house in Clarkston, Washington, and, for the first time since I left home in 1935 had enough room for some of my books. When Duane saw them, he was immediately sent (my tastes by this time having expanded to cover realism in the novel) and he delivered me quite a monologue on his aspirations as a writer, his sales to *Weird Tales* and *Future*, and his correspondence with several successful writers, most notably an H.P. Lovecraft. I was considerably amused by Duane's awe as he spoke of HPL; I'd never heard of the fellow, and anyway figured that no pulp magazine writer could be much good.

Not too long after this, Duane informed me that some small, midwest publishing house was bringing out a collection of Lovecraft's stories, and that he wanted me to read them. (I had previously read the January or February

1939 *WT* with a Rimel story in it, and had been utterly unimpressed.) In due season, he reverently brought over his copy of the then-new *Outsider and Others*, and left it with me. It sat around the house for several days, but finally I decided I had better glance at it enough to seem to have read it, and return it to Duane with thanks. I opened the book pretty much at random, leafed back to the beginning of the story I'd opened to, and started skimming through it. That story held me more than any single yarn I had ever read, and when I came to the denouement I was really sent. "The Thing on the Doorstep" is not really a very good tale – too melodramatic and overdone, and completely lacking in characterization – but it rocked me that night from top to bottom. I read HPL that night until after three in the morning, and did not really stop until I had read that book through and through.

At this time, Duane's enthusiasm was more or less latent, but I was so completely sent that he began to perk up right away. Yes, he had lots more stories in the same vein – a whole closet full of *WT*; yes, he was still writing away merrily; no, he had scarcely any of the books HPL mentioned in "Supernatural Horror in Literature", but HPL had loaned him many of them in some sort of circulating library deal. I immediately made up an alphabetical bibliography of the stuff listed therein, and headed for Spokane and Clark's Old Book Store. The resultant loot, which included a volume of Bierce, set both of us off all the more.

Say, had I ever seen a fan magazine? What the hell was that? Very shortly I found myself with the loan of a complete file of *Fantasy Fan*, a handful of *Fantasy Magazines*, and (most important, since it was still being published) several copies of *Polaris*. My god, I thought, something like this would be fun, but right about that time the writing bug bit me very badly, and it took me several months to work it out of my system. (The less said about the stories I wrote at this time, the better. There were about equally inspired by HPL and Bierce, and the best one – terrible though it is – appeared eventually in the first issue of *Acolyte*. The others have long since met the cremation they so richly deserved.)

I thought very seriously about sending a subscription to *Polaris*, which I regarded as a likely outlet for my stories, but my interest pretty much waned when I learned that Paul Freehafer, in common with other fan publishers, did not pay for material. (All right, laugh, damn you!)

One of the really big events of 1940 was my discovery of Abe Merritt. *Face in the Abyss* and *Snake Mother* appeared wellnigh simultaneously in

*FFM* and *FN*; Duane brought over his copies, and, after he had left, I started reading them. Meanwhile, nature called me, and I carried the darned magazines into the bathroom with me. Utterly oblivious to where I was and what I was doing, I sat there on that WC nearly all night, utterly lost in Graydon's weird adventures. When I finally finished *Snake Mother*, the spell broke, I tried to stand up, and was so cramped and cold that my legs would not support me. I collapsed into a heap, and lay there on the floor laughing at myself for being such a damned fool. But I'd give a lot today if I could find any story that would hit me as hard as those two did.

So 1940 faded into 1941. Despite an increasing preoccupation with fantasy, my life at the time was thoroughly normal and enjoyable. Jackie and I got along famously, we were both very much wrapped up in the infant Sandy (then less than a year old), we went dancing frequently, played many evenings of pinochle with other young couples, drove the car a great deal, and otherwise lived like human beings. I spent perhaps two evenings a week monkeying around with fantasy, and oftentimes not even that.

February 1, 1941 Duane and I, in the course of gathering up his girl friend for a party to be held at my house, got into the way of a wild driver. The resulting crash demolished my Chrysler, and put me hors de combat for over two months. Duane was at that time leading pretty much the garret dweller's life, working like a dog with his writing, and picking up his living playing the piano around town. When I became somewhat convalescent, I spent many of my afternoons with him, and bit by bit borrowed and read all his *WT* (a run 90% complete from 1928 through 1940). Had it not been for the wreck, I daresay I would have escaped fandom altogether, but we were stony broke and without a car until the insurance company paid off, so I fell deeper into the morass of fantasy, and also cultivated much more of a habit of staying at home. The roots of the breakup of my second marriage were very likely planted at this time: since Jackie did not share my interest in the fantasy we gradually began to grow apart somewhat.

In September 1941, we bought a new house (the once-familiar 720 Tenth St. Address) and the moving in, remodelling, and what not momentarily gave us a common focus once again. Duane and I averaged perhaps three sessions a month, playing records and discussing fantasy. On my infrequent trips to the city, I still tried to pick up fantasy in the used book places, but it didn't mean much to me any more, though I used part of the settlement from the insurance company to buy the *Outsider*.

After a year and a half of good intentions, I finally committed my first acts as an overt fan, sending Paul Freehafer a subscription to *Polaris* and Art Joquel 30¢ for three of the pamphlets he'd advertised therein. This was in late December 1941. Joquel promptly sent me *Sun T(r)ails*, which was utterly incomprehensible to me, dealing largely as it did with the Hornig/Pogo fracas: and eventually refunded my dimes one by one. Freehafer was slower about replying, but finally sent me a very friendly note, in which he regretted that *Polaris* had become defunct, but suggested that I send the subscription and a poem which I'd also sent him, to a Harry Jenkins, who had taken the magazine over. Under separate cover, he sent me the last three issues of *Polaris*; I'd seen them before, but was of course pleased to have copies of my own.

After the delay of several weeks, I sent the poem to Jenkins, and rather to my surprise got a virtually return mail reply, which praised the poem quite unwarrantedly and guaranteed its publication. In April 1942 I received the one Jenkins issue of *Polaris*, containing my poem, together with *Jinx* #2, and a copy of *Fan Editor and Journalist*. I immediately answered at some length, but was given the old brush-off treatment by Jenkins, and lapsed back into normalcy.

About the only fanning that I did for the next several months was reading Rimel's set of *Reader and Collector*. They gave me a very high opinion of H.C. Koenig, which better acquaintance has only strengthened. His attitude toward ethics in fan publishing also had a very strong effect on the editorial policy of *The Acolyte*, if I may get ahead of myself for a moment.

This would be a pretty good place to veer momentarily, and sketch in some information on Rimel, since he is such an important character in these memoirs. Duane Weldon Rimel (pronounced *rye'-mel*) is the son of Asotin County probate judge P.G. Rimel, and was raised in the hamlet of Asotin, Washington. He is a brawny fellow, 6' tall and weighing 190 pounds, but his entire life has been colored by recurrent inflammatory rheumatism, which first struck him in his early teens, and which has pretty much kept him from the active physical life. About simultaneously with his first semi-invalidism, he became very closely associated with another Asotin youth, Franklin Lee Baldwin, who at the time was actively reading and collecting fantasy, corresponding with H.P. Lovecraft and other fantasy names of the early 30's. Duane straightway got into the Lovecraft circle, and soon both of them were

actively contributing to *Fantasy Fan*, *Fantasy Magazine*, and others. To bind them still closer, they were both crazy about jazz, especially the piano of Earl Hines. When Lovecraft died in early 1937, Baldwin was heartbroken, and dropped out of fantasy altogether. Duane was also deeply affected, but chose rather to carry on as an Acolyte, having hit *Weird Tales* for the first time in the last issue that Lovecraft saw. Though he sold a few stories, and devoted the bulk of his time to writing, he made a passable living playing piano, mostly around Lewiston and Clarkston, and later as a reporter for the Clarkston Herald, for which he conducted a scientific weekly column (Twenty Years from Today) for over two years. Through his membership in the American Federation of Musicians, he became active in the Lewiston Central Labor Council, and eventually climbed across the bar he had leaned on so often. He's been a bartender for about four years now, is still writing (as witness his sale of detective books both here and in England), and eventually hopes to become a full-time writer. He's married happily, and has a small child.

Duane has one of the most attractive personalities I've ever encountered. He couples the insight and sensitivity of the introvert, with the bonhomie of the born mixer. A brilliant raconteur, he is the life of any party, yet has the depth to hold up his end of any serious discussion. He's always well-dressed, and meticulously groomed; and being an unusually handsome fellow, used to be a devil with the ladies in his bachelor days. He is deeply interested in fantasy, but has never so lost his sense of perspective as to bury himself in it. All in all, he is the sort of fellow fandom needs more of, and, perhaps, would have if fandom but offered this type of man anything worthy of his serious attention.

At this point, we'll veer back to June 1942, and the next of the series of accidents or what not that kept pushing me into fandom. At that time, I was employed in the invoicing department of Potlatch Forests in Lewiston, and, being bucking for promotion, had made it a point to learn every other job in the department. A reorganization of the office moved the big electric Ditto machine into our department, and more or less as a joke, my boss told me I'd better learn how to run that too. I did, and just about the time I rolled the first page out of it I was struck with its possibilities for publishing a fanzine. I immediately inquired into the possibilities of converting it to my own use, and found that no one had the faintest objection, so long as I paid for materials used, and did all the work on my own time.

Coincidentally with all this, Jackie was pregnant with the child Quiggie, and I had a good deal of time on my hands in the evenings, since she was not very well, and found it necessary to retire very early. Another push toward fandom.

Duane and I talked over the Ditto possibilities, and decided we'd try our hand at a fan magazine. It was easy for him to get into that mood, since he and Lovecraft had almost founded one back in 1935, and had been stopped only by Duane's inability to get the old press he had been promised by a former printer in Asotin.

We had absolutely nothing to go on but our enthusiasm. Duane's contacts in the field had virtually lapsed, but we went through his old correspondence and jotted down all the addresses we could find. In going through his stuff, we found poems by Richard Ely Morse and Lionel Dilbeck which had been submitted for the HPL/Rimel effort seven years previously, and were also struck by the possibility of excerpting from the Lovecraft letters. This material, plus a story by Duane and the best of my own abortive efforts, gave us enough for part of an issue.

Most of the letters we wrote to Duane's old list were unanswered. Hornig wished us luck. Koenig regretted his inability to contribute anything, since he was as usual swamped, but offered to assist in the distribution. Emil Petaja (whom Rimel had met personally a few years previously) sent us a story; and Nils Frome, a Canadian who has been in and out of fandom for the past fifteen years, sent us a letter which I attempted to work over into an article. He also gave me the address of Les Croutch, who became my second fan correspondent, sending me *Light* for August 1942.

Duane and I spent a good part of our spare time that summer typing merrily away on Ditto carbons I had snaffled at the office. He typed his own story, and designed and drew the cover heading; I made up the masters for the rest of the stuff, and gave it what arrangement it had. As the magazine grew, we saw that we could never afford to put out another issue free, and I didn't want to take a chance on selling copies, since it would just get me in dutch at the office if it were discovered. So we decided to make just the single issue and quit.

The masters were all typed up by the middle of August, but it was not until the Labor Day weekend that I slipped down and spent a Sunday running off and assembling 120 copies in the deserted office. The entire job took only a little more than seven hours, since the machine was a fast electric model in

tip-top condition, required no tedious slip-sheeting, and the office afforded almost limitless table space to spread out on for assembling.

Looking at this first issue from the vantage point of 1947, I find it difficult to understand our boundless enthusiasm over it. Rimel's long poem, "Dreams of Yith", and the two-plus pages of Lovecraft letter excerpts are the only items which would have been thoroughly acceptable in the later issues, tho perhaps one or two of the poems might have been usable as filler. Of amusement value only, in light of subsequent developments, is my editorial, which employs the most extreme of the notorious Laney purple verbiage in decrying, of all things, *fan feuds!*

I have been asked several times as to the origin of the magazine's title, particularly by persons who did not see the earlier issues with the mast-head dedication to H.P. Lovecraft. My inability to think up suitable titles is notorious, as witness the many pictures I've published with the banal caption, "A Drawing", and so it was Duane who christened it. I never did care much for the title, "The Acolyte", but being unable to suggest a better one, let it ride. Through all of *The Acolyte's* 14 issues, this title, with its strong connotation that the magazine was strictly from Lovecraft, was a constant handicap; but by the time I realized this fact, the magazine had developed enough prestige so that I hesitated to make a change.

Well, there we were, with 120 magazines bravely decked out in gaudy orange covers. The stack looked mountainous to both of us, particularly in light of the fact that our mailing list consisted of only 13 people, several of whom were not fans by any stretch of the imagination. We simply did not have any acquaintance with the field. Under previous arrangements with Croutch and Koenig, we sent 35 copies to each of them. Koenig sent his to the more prominent FAPA members, while Croutch distributed his to the *Light* mailing list, thereby giving *Acolyte* a North of the Border complexion that it did not wholly lose until it moved to Los Angeles.

Our brief span as publishers having been run, we thought, we settled back and commenced waiting for the avalanche of response. When a month had passed with no particular notice having been taken, we were both heartily disgusted and through with the field. (Do all new editors expect 100% response to their sleazy first issues?)

This account would stop right here, had it not been for the malignant fate that seemed hellbent on pushing me into fandom.



Leslie Croutch, 1942. Photo from the  
Mike Rosenblum collection.

## Chapter Two

# A Fan Is Born

About the first letter I received about *The Acolyte* was from C.M. Brewster, an associate professor of chemistry at State College of Washington, and a long term friend. He complimented the issue, and added oomph to his remarks by mentioning that he had a disused mimeograph in his basement and urging me to come up to Pullman and haul it away. Well, what would you have done? So did I.

My dire fate was further abetted by the war. Lewiston/Clarkston is pretty much a company town, and a Weyerhaeuser company town at that. With shipyards and aircraft factories out on the coast getting into high gear, practically all the less rooted people possessing any initiative were seizing the opportunity, to get out of the dead-end one industry town setup and go where they could get ahead a little. The army gobbled up many of our friends; the coast got the rest of them – and almost before Jackie and I realized it we were almost alone. By December 1942, even Duane had left to go to Pendleton, Oregon. So instead of friends dropping in every evening or so, we commenced hitting weeks on end when no one came to see us and we went nowhere. Yet it happened so gradually that it was a *fait accompli* before I realized it, particularly with the compensatory emergence into fandom. By that time, my head was turned. Like a fool, I took fandom seriously, found it difficult to manifest genuine interest in much of anything else, and if they can pin the situation onto any one cause, my two little girls can blame fandom for the fact that they do not have two parents and the normal home life which is their right.

But this does not tell of the birth of *Acolyte* into a regular periodical. As soon as I got the mimeograph, Duane and I held an exhaustive pow-wow and set up the editorial policy which, with one change, was adhered to throughout the life of the magazine. We were guided chiefly by Lovecraft's letters to Duane, though the various remarks by H.C. Koenig in four years of *Reader and Collector* definitely influenced us, and we moreover tended definitely to pattern *Acolyte* after *The Fantasy Fan*. Moskowitz, unless he has already done so in a yet unpublished installment, should really modify his remarks

which lead one to believe that first fandom disappeared, except for “later rapprochements”, with the death of *Fantasy Magazine*. *The Acolyte*, which certainly was a strong influence in the fandom of the middle forties, stemmed directly from first fandom, without benefit of any intermediate steps.

From H.P. Lovecraft, as expressed, in his letters to Rimel, came the two cardinal tenets of *Acolyte*’s policy: the furnishing of a medium for the publication of artistic and literate attempts of fantastic self-expression (and an eschewment of the pulp magazines); and the fostering of a literate approach to fantasy through the writing and publishing of serious criticism (as opposed to mere synoptic reviews).

H.C. Koenig, largely through indirect remarks in “Hoist With Their Own Petard”, was responsible for *Acolyte*’s adherence to a rigid publication schedule coupled with as prompt as possible answering of all mail, and for our policy of publishing nothing whatever dealing with fans and fandom, the studied elimination of juvenility even at the expense of a friendly atmosphere.

From *The Fantasy Fan*, *Acolyte* derived the idea of having regular columns (even going so far as to revive one of *TFF*’s own columns complete with its regular editor), of going all out for professional contributions, and of attempting to knit its more devout readers and contributors into a fandom within fandom.

Contrary to popular belief, *The Acolyte* was never intended as being an organ for the aggrandizement of H.P. Lovecraft. This is the last thing Lovecraft himself would have wanted. The dedication to HPL’s memory was intended solely as an attempt to give HPL our own idea of what a fantasy fan magazine should be like. It was quietly dropped after the fifth issue, since it was being so widely misinterpreted. *The Acolyte* followed pretty closely *Fantasy Fan*’s old policy of publishing articles on any phase of fantasy (including scientifiction) and the weird, but restricting fiction and verse to pure fantasy and weird only. This was done chiefly because we felt that amateur attempts at science fiction were too likely to be modelled after cheap pulp stories, while pure fantasy and weird had a reasonably good chance of being influenced by more literate material. When I finally realized that I just couldn’t get enough articles on science-fiction to give a balanced magazine, the masthead was expanded to mention that sub-division of fantasy specifically.

The only major change ever made in *The Acolyte*’s editorial policy may

be directly attributed to A. Langley Searles and his superb *Fantasy Commentator*, and it was made during the height of my feud with Searles. Both Russell and I (look at me get ahead of myself, mentioning a character I've not even introduced yet!) decided that *Acolyte* was markedly inferior to *Fantasy Commentator*, chiefly because the free use of fiction tended to crowd out articles, and quietly adopted Searles' no fiction policy, modifying it only to the extent that we were willing to include stories which we felt were very close to being of book grade. We did not, however, renounce certain previous commitments; and as a result the change did not become fully evident before the magazine finally suspended. Had *Acolyte* continued publication, it would by now (February 1947) consist entirely of articles, departments, and verse; the latter being used only as fillers at the bottoms of pages.

We may have been "mouldy figs"; our first fandom affiliations may have put us somewhat in the light of dawn-age barbarians invading the modern civilized world; but modern fandom must not have been as much affected by Moskowitz, Wollheim, and the others of the 1938-41 period as these gentlemen might have wished. Judging both from subscription requests and polls the fan of the mid forties apparently liked *The Acolyte* pretty well. (My chest is getting sore; let's change the subject, huh?)

Immediately after Duane and I had made our plans for the continuance of the magazine, I remembered Jenkins' *Fan Editor and Publisher*. I dug it out, and sent a medium-long letter, plus a copy of the first *Acolyte*, to nearly every publisher listed therein. This was the beginning of my personal policy, continued until I moved to LA in October 1943, of writing a letter to every fan whose address I could get, sending a sample *Acolyte* and urging both a subscription and material. I never followed up the pro magazine reader columns very much, but the then current *WT* gave me Manly Banister, who had just hit the mag for his first pro sale, and who was for about a year and a half one of my most stimulating and enjoyable correspondents. And a copy of the Canadian *Uncanny Tales* which Croutch had sent me netted Barbara Bovard. Also at about this time I commenced corresponding with Nanek (Virginia Anderson), who at this time was hitting the *FFM* reader column quite regularly with Merritt-inspired verse.

The intensive letter-writing campaign shortly bore fruit. Harry Warner sent me the last three issues of the just-folded *Spaceways*, together with a most helpful letter of comment and suggestions – the start of an intensive correspondence which has continued to the present time. Warner is easily the

Samuel Pepys of fandom. No one else can take the trivia of his daily life and turn them into a fascinatingly readable letter. Harry has always been one of my major influences in fandom, and usually one of the more restraining ones. Though I've never had the pleasure of meeting him in the flesh, through his letters and other writings he has made himself much more real to me than many individuals with whom I've associated daily.

Phil Bronson had published the last Minneapolis issue of *The Fantasite* at about this time, and had sent a copy in exchange for the *Acolyte* sent him by Koenig. An advertisement in it listed several back issues, including the bulky annish which I still consider to be the greatest single fanzine issue of all time, and my receipt of these really threw me over the brink. I promptly became a *Fantasite* fan, and shortly had struck up a very enjoyable correspondence with Bronson which continued until I moved to Los Angeles.

At this point, Forrest J Ackerman also hove on the scene, so far as I was concerned. He was one of the few active fans of 1942 who was known to Rimel and myself, but we tended to regard him with a jaundiced eye due to the Ackerman/Lovecraft-Smith feud in the "Boiling Point" column of *Fantasy Fan*. (This feud had arisen out of an intemperate attack by the teen-aged 4e upon some story of Clark Ashton Smith's. Lovecraft rather unworthily came back with an even more intemperate rejoinder, and after a couple of exchanges, the boiling point was considerably exceeded. Rimel of course had sided with HPL, and I tended to do the same, though not without deprecating the intemperance of some of Lovecraft's remarks at Ackerman. It was from events leading out of this ruckus that H.C. Koenig christened 4e "Balloon-Pants".) The anti-Ackerman feeling in Eastern Washington had also been considerably fanned by FJA's dealings with Lee Baldwin. Back in 1934, Lee had been collecting photos of fantasy celebrities, and had written Ackerman for a snapshot. Forry had replied that he did not send pictures of himself as a rule, but that he would be happy to *sell* Lee an autographed picture of himself for 10¢! All these events taken together caused us to regard Ackerman rather lightly, so we made no effort to get his address, figuring that he was so well known that probably both Croutch and Koenig would send him the first *Acolyte*, and if they didn't it would make no real difference anyway. The guy was so well known that neither sent him a copy, figuring that we must have done so ourselves. So it was that the then #1 fan failed to get the first issue. Wouldbe #1 fans might ponder on the drawbacks of Fame.

In early October 1942 came a most amazing letter from Ackerman

himself. He opened it with a play on words carrying the thought that since we loved Lovecraft we must hate him, since he had once feuded with HPL, and that we had slighted him horribly by not sending him *Acolyte* and he being the #1 face too, but that we were undoubtedly too intelligent to bite off our noses to spite our faces by not dealing with him, since he had more Lovecraft stuff for sale than any man alive. The remainder of the page and a half single spaced letter was a listing of HPLiana, at characteristic prices.

Rimel tended to get angry about the whole thing, but I laughed him out of it. Fortunately for the peace of fandom, which otherwise might have been plunged irrevocably into War, a letter of mine to Bovard had crossed the one from Ackerman to me. In it, I had commented sympathetically with his five page dirge in connection with army life, and had asked her to show it to him, since I did not have his address. So I wrote him a chiding, if amused, letter, ordered some stuff, and all was well. Out of it all came a large bundle of LASFS material (free, too, bless his heart), and my first *VOM*, #25.

In October came also the first recruit to what was later to be the *Acolyte* gang. Fortunately for *The Acolyte*, I have never held truck with graphologists, or else I would have ignored the sprawled, almost childish handwriting on the note which came from Toronto, requesting that a copy of *The Acolyte* be sent to Harold Wakefield. I almost ignored it as it was, but finally sent the last available copy to the man who for my money is one of the four or five top experts on fantasy and the weird. There'll be more about this lad in the next chapter.

We received letters from a number of other people in October and November of 1942, but the ones I have named are the only ones that jump readily to memory in 1947. There was a delirious quality to this mail that no fan mail since has held for me; I was woefully ignorant of the field, so every letter was an unknown quantity. For all I knew, the guy might really *be* somebody, or he might be some crank. So what was there to do but follow them all up? I imagine I must have asked nearly every one of these people for material and/or a subscription.

As time drew on, I saw that the second *Acolyte* must be started at once, if it were to appear in December. Material was at a premium, as a quick glance at the magazine clearly shows. I had prodded Crutch into doing a column, which dragged on for four issues. Rimel had, by main brute strength, gotten Baldwin to do a revived "Within the Circle". Banister had sent us a story which at least was long. But there was no article, and nothing in sight.

Rimel and I had often spoken of compiling a glossary of the Cthulhu Mythos, and it occurred to me that I might be able to toss something together that would get by. So I ripped into *The Outsider and Others*, noting down every entity and place name together with descriptive data. The whole job, including alphabetizing the glossary and stencilling it took only two weeks, and I am still surprised that someone hadn't done it long before. It was surely a cheap and easy way to make a reputation, though this aspect of it did not occur to me until much later. If it had, I doubt if I'd have done the article at all, because it is embarrassing to me to be cited as an authority on Lovecraft, and asked to give offhand remarks and definitions about the mythos when in actuality I know much less about it than most Lovecraft followers. All I did was to turn out an article for a deadline, and I learned just about as much about the subject matter as a mundane journalist will learn about some topic he does for the Sunday supplement.

With this second issue, I set up the publishing schedule that was adhered to rigidly throughout all the Clarkston issues, and was aimed at here in LA. The only way to keep a regular magazine from becoming an impossible burden, I reasoned, is to do it in small, regular gobs. So I divided up the three months between issues: first six weeks, correspondence only, with emphasis on securing material. Next thirty days, cut one stencil per evening, come hell or high water, but never more than one – and cut it before doing anything else, so as to be as fresh as possible for it. This left me plenty of time for other things I might want to do. Next two weeks, run off two stencils an evening, but devote one of the two Sundays to running at least six, so as to leave an evening or so free for assembly, addressing, and wrapping. For a fanzine of 150 circulation or so, I can still recommend this schedule highly, since the chief bugaboo of subscription publishing is putting everything off until the last minute, then doing so much as to get a belly full. The four Clarkston subscription issues of *The Acolyte*, each scheduled for the 15th of its month of publication, were never *mailed* to subscribers and exchangers later than the morning of the 15th, and on one occasion as early as the 13th.

The schedule, however, almost hit a snag when I tackled the mimeographing of the first issue. The mimeograph, I discovered when it was too late, was so old as to be unfit for modern stencils, since it required the top line to be a full inch higher than I could put it. Matters were further complicated by a hardened roller, which I did not diagnose for two more issues. By dint of endless experimenting I finally found a spot just barely

within reach of the pickup which would still get all of the print on two sheets out of three. Under such conditions, the second issue was finally sweated out, though there were only 94 usable copies out of an attempted 125. If I'd had any sense, I'd have given the whole thing up as a bad job, but I'm a stubborn character, and besides, the bug had bitten me – hard.

One other major, from a fan point of view, event (oh gawd! Dunkese!) of the fall and early winter of 1942 was my discovery of magazine science fiction. I had scorned it, in common with all pulp magazines, all my life, and when I finally relaxed my standards and started collecting and reading *WT* and *FFM*, I suppose I reacted against the other pulps all the more. This attitude was further abetted by Rimel, who has never cared much for science fiction. But my very deep admiration for *Fantasite*, led me to wonder about these magazines which were being so detailedly reviewed in a magazine so otherwise admirable.

So I started browsing the news stands, buying one each of the titles as I discovered them. *Amazing*, *Fantastic Adventures*, *TWS*, and *Captain Future* were bought once and tossed in the furnace. But I found a mine of information in the fanzine column of *Startling*, and gradually got so I liked even the stories. *Astonishing* and *Super-Science* knocked me out, colder than a fish. *Astounding* I left until last, since it was not displayed among the other pulps, but I went overboard for it when I finally discovered it. A girl at the office introduced me to *Unknown*, giving me the August 1942 issue with Fritz Leiber's "Hill and the Hole" in it, but apart from that story and one or two others, I never cared for *UNK* until I started getting hold of the earlier numbers.

My second daughter, later known to fandom as "The Child Quiggie", was born about half way through the preparations for the second *Acolyte*. The stretch of about four months, centered around Quiggie's birth on November 11, 1942, during which her mother was for the most part too much under the weather to be of much company, saw me get mighty deep into fandom. I am restless, and possessed of a driving energy which simply does not permit me to relax and take life easy. At the time I figured that fandom was a good outlet for my energy, that it would keep me from wandering around and getting into woman trouble or spending a bunch of money some other way.

I did not realize then the insidiousness of it all. In the first place, I naively believed that fans were people pretty much like myself, or Rimel, or Edwards, or Baldwin. It never occurred to me that most fans are neurotic

messes, seeking in fandom the fulfillment their botched natures prevent their seizing out of life. Fans are always at their best in letters, and I took them at their self-stated value. Secondly, my friends were all gone; no-one was left in Lewiston-Clarkston that I cared anything much about associating with.

Worst of all, I did not know myself. I had a dead-end, low-paid job, secured in the depth of depression, and I'd latched onto it with all the tenacity of a limpet. Events had never given me much confidence in myself – indeed had had much the opposite effect – so there I was, kidding myself along with a structure of compensations and evasions of fact similar to that used by the *Timebinder* crowd. My intelligence, such as it is, told me with a clarion call that I'd better get out of that rut and get a high-paying war job. But emotionally I was incapable of it. In plain English, I had neither the guts to get out of an impossible situation, nor the intelligence to analyse it and see what was wrong. So there I was, not exactly unhappy since evasions and compensations usually sugar-coat our ills, but discontented with a malaise I scarcely recognized consciously.

All of a sudden, boom! I was getting dozens of letters, friendly and well-expressed, praising my efforts (success where I'd been a failure), typewriter acquaintances ripening almost overnight, into fast friends (this to a lad whose friends had all left town, and who felt himself too much tied down by family obligations to go out and do things in the evening), and something definitely fascinating and, apparently constructive to occupy the lone, boresome evenings.

I have never in my life gone quite so far overboard for anything as I did for fandom. At first I left the bulk of my free time free, but even after she'd recovered from having Quiggie, Jackie no longer seemed to care about enjoying life, and had adopted a somber and joyless attitude towards everything which made attempts at recreation unpleasant and the necessary chores around the house and yard almost unbearable. Well, there was plenty of fanning to be done, and imperceptibly it took up more and more of my time. I realized that our marriage, despite the two children, was shot – yet I recoiled from doing anything drastic about it, and had no success in constructive attempts to bring things onto a more pleasant plane for both of us. (Very likely, the mass psychosis of war, which in 1942 and 1943 did not look very hopeful for anything or anyone, had a marked effect on both of us.)

Well, that's all water under the bridge. The fact remains that for what I hope is the last time in my life, I made an evasive, escapist adjustment to a

situation. I took something which at its strongest should be no more than a desultorily followed hobby, and made of it almost a full-time job. If the truth were known, I am willing to wager that at least 50% of the more prominent fans are active in fandom for the same basic reasons I was – evasion and compensation.

By February or March of 1943, I was for all practical purposes a total fan, heart and soul.



Harry Warner Jr. Photo from the Mike Rosenblum collection.

## Chapter Three

# The Acolyte Gang

Since practically my entire pre-Los Angeles fan life centered around *The Acolyte*, and since the people I encountered in fandom *were The Acolyte*, it seems eminently logical to describe the palmy days of the magazine in terms of the people who made it possible. Palmy days! Make no mistake about it, the first six issues of *The Acolyte* were the ones that really meant something to me; though the material in them was for the most part far superior, the last eight issues were the uninspired product of a meaningless habit, depending almost 100% on the momentum *Acolyte* had picked up during my year as a total fan.

Most important of The Acolyte Gang was, of course, Duane Rimel. Though he took no more than a nominal part in the majority of issues, he was definitely the one to whom I turned to discuss matters of policy and editing, even after he had left Clarkston and moved to Pendleton.

F. Lee Baldwin did not appear on the scene until December 1942, and made no more than three or four trips to visit me during 1943. Nevertheless, he was a major influence on *Acolyte*, and not just because he was my only “in-the-flesh” fan for nearly a year. He was indefatigable in seeking out new contacts for us, particularly among the professional authors, and was directly responsible for *Acolyte*’s contacts with Derleth and the Wandreis. His enthusiasm and candidly intelligent criticism were worth far more than his generous encouraging. Lee, born Franklin Lee Baldwin, comes about as near to being my ideal fan as anyone could. He is another of those all too rare individuals who can take his fanning or leave it, whose interest in the field is that of the intelligently desultory hobbyist, and who does not use his fanning as a substitute or compensation for something else. Lee was raised in the hamlet of Asotin, Washington, and was actively reading *Amazing* as early as 1926, collecting it and other fantastic literature, and generally making a nuisance of himself writing to professional authors for autographs and such. His correspondence with H.P. Lovecraft commenced in 1931 and continued very actively, until the latter’s death in 1937, at which time the heart-broken Baldwin forsook fantasy altogether until *The Acolyte* dragged him back into

fandom five and a half years later. Coincidentally, he was studying piano, and supported himself for several years during the mid-thirties playing in dance bands and taverns all through the Pacific North West. (He is one of the three best white boogie-woogie men I have ever heard, and since the other two are Joe Sullivan and the late Bob Zurke, this is not ungenerous praise. Had he cared to do so, he could easily have made a name for himself in Jazz.) Baldwin's living comes out of the bakery business, and he is definitely a successful man from the mundane point of view, being foreman of the largest bakery in Central Idaho.

In physical appearance, he is short and slender, with pale complexion and dark wavy hair, and has the sort of good looks one is wont to associate with Poe's heroes. Upon meeting him, one is immediately struck by his sharply inquisitive eyes, his rapid-fire conversation, and his dapper vivacity. Baldwin's only apparent abnormality is his unbelievable capacity for food. I remember one occasion when he and Mrs. Baldwin came down to spend the weekend with us. On the way out to the house, Lee stopped at a restaurant and put away a full order of chili and beans. An hour later, he performed doughtily at the Laney dinner table, eating half again as much as anyone else at the table. By 9:00 that evening he commenced mentioning being hungry, and by 10:30 had me downtown in a cafe, where he topped his evening's eating by polishing off a teabone steak smothered with eggs, a full order of french fries, a full order of salad, a piece of pie, and an entire silex full of coffee. I tried to keep him company, but failed miserably from the gastronomic point of view and was reduced to merely marvelling at such mighty feats of trenchmanship. I still don't see how the man manages to be only 5' 8" tall and hold his weight at about 135. If I ate that much I'd look like a garter-snake that had swallowed a chipmunk.

In addition to being one of the best men I know to discuss fantasy with, Lee's musical tastes are impeccable. Well, at least they coincide with my own even closer than do Perdue's. Lee has one of the best record collections in fandom, including a copy (on either original label or reprint) of every side ever made by Earl Hines. For straight bull-festing apart from fantasy and jazz, Baldwin is the full equal of Al Ashley. All in all, I'd say that Franklin Lee Baldwin is right in there.

No mention of Baldwin is complete without bringing in his wife, Evelyn. She is her husband's full equal as a stimulating and informed conversationalist, and moreover possesses one of the most beautiful

personalities I ever have encountered anywhere.

Dwight “Whitey” Edwards was the only other fan I met in person until I headed for Los Angeles. He was an ex-fan whose fantasy interests had pretty much crystallized in 1937 or 1938, and whose contacts with outside fandom had vanished entirely when Standard took over the Gernsback *Wonder*. He had been a charter member and prime mover in SFL Chapter #2 in Lewiston, Idaho (other chief members were Stuart Ayres, Lee Baldwin, and Duane Rimel, though there were three or four others). Edwards still read *TWS*, and one or two other pros, and browsed considerably in his collection of bound excerpts from *WT*, *Amazing*, *Wonder*, and *Argosy* of the period 1925-37. He also had most of Merritt in book form and perhaps 50 other fantastic books, together with sets of *Fantasy Fan* and *Fantasy Magazine*. I am inclined to believe that he would have become active once more, except that he moved to Seattle to go to work in the navy yard, and I gradually lost touch with him. Had he re-entered fandom, he would have been one of our more notable artists; I still remember with envy an entire *apple-box* filled with unpublished Edwards originals, many of which compared most favorably with pulp pen-and-inks. Edwards is tall, blonde, balding – a good mixer, married, and makes his living as a master machinist.

The first out-of-town recruit to the real inner circle of *The Acolyte* was Harold Wakefield of Toronto. Though I corresponded very actively with Harold for more than four years, I never did find out much about him personally, except that his “Little-Known Fantaisistes” column was tough going for him; and usually came forth by his locking himself in his room with a pint of whiskey and finishing both of them about simultaneously. Van Vogt has told me that Harold is quiet and retiring, and spends his infrequent sallies into Toronto fandom with his nose in a book. Be all this as it may, Harold is one of the best informed men along the line of book fantasy. He has no time for scientifiction, but has about the best collection of weird and pure fantasy in Canada. It has moreover been lay experience that his critical opinion is unusually sound. Not only was his regularly appearing column one of *Acolyte*’s very best features, but his limitless enthusiasm had more than a little to do with keeping the magazine going, particularly after I had come to Los Angeles and become increasingly fed up both with *Acolyte* and fandom.

Freehafer did not acknowledge the first couple of *Acolytes* until January or February of 1943. When he did so, he sent a subscription for himself and another for a Pvt 1/c R.A. Hoffman at Camp Beale, mentioning in passing

that Hoffman was a good man to discuss fantasy with, and was rather lonely and unhappy in the army. So I sent Bob the customary come-on letter and shortly found myself inundated with the most lengthy correspondence I have ever had at the time, his army job was strictly gold-brick (secretary to the divisional chaplain) and as far as I can tell he spent most of his time during the spring and summer of 1943 writing to me and drawing stuff for *Acolyte*. The drawings were not only stencilled at Camp Beale, they were actually run off there. Our correspondence very quickly got out of all bounds; there being many weeks that we'd each send the other as many as four long letters. This friendship, alas, did not survive a personal meeting as well as might have been hoped – though Bob and I have never quarrelled and have always been on the best of terms, we very quickly found that we did not have a great deal in common, particularly after I lost most of my interest in fantasy. Our correspondence there in 1943 was just one of those things, but it was a dilly while it lasted.

Bob Hoffman (or Rah as he prefers to be called) has always had too much sense to allow himself to be dragged very deep into fandom. His ruling passion is classical music, and his musical studies both at USC and under well-known Hollywood figures is calculated to land him in the musical end of the motion picture industry. Bob has the largest symphonic record collection of any. LASFSer, and in addition collects sound tracks, motion picture music, Cole Porter, and other similar stuff. He is totally non-hep. His interest in fantasy is a sideline, as is his artwork of various kinds, but he has a very fine collection of the stuff that makes fans go mad when they view it at Ackerman's. Bob is a good conversationalist and a good mixer; it is too bad he is such an esthete! But esthete or no, he was a prime mover in *The Acolyte* from the moment he first hove on the scene until Uncle finally sent him overseas.

I imagine Bill Evans really ought to be numbered among The *Acolyte* Gang, since he was one of my earliest correspondents, was one of the most regular during the Clarkston days, and worked so much with us along bibliographical lines. Another favorite during mid-1943 was Art Saha, with whom I had a protracted and fervid argumentative discussion on fantasy, part of which landed in *Acolyte*'s letter section. But I'll give these two the works later on, when I tell about meeting them personally.

Two Canadians were also strong influences on the 1943 *Acolyte*: John Hollis Mason and Norman V. Lamb. Mason wrote me a series of most

marvellous and provocative letters mostly consisting of brilliant criticism and discussion of the stories in the Campbell magazines. Fandom lost a lot of its savor for me when Mason requested me (in mid-1944) not to send him any more letters or fanzines, because his fanning was interfering too much with his mundane life and the only way he could cut it out was to avoid exposure. Lamb is one of these long-time book and magazine collectors who has been bitten badly by the bibliographical urge. He was a major influence in that he expanded so much my knowledge of fantasy authors and titles; in addition, he and I did a great deal of magazine and book trading. Our relations were rather abruptly severed in late 1943 when the Canadian army sent him overseas.

These ten fans plus Warner and Bronson made up *Acolyte's* inner circle. The *Acolyte* gang actually had no organized existence as such save in my own mind, but I did think of them in those terms until I left Clarkston.

The year of 1943 was up until early October a very fannish one for me. As I have intimated earlier in these memoirs, I had become in most ways a total fan by February, but I was benighted enough to like it. In the first place I was getting ego-boo by the barrel-full, and my preoccupation with what I was doing kept me quite contentedly snuggled up in cotton batting, drowning out the still small voices which even then nibbled at my sub-conscious telling me to get to hell out of that dead-end job set-up, to get out and make some civilized friends, to lead the life of a human being instead of spending night after night in my den, pounding on a typewriter or twisting a mimeograph crank. In the second place, I seriously and honestly believed fans to be an extraordinarily gifted and worthwhile group of people, and fandom itself to have extraordinary possibilities and potentialities as a force to build up and improve the persons participating in it. Despite the avalanche of evidence to the contrary, it was not until the spring of 1946 that I finally completely recognized the fallacy of these two unfounded beliefs.

My violent reversal of stand in regards to fannish philosophy is not so difficult to understand when one considers the false impression of fandom I had built up in Clarkston. I was a "purist fan" simply because I felt the persons like Jack Speer whose prime interests in the field no longer centered around fantasy and stf were weakening fandom by dragging in extraneous factors. Since I actively maintained my definitely non-fan interest in jazz even when I was a total fan of the deepest totality, and yet did not find it needful to drag it into fandom, I could not see why these other people could not do the same. I don't know why I was so totally unable to see the

inconsistency between fandom's professed aims and ideals and the antics of people in the field. Part of it was probably due to the fact that nearly every one of my chief intimates was a fantasy/stf enthusiast first and a fan second, but most of it undoubtedly was due to the non-recognition which perforce goes hand in hand with any evasive psychological adjustment.

Well, anyway.

The first big event of 1943 came for me shortly after the publication of the third *Acolyte*. Baldwin had gotten extra copies of it and #2 for use in his proselyting campaign, and sent them to August Derleth, the two issues in one envelope. One day I came home for lunch and found a red-hot letter from Little Augie, criticizing the devil out of Rimel's story in the third issue, and lambasting me in no uncertain terms for allowing it to be published. Derleth's point was that the Cthulhu Mythos was at best a difficult thing to use adroitly, and that no one who was not a top flight writer should try to use it, both because such a one could not expect to make a saleable story thus, and because inept use of the mythos tended to cheapen Lovecraft's memory. Well, well. I was a bit miffed about it, but comforted myself with thinking how mad all this would make Rimel. So I went back to work.

When I went home that night, I found the afternoon delivery had brought another letter from Derleth. I must admit I had quite a chip on my shoulder when I opened it, figuring that he had thought of something else rough to say. But when I did open it, I almost fainted. Derleth praised my Cthulhu Mythos article except for my suggestion that it be used to guide new writers who wanted to use it in their stories, mentioned that he had considered such a compilation himself but had never gotten around to it, and asked me if I would be willing to augment and rewrite it for the second Arkham House Lovecraft volume.

This was the one time in my fan life that I really went goshwowoboyoboy. I'll bet Derleth never in his life got quite as incoherent a letter as the one I sent him, telling him I'd love to do the article for him.

When I came somewhat to earth, I realized that I'd need some help. So I induced Baldwin to loan me his file of *Weird Tales* (I already was storing Rimel's for him) and asked Derleth if he could help me out on certain of the stories which were still unavailable to me. His help was prompt and generous, not only did he send me detailed notes on several tales which I did not have at hand, but he also sent me the carbons of the totally unpublished "Dream Quest of Unknown Kadath". I set to work, and read exhaustively

everything by HPL and Clark Ashton Smith, making copious notes from scratch. Not content with this, I skimmed every issue of *WT* in the house (1925 to date) and read carefully anything that seemed to have a bearing on the research. During this time, I corresponded extensively with Derleth, and somehow or other got him inoculated with the mythos bug too, for one day he sent me a bulky envelope with the carbons of two new Lovecraftian stories he had just sold to *WT*, mentioning that my compilation had showed that no fire entity had yet appeared so he had created Cthugha. (I was thrilled to death.)

Somehow, I managed to keep my correspondence perking at full blast during the five or six weeks I was working on the mythology essay, even answering all my mail by return mail. But one day I realized an *Acolyte* deadline was staring me in the face, though the article for Derleth was not beyond the notation stage. I went to work then; and finally turned out the final draft for Derleth in a continuous seventeen hour session at the typewriter one Saturday night, I slept most of that Sunday, then tackled the next *Acolyte* that night, turning the entire issue out in less than a month. It came out on time, but my stint took something out of me.

In the first place, my analytical reading and rereading of those Cthulhuian tales ruined them for me permanently. Those stories depend wholly on atmosphere, and once that is dissected it ceases to exist. I've not enjoyed any Lovecraftian tale since that summer, and my pleasure in other weirds has been little more than perfunctory since that time. Secondly, the rapid pace of getting out the fourth *Acolyte* on schedule got me very much fed up with the magazine. Even to my amnion enflamed eyes, fan publishing began to look remarkably like an old man of the sea.

So I attempted to break loose a little. But Jackie, I discovered when I attempted to associate with her, had become even more dour and joyless than ever. Had she cared enough for marriage and so on to make even the slightest effort right at that time, I probably could have pulled out of fandom quite easily. After a couple of weeks of rebuffs, I slipped back into the morass. That's the trouble with fact evasions and compensations – they're too easy to fall into. If one has the old side-stepping habit, he just runs and buries his head when trouble approaches, and probably ends up with his troubles aggravated, if postponed a bit. Had I the proper adjustment, so I could have faced facts squarely and acted on them accordingly, I would have done something about my marriage right then in 1943 – either given it up as a bad job (probably that) or planned a systematic campaign to try to put it back on

its feet. But it was so much easier to evade the issue, and slump back into fandom with the rest of the escapists.

Inside of a month, I'd forgotten the whole thing – rather pushed it down into the same limbo that the *Timebinder* crowd uses as a locker for inconvenient facts.

By the time the 5th *Acolyte* rolled out of the Clarkston post office, the magazine was really in the groove. Or so it seemed at the time. Enough first class material for another issue of the same size was on hand waiting stencilling for the sixth issue, my year-long campaign had begun to bear fruit what with an avalanche of subscription renewals and the beginnings of a trickle of usable and unsolicited material. I had gotten that old clunker of a mimeograph licked, and no longer had much trouble with technical details. It was not difficult, either, to ignore my increasing boredom with *Acolyte* when I was getting so much praise, and when I could see improvement from issue to issue. Besides, what an escape! No draft to worry about. No financial worries. No matrimonial worries. Ah, sweet fandom. Sweet escape. Sweet idiocy!

Tho my chief preoccupation during the Clarkston days was *The Acolyte*, I found other facets of fandom quite interesting from time to time. My acquaintance with *VOM* commenced with issue #25, and I found participation in the “forum” quite pleasant, though some of the more juvenile effusions were difficult to rationalise with my conception of fandom. The chief lasting effect the 1942 and 1943 *VOMs* had on me was to saddle me with a wholly unjustified dislike of Jack Speer. He made some remarks about girls smoking cigarettes and chewing gum, implying that such women were bags and unworthy of Speer. Or so I took it. When I asked Bronson about this “callow youth” and found out that Speer was considered one of fandom’s Great Minds, I was stunned. I still don’t see why I should have resented all this so much, particularly when a rereading shows me that I intensified Speer’s attitude far beyond what he said or implied. But I did.

Another trend in 1942 and 1943, logical enough when one considers the Lovecraftian tinge to my background, was for me to try to interest mundane ajay in fantasy publishing. This led to my digging out all of HPL’s friends who were still in ajay (notably Reinhart Kleiner and W. Paul Cook), joining NAPA, and taking considerable time in surveying the better ajay magazines. Since the good ones do not usually appear in the bundles, but must be wangled individually, this took considerable doing. I did not totally give up

on this until late August. During the time I was in NAPA I indulged in a spat with Tim Thrift which did not prove anything except that neither of us were capable of a logical uninsulting argument, got a passel of desirable HPLiana from Cook and Edkins and Barlow, and had a brief argument with Burton Crane. This I'll dig later.

In December of 1942, I learned of FAPA through a notice in *FFF*, and wrote to Chauvenet, then the secretary-treasurer. I waited on the outside most impatiently for six months, being kept from resigning from the list only by the combined efforts of Bronson, Gergen, and Warner. (Gergen was a young but apparently brilliant chap who flashed across the fan scene momentarily in 1942 as a member of the MFS, published a bit in FAPA, two issues of a subzine called *Tycho*, and then quit fandom very suddenly, in early 1943.) Anyway, I finally got in through a most amusing fluke, though I did not learn of the flukishness until later. At this time, Elmer Perdue was vice president and Chauvenet secretary-treasurer. Elmer sent Chauvenet his dues, but in some way LRC overlooked them, dropped Elmer for nonpayment of dues, and notified me that I was in. After the group was committed as far as I was concerned, Chauvenet discovered his error; but it was too late, and the FAPA constitution took one of its beatings by the roster's carrying a 51st member, me.

When I received the notification from Chauvenet, I airmailed him a note inquiring if I would perhaps have time to get a magazine into the coming mailing, my first as a member. He wired me in reply, and through some skullduggery there in Lewiston, the telegram was delivered to the office. We were almost completely idle at the moment, due to the mills' being on strike, so I wangled permission to dash home, jot down Ashley's address, and grab a partially written article I had kicking around. I got back to the office at about 2:30, finished the article (an essay on the possibility of a fanzine anthology), typed it off on ditto masters, ran it off on the company time, and airmailed the edition to Ashley with company stamps. Thus was born *Fan-Dango*.

My first mailing (that for June 1943) arrived about a week later. In retrospect, it is chiefly notable for containing the first major exposition of the Slan Center idea, something for which I went completely overboard, as might have been expected from the erroneous and over-idealized concept I had at that time of fans and fandom. My rather detailed entry into this discussion started me off on my friendship with Al Ashley, who is one of my favorite people even if he is a heel. And the mailing as a whole sold me on FAPA.

In the latter part of the summer, a peculiar combination of circumstances made it possible for me to help Tucker scoop fandom with one of 1943's hottest pieces of news, the demise of *Unknown*. John Hollis Mason saw a letter at Van Vogt's, in which Campbell told him that *Unknown* was finished. He went home feeling pretty blue about the discontinuance of his favorite magazine, so wrote me a letter crying about it. I got it one noon, so at the office dashed off a note to the then new *Fanewscard* with the gory details, catching Tucker, as chance would have it, just before his deadline. Looking back at it, it seems screwy that an isolated fan from the hinterland would be able to make a scoop like this. And looking back at this paragraph it seems even more screwy that I should waste 13 or 14 lines telling about it, but the incident has been on my mind for two pages and I suppose it might as well be told.

From the vantage point of 1947, I cannot help chuckling every time I remember how I helped Walt Dunkelberger, the lard bucket that walks like a man, to get started in fandom. Little did I know! An early summer issue of *Fantasy Fiction Field* mentioned that there was this character in Dakota who published an amateur magazine for boys in the service, who was buying vastly from Unger, and who looked like such a good bet to get into fandom. So I wrote the guy the customary come-on letter and mailed an *Acolyte* to him. It led into quite a correspondence. We even got so far as considering the joint publication of an *Acolyte*-type fanzine, with Dunk doing the work and me furnishing contacts, advice, and some material. The magazine fell through when Dunk, typically, took umbrage at something someone said to him. I believe, however, that I was Dunkelberger's first fan correspondent apart from Julie Unger. (Well, this is attempting to be realistic; I'll give you the bad with the good.)

With another correspondent from this period I actually did collaborate. Roscoe Bright, 17 years old at the time, was nosing around the fringes of fandom in early 1943, and since he lived in my neighboring state of Oregon, I took unusual pains to bring him into the field. When he finally overcame his initial bashfulness, he became a most prolific correspondent, writing me extremely long letters in a handwriting worse even than my own, sending me short stories for criticism (as if I knew anything about writing!), and so on. When I discovered that he intended to publish a fanzine without possessing even a typewriter, I couldn't resist offering to help, because I knew just about what some of the more supercilious fans would say if they collided head-on

with Roscoe's chirography and I didn't want a friend of mine to take that much of a beating until I was reasonably certain he could take it without being hurt. The result was the first issue of *Vision*. Roscoe also illustrated Rimel's long poem "Dreams of Yith" with a full page ink drawing for each stanza so that I could publish it in FAPA. The drawings were made directly with Ditto ink, and while lacking a bit in technique certainly captured the atmosphere and spirit of the poem.

The summer of 1943 saw the peak of my correspondence with Lilith Lorraine, a Texan who had taken her interest in poetry and made a very good thing out of it by establishing an organization called the Avalon Poetry Shrine. Avalon accepted memberships from poets and would-be poets, offering personal criticism and help to the members, assistance in getting published, and so on. The group published a very good poetry magazine of their own, but the chief attraction to me was Lilith herself, an extraordinarily brilliant and stimulating correspondent, and a fantasy lover from way back, with four published stories to her credit dating from back in the Gernsback days. She contributed several of *Acolyte's* best poems, gave the magazine, most of its poetical contacts, and kept me in a constant dither with her talk of a printed, semi-professional fantasy magazine, something which I hoped *The Acolyte* might develop into. Lilith also published a critical essay of mine dealing with fantastic verse. In many ways it was quite derivative from Lovecraft, but at least it gave fantasy a plug in a medium that had not heard much of it up until that time.

George Ebey and Bill Watson swam into my ken in mid-1943. Ebey was the same supercilious and amusing character then that he is now, though perhaps a little less polished, but Watson was then at the height of his peak as a boy wonder. Both of them were (and are) good eggs, though at times a bit trying to people who take themselves or fandom seriously. Watson's letters were especially interesting to me, and I was unable to realize that this mature and witty person was only 16 years old.

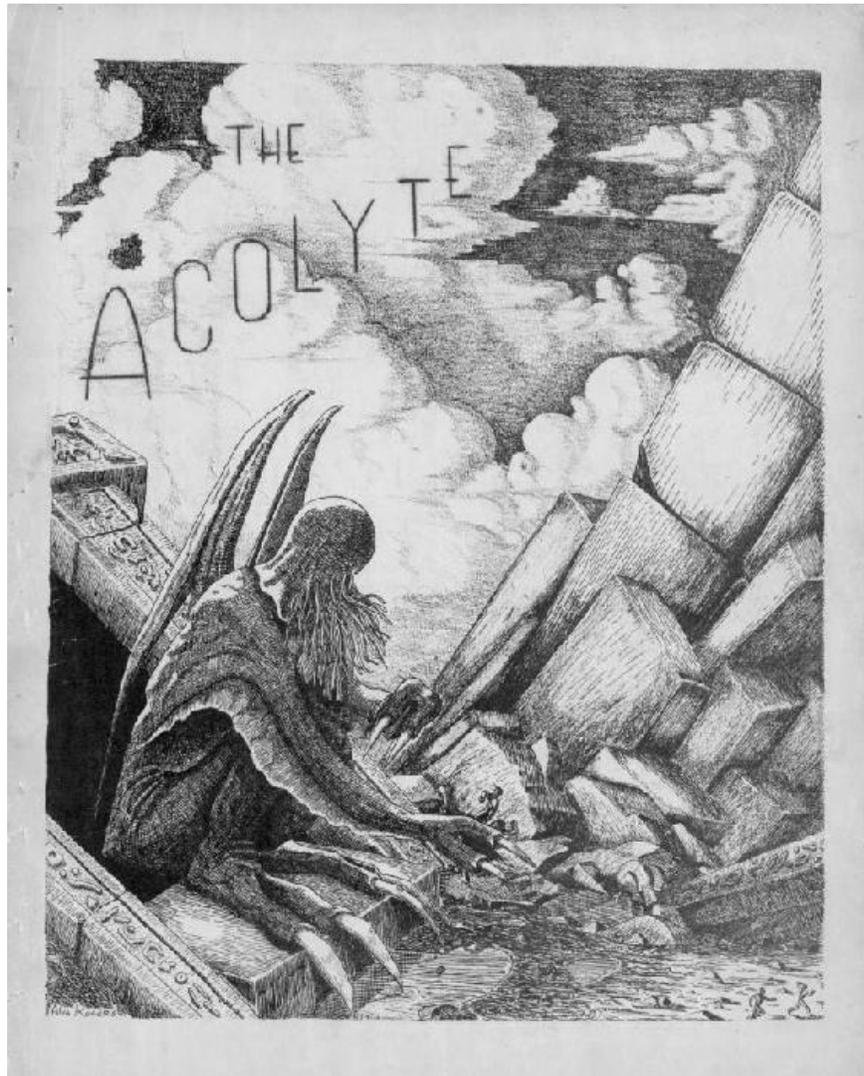
Andy Anderson has told me since that it was my letter-writing that definitely pulled him into fandom, so I suppose I should mention that he became a major correspondent of mine in the summer of 1943, and that his letters were definitely among those I looked forward to, though I must confess I no longer remember much of what passed in them.

As soon as I discovered magazine stf in late 1942, I became obsessed with the idea of building up complete files of the better ones, but of course

ran head-on into the drawbacks of my isolated location. I found a few fairly recent ones here and there in Spokane, got several duplicate Gernsbacks from Whitey Edwards, and when Watson discovered I had read no Heinlein he most generously sent me a large box of *Astoundings* for which he never would accept recompense.

But my real windfall came from Russell Chauvenet. In one of his many butterfly incarnations, the pupa offered me his entire prozine collection for only \$20.00 FOB Clarkston. I was short of money at the moment, but snapped it up anyway, paying partly in cash, partly in non-fantasy non-fiction, and partly by giving him one of my two contributor's copies of *Beyond the Wall of Sleep*. I was so excited that I forgot all about Clarkston's having no freight office (the entire county is without railroads) so caused the Chauvenets considerable difficulty. When the four or five packing cases of magazines arrived, I was in seventh heaven. Not only were there few gaps, but there was a wad of desirable duplicates, and I still remember how excitedly I collated, repaired, sorted, and arranged these magazines on my shelves. This was just about the last major piece of fanning I did in Clarkston.

The fifth *Acolyte* had come out September 15, and so I had settled down to the interim activities; in this case, the preparation of the third *Fan-Dango* and a veritable orgy of prozine reading. Ackerman himself was no more of a total fan then than I was.



*The Acolyte* #9 (Winter 1945) with cover by Alva Rogers. Scan by Joe Siclari.

## Chapter Four

# The Odyssey of the Weird Willys

As September 1943 faded into October, old total fan Laney had very few redeeming features. I did a certain amount of diaper changing and other services for the Child Quiggie, played records now and then, did occasional chores around the house and yard, and occasionally was unable to avoid social contact with the Great Unwashed. But the only non-fan activity that really meant anything to me any more was the nightly sessions with Sandy, then 3½ years old. We would play vigorously for half an hour or so, then taper off with a big sing-song of Mother Goose rhymes and suitable childish songs, rocking like mad in a big platform rocker. Then I'd put her to bed, and head straight to my den, for another orgy of fanning.

I was so deeply involved in my escape pattern, that it was very seldom I consciously missed the companionship of marriage, the pleasures of friendship; only rarely that I was momentarily disturbed by the undesirable factors of my job, or by the still unoptimistic probable outcome of the war. Fandom was All. Of course there was a strong subconscious unrest, which would have broken out and led me to positive and constructive action if I'd let it, but the soporific of fandom was so strong that this disquiet very rarely reached the level of consciousness.

That is the insidious and rotten thing about fandom. Just the same as any other evasive compensation, it fetters its participants, and does them positive harm. A head-on and non-evasive adjustment is by no means easy to make, but through its accomplishment lies a person's only hope of attaining genuine happiness and security.

No doubt you are tired of my preaching. So am I. But the chief reason I am writing these memoirs is to try to get you, and you, and you to face your own personal problems like men instead of like fans, get out of the drugging microcosm, and triumph over whatever is keeping you in fandom.

These memoirs are meant as an object lesson. That's the only reason I'm writing them.

---ooOoo---

October 3, 1943 saw my little dream world blown sky-high. A new directive

from the War Manpower Commission removed the entire office force where I worked from the list of essential jobs. In typical big business fashion, this knowledge was supposed to be kept from us, but one of the minor executives had a sense of fair play, and “accidentally” allowed the directive to circulate through the office.

When I saw it, I like to exploded. Everything I’d been evading and sidestepping rose up three times as strongly as it ever had been before. Our economic situation was precarious enough in the face of rising prices and a growing family; under GI allotments we would have lost our house and everything else. The job was no good anyway, but now it did not even carry draft deferment. And for a variety of probably invalid reasons which I’ll not bother you with, I had a dread of army service which was almost an obsession.

Before I had allowed myself to drift imperceptibly into fandom, I had been capable of reasonably positive actions, and long-dormant habit patterns sprang to life on the instant. That evening I talked the whole matter out with Jackie, decided to take off, and made preliminary plans. The next day. I skipped work, talked to my draft board, got a job release from the War Manpower Commission, and then went up to the office and told them I was on my way, but would work two or three weeks while I was getting ready to leave. They were furious about it, particularly when I spent most of that two weeks urging the other members of the force to do as I was doing.

Preparation for leaving was no light job. We owned, our own house, and it was indescribably full of this and that. While the bulk of the furniture was earmarked for sale, there remained my home workshop, books, records, and gobs of other stuff which had to be packed for storage and eventual shipment, sold, packed for immediate shipment, or otherwise handled. The house itself had to be sold. My teeth needed some immediate attention. My car, a 1938 Willys sedan, was in bad mechanical condition and required a complete overhaul plus new tires. Gasoline rations had to be gotten.

Not the least of the problems was where to go. I wanted a job which would not only be gilt-edged draft deferment, but which could carry definite postwar possibilities. This indicated a big city, as did my wish to get out from under the company town setup. I didn’t want to go somewhere that would offer me a choice between only one or two prospective employers. Five suitable cities were within striking distance: Spokane, Seattle, Portland, San Francisco, and Los Angeles. I would have gladly enough moved the 110

miles, to Spokane and called it good, since we would have been able to save all our stuff and also avoid working over the car. Jackie vetoed this, said she hated the place, and urged Seattle or Portland, both of which I disliked for various reasons (in-laws living there, too heavy a dependence on ship yards, lousy weather, and other factors). This boiled it down to a choice between Frisco and LA. So the final decision was for me to head to California alone, aiming for Los Angeles, but laying over in Frisco long enough to study the employment and living possibilities of the Bay Area. If San Francisco did not suit, then it had to be Los Angeles.

I decided to go to Los Angeles anyway, since I could get enough gas for the trip, and compare the two cities – so I made arrangements accordingly. It occurred to me almost at once that if I worked out my itinerary carefully I ought to be able to mooch over night lodging and meals from fans along the route. So I wrote to Roscoe Wright, Bill Watson, George Ebey, and Andy Anderson. Knowing that LA was in the midst of a housing shortage, I asked both Phil Bronson and Paul Freehafer if there was any chance on being put up by some club member for a week or so.

Most fan activity was of necessity shelved immediately, but I did have two irons in the fire that had to be handled somehow. Bill Evans and I had been working for nearly a year on a bibliography of H.P. Lovecraft which had advanced to such a point that my share of it would be discharged if I cut one stencil. As good as done. And I had written, on Ditto masters, five pages of comment on the last FAPA mailing which I knew would be lost if I did not run them off before I left. So I finished up the third *Fan-Dango* on the company time.

Otherwise I buckled down to work. At first I missed the customary fan activity somewhat, but the relief of actually *doing* something for a change, and the fun of making the necessary personal contacts to get things I needed very shortly shoved fandom into the background. I was still a fan, yes, but for the first time since I got so deeply involved in the microcosm I realized how deep I was in, what I was losing thereby, and how much nicer it would be to keep fandom as the hobby it should be, rather than almost a full-time job. Unfortunately, my burst of clarity did not extend to showing me WHY I had gotten in so deep.

By dint of working night and day, three weeks to the day from the moment I saw the WMC directive the house was sold, vacated, and a rebuilt Willys loaded to the groaning point with my records and a basic minimum

outfit for me was sitting in front of the house ready to go. Jackie and the children were to go to her parents for a couple or three months, until I could get a place. And I had accumulated myself a passenger, a friend of Rimel's named Aaron Shearer. Aaron had no interest in fantasy or fandom, but he was a crackerjack guitar man, and shared our jazz interest strongly.

One utterly mad stroke of luck had befallen me during the three weeks of preparation. While dashing about the rain-swept streets of Lewiston trying to expedite the motor overhaul and the tire retreading, I happened to spy a cigarette-shaped object, lying in a puddle of muddy water. Something about it took my eye, and I picked it up, dashed into a nearby hotel, locked myself in a toilet-stall, and investigated. The soggy wad turned out to be a tightly rolled sheaf of greenbacks – \$385 worth, including the first \$100 bill I had ever seen – and not a scrap of identification. No use advertising it, though I did watch the Lost and Found closely. It was probably lost by some lumberjack in town on a drunken tear. Whoever lost it did not miss it enough to advertise, so I was “in”. Actually, it was a bad thing to happen, since it made me feel entirely too prosperous, and led me to spend a whole lot more money on the trip and shortly after than I should have. But it still was a stab.

So with a pocketful of money, I chugged out of town on October 25, 1943. The car was so heavily loaded that the rear fenders scraped on the tires with every hard jolt, and even with the rebuilt motor most hills were a strain and required going into second gear. Aaron and I decided that 35 miles an hour was enough, what with a five year old car wearing all five of its original tires. The new treads did not restore the rotten casings.

Our first stop was to be Portland, Oregon, where non-fan friends had agreed to park us. Fifty miles short of town, the clutch went out, and I still don't see how we got into town under our own power, what of it we could still get to the wheels. I was frantic. The car was too badly crippled to try to find our friends' house with it, so we shoved it in a garage and went to a hotel for an unscheduled two day stopover. “Three weeks, anyway”, the mechanic told me; but I handed him an inspired line of bull about how much the war effort depended on our being in Los Angeles by November 5 (using a fictitious yarn about my connection with Lockheed, and an equally fictitious one about Aaron's connection with Navy recruiting which we backed up with his honorable discharge papers from the Navy). So the man fixed us up anyway. Synthetic taurine excretia is often a great help to one.

While in Portland, I discovered a fabulous cache of stfzines in a store

but a half-block from our hotel. The place had a special room stacked ceiling high with virtually mint copies of nearly every issue of every magazine. The biggest haul was a mint set of *Amazing Quarterly* for 1928, 1929, 1930, and 1931; though I also bought largely of 1937 and earlier *Astoundings* and completed my file of *Wonder*. This is the best magazine store I ever found: in nearly every instance I had from three to ten fine to mint copies of each issue from which I could make my selection. Bill Evans, who knows the place well, has since told me that it had gone to the dogs by the time I found it. Cthulhu knows what it must have been when Bill first hit it!

With the car finally fixed, we pulled out of Portland en route to Toledo, a cross-roads settlement near which lived Rosco Wright. This necessitated a fifty mile detour out of Corvallis, where Aaron had proposed to stay the night. Being near a big army post, the town was so packed that he couldn't get a room, so reluctantly he headed Roscowards with me.

(I might veer to say that Milty Rothman was stationed just out of Corvallis at this time, but we were unable to make connections with him since he was at the moment alerted for one of his many moves.)

Toledo, we found, is situated high in the coast range, over an execrably steep road, which practically tore the guts out of the overburdened Willys. After hours of climbing, we hit heavy fog which further slowed us, and it was close to 9:00 PM when we finally arrived at the bright farmhouse, or rather at the base of it. (The house is 50 feet over from the road and about 25 feet up from it.)

It was nice and warm in the car, but the icy blast when we opened the door nearly laid us out. But at the top of the hill was a short, stocky young man who was almost incoherent with excitement. Almost his first words were to warn us to say nothing about our religious beliefs, because all fans are atheists and his folks are hyper-religious (Seventh Day Adventist) and never the twain shall meet; also, would we oblige him by attending the nightly family prayer meeting and Bible study if we were asked. We assured him we would do nothing to abuse his hospitality, and dashed into the house hoping to get warm.

The house turned out to be one of the coldest buildings I've ever been in. It is strictly pioneer, built loosely of unplanned rough boards, and was not designed for effete urbanites. As nearly as I can deduce, the place is a homestead, probably sub-marginal, and is attractive to Rosco's parents chiefly because they are the pioneering type born fifty or seventy-five years

too late. A hilly and rocky farm such as this certainly cannot bring in much income, and the isolation (six miles from a village cross-roads) would be bad enough for me even with a car, and would be impossible without one. Yet the Wrights did not even have a truck, and were dependent on a neighbor for transportation and hauling. I daresay that the early settlers of the west must have lived much as the Wrights were.

I do not mean to seem disparaging. The house, though primitive, was comfortable enough in a spartan sort of way; and the hospitality was far more genuine than what one usually meets. But the gap between this homestead cabin with its pot-bellied old heater, and my accustomed surroundings was simply too much to bridge comfortably in a single evening. Very shortly I went out to the car and got every extra coat and sweater I could in order to bear the temperature Rosco was taking in his shirt-sleeves.

Rosco's father is a virile old man in his late sixties or early seventies, and his mother is a woman perhaps 38 or 40, work-worn and quiet. There are siblings galore, ranging down to a little toddler scarcely older than Quiggie. The family life was of a patriarchal nature and apparently centered chiefly around giving glory to God. Other activities were for the most part bent on wresting an existence from a most unpromising environment.

Rosco had an attic room of his own, to which we shortly repaired. Two of the windows were broken out, and the fog-laden icy air coming in through them had a rough effect on my tendencies to bronchitis. I couldn't help wondering why Rosco had not boarded up the empty sash with some of the dozens of boards stacked under the eaves, and why he had not taken some more of them and built some shelving, since his collection was stacked in the bodies of two gigantic old baby buggies, and in apple boxes. I am afraid I was rude enough to mention this.

Rosco was about the hardiest character I have ever met, for while Aaron and I shook as though with ague even though we were bundled up like mummies, Rosco sat there in his shirt-sleeves and stocking feet. Though he was blue with cold, he seemed comfortable enough.

And I, at least, soon got so deep in conversation that I more or less forgot how cold I was. I told Rosco most of the stuff contained in these memoirs up to now, and also dragged some of the more get-at-able stuff out of the car to show him. He showed me gobs of his drawings, his collection (which was better than mine at the time), and a bunch of other stuff; told me of his aspirations as a writer/artist; and did a certain amount of stewing over

the imminence of being drafted. Then I found out that he had not only never been to Portland (not more than 175 miles away) but had never even been to Corvallis (a mere 35 or 40 miles) I realised that the draft could easily be the making of him. (It was, too; the Rosco Wright who wore uniform around LA a year later was a far different man from the boy we met that night in Oregon. The only thing unchanged was that Rosco then and now is a swell person, vital, sincere, friendly, and a lot of fun.)

We talked until 2:00 in the morning, breaking our stint only to go downstairs for the religious meeting which turned out to consist of the reading of what seemed to me an irrelevant chapter of the Bible, totally without comment, and rather long vocal prayers. I felt at the time that Mr. Wright was the religious member of the household, and that he had trained his family to be more or less acquiescent, but I may have been wrong. In any event it was evident that Rosco's father disapproved of his drawing and writing quite strongly, and that his mother probably made it possible. Mr. Wright seemed to be a man to whom religion was the only actuality, and he coupled this attitude with a very forceful and unyielding personality.

At six the next morning, Rosco routed us out of bed, we had breakfast at 6:20, and all had left the house by seven – the Wrights going in a truck with some neighbors to the county seat twelve miles away, and we heading back towards Corvallis and the highway.

The frigid evening shortly had its repercussions; by noon my voice was utterly lost, and I could speak only in a hoarse whisper. I was moreover so racked with deep bronchial coughing that I was unable to drive. I was frantic. Not only was I afraid of getting sick in this unfamiliar country (there isn't a town of more than 10,000 between Corvallis and San Francisco) and going broke waiting to recover, but I had a definite date to meet Bob Hoffman and go meet Clark Ashton Smith on November 1.

A druggist fixed me up with some throat tablets which gradually brought me out of it, but I was a pretty sick lad for a couple of days. Aaron did most of the driving, though, and the easy stages of the next two days had me OK by October 30, when we laid over in the sun at Chico. John Cunningham was stationed there at the time, but we didn't bother – spending several hours looking through second hand stores and getting a number of very desirable records. Around sundown we finally arrived at Camp Beale, headquarters of RAHoffman and the 13th Armored Division.

Bob had reserved a room for us in the guest barracks; we had

considerable difficulty locating both it and Hoffman, but finally made the grade. The three of us chatted for a while, then Aaron heard music coming from somewhere and went to investigate. Bob and I adjourned to his barracks, where my civvies brought me the biggest barrage of whistles and catcalls I ever had in my life. I managed to weather the storm, though, and soon found myself in the middle of a big conflagration with his cell-mates, all of whom went to great lengths telling me to stay out of the Army. In mid-evening, Bob recollected that he had prepared some Hoffmania for *The Acolyte*, so we adjourned to the chaplain's office and spent nearly an hour looking at the crifanac Bob had been doing on army time.

It being closing time at the Post Library, we went thither to meet one of the librarians, an attractive but plump girl whose name I no longer recall, but who had been subscribing to *The Acolyte* with considerable interest and had been having big bull sessions of a fantastic nature with Rah. We collected her and walked through a big recreation hall where a dance was in progress. Struck by a certain familiarity in the solo guitar, I moved where I could see, and sure enough, his civvies sticking out like a sore thumb, there was my boy Aaron sitting in with a 15 piece GI swing band and having the time of his life.

Bob, the girl, and I went to the parlor of the visitors' barracks and spent the rest of the evening talking about fantasy, arguing about music, and generally conflagrating. In the course of all this, Bob and I perfected our plans to visit Clark Ashton Smith the next day, and the session closed on a high note of excitement.

We had to wait until noon the next day for Rah to clear himself with Uncle, but the time passed very quickly when we got to watching a bunch of tanks maneuvering. The Weird Willys creaked and we moaned when Rah finally squeezed into the front seat with us, for he is what might well be described as a Plump Boy, and that tiny car was plenty full to start with – but the couple of hours drive to Auburn passed very quickly, despite a lousy road that knocked another couple of thousand miles off TW's life.

Smith lives a couple of miles out of town, and is at least a quarter of a mile from the nearest road. So we parked on the edge of a dirt cow-track, and started walking through what Hoffman insists is the fabulous Forest of Averogne, actually the remains of an orchard abandoned to the wilderness. Smith's cabin, a weather-beaten two room shack, sits well away from the trees in the midst of a rocky and desolate pasture. On approaching it, one is

struck equally by its forlorn loneliness and by the beautifully built rock wall Smith has built around his dooryard.

I had of course heard a great deal about Clark Ashton Smith, and seen many pictures of him, but none of this had prepared me adequately for the man himself. He is tall and slender but well-made, and has a much more striking and massive head than his: pictures indicate, on the occasion of our visit he wore dark slacks with a light sport coat and of course his omnipresent beret; trivial, perhaps, to mention the man's clothes, but it seemed vaguely incongruous to find the man who had written the sort of thing he has, dressed like any college student. And even more incongruous was it to discover, with a touch of pleased surprise, that the man I had thought of as aged and vibrant with a knowledge not of this world was instead as youthful as any of us. Smith is extremely shy at first, but as he gradually comes to feel that he is among friends who will not ridicule his mode of life and thought, he unbends, and becomes one of the most gracious hosts and entertaining conversationalists I have ever known.

We spent the afternoon drinking wine, talking, and being shown Smith's collection. His books, a choice and varied lot, including many surpassingly beautiful illustrated editions, are very much worth examining, but the real stab came from the surprisingly large quantity of artwork, mostly the creation of Smith himself. His sculptures, using the small boulders picked up in his yard, are somewhat known to fantasy lovers, several of them having been shown on the dust jacket of *Lost Worlds* and in the illustrations in *Marginalia*. There were far more of them, however, than I had imagined – at least a hundred.

But the high point of the afternoon came when Smith brought out a stack of original drawings and paintings at least two feet thick, perhaps 25 or 30 of them were commercially published ones, including the originals of most of Smith's drawings from *Weird Tales*, and the Finlay original from "The Thing on the Doorstep". (This last, incidentally, is by far the best Finlay pen-and-ink I have ever seen. Made before Virgil started drawing to size, it measures something like two by three feet, and has a mellowed beauty encountered but rarely among magazine illustrations.) There were also several early Boks, including a couple of wonderful unpublished ones, and an unpublished Roy Hunt drawing of Tsathoggua.

Smith's own drawings and paintings, every one of them unpublished, made up the rest of the stack. Nothing of his that has been published gives

any inkling of the man's stature as an artist. In technique, of course, he lacks a good deal, being entirely self-taught. But he more than makes up for it with subtle and bizarre ideas, by a surprisingly good sense of form and structure, and above all by his unconventional and often superlative use of color. Most of the paintings are done in showcard paint, or something very much like it; they tend to be garish, but yet there is a certain use of restraint that makes even the most unrestrained ones quite acceptable. Perhaps twenty show entities from the Cthulhu Mythos; the remainder are extraterrestrial landscapes, divided about equally between non-human architecture and alien plant life.

Of the conversation I no longer remember much. Unforgettable, though, was Smith's impressive recitation of a medieval formula to raise the Devil. The afternoon was just guttering away into, twilight, leaving the room in a hazy half darkness; between the look in Smith's pale eyes, the overtones in his voice, and his powerful delivery, I must admit that the chills were really going to town playing hide-and-seek along my backbone. Materialist that I am, I was actually relieved when Smith paused and remarked that he wouldn't repeat the spell a third time, for fear it would work! Then he laughed, and the spell broke. But the man has dramatic powers which I believe might have made him famous as an actor had he followed that art.

With the onset of darkness, we went into town for dinner, taking Smith to a Chinese restaurant he had recommended. Our entry took on the air of a triumphal procession when we encountered the Auburnites, nearly all of whom greeted Smith warmly by name. It was pleasant to see that he is so well thought of by his fellow townsman, a type of recognition not always given to creative artists.

Smith had a date at 8:00, so we left him downtown and headed the Weird Willys towards the Golden Gate. His parting sally was unforgettable. Aaron was riding high on a fresh fruit kick, and just as we were leaving he dashed into an open market and bought a large sack of grapes. Smith looked at him with an air of profound disbelief, turned to me and whispered, "That may be all right, but personally I prefer the finished product."

We had been planning, happily, to have the Hoffmaniac drive us into San Francisco, feeling that we needed a bit of rest. Imagine our stunned surprise when we discovered that this non-commissioned officer in an armored division was totally unable to drive any kind of self-propelled vehicle! In vain we pointed out the intimate family relationship between the

Weird Willys and a Jeep; he informed us, smugly, that he had flunked a jeep driving examination and by army order was not permitted to take the wheel of any automobile, truck, or such.

Aaron being exhausted from the disproportionate share of driving he had done through southern Oregon and northern California, it looked as though I was elected. The Weird Willys chose that opportunity to go very, very sour on us. The lights faded out into faint ghosts of themselves, the motor began to miss and clank, and to top it off, I shortly discovered that we had no brakes left. The drive, through utterly wild Saturday night traffic, was a nightmare; we were unable to maintain enough speed to keep out of peoples' way, and were moreover blinded every time we met another car.

But we finally rolled into Oakland shortly after one in the morning, after a long conversation about the possibilities of a weird session at the Pacificon put Aaron to sleep. Hoffman suggested that we drive out to Tom Wright's house. I had plenty of misgivings about pushing doorbells at that hour, but Rah egged me on. The fragile little fellow who minced to the door didn't like the idea at all, and was at first even less cordial than I would have been under analogous circumstances. But Rah finally talked his way in and we phoned George Ebey, who had been expecting us but had given up. He had room for two, he said, but Tom, finally awake, had become more hospitable and invited Aaron to stay with him.

When we got out to Reinhart Drive, we found a delightfully zany household. George's mother and a friend had just returned from working swing shift, coffee was brewing, and a disjointed conversation sprang up. At first acquaintance, George was a bit disappointing, acting adolescent as all get out, and it was not until I met him on subsequent occasions here in Los Angeles that I realised he is one of the better characters I met through fandom.

Mrs. Ebey walked all over him for not having made us up a clean bed, but we were too tired to give a damn – even when he told us with high glee that Degler had slept there and the reason he hadn't changed it was that he was saving it for us. The bed was vile. When we saw it, we immediately decided not to undress, and as an additional precaution sleep between the top sheet and the blankets. The pillows we covered with an old blanket out of the car. I was convinced Degler must have kept a sow and litter for bed partners, but George swore this was not the case.

Since this is the first time Degler raises his stupid face in these memoirs,

perhaps I should backtrack a bit. Shortly before I started packing, I received from T. Bruce Yerke his initial letter of inquiry about Claude Degler/Don Rogers, in which he was attempting to assemble data for his report on the Cosmic Circle. Amusingly, this was the first I had ever heard of Degler, but I answered, and emphasized that any use of my name or that of *The Acolyte* was totally unauthorized, that I hadn't given Degler permission to use it, and if he was as described I never would. Shortly thereafter I got the FAPA mailing with the first *Cosmic Circle Commentator*, and practically blew a fuse laughing over it. As I thought the matter over, I saw that rubbish like that could only serve to give fandom a black eye, and became increasingly angry about it, but finally decided the best counter-attack would be heavy-handed satire. (Widner and Kepner also felt this way, judging from the three take-offs in the next mailing!) Then about mid-way through my packing, Yerke's report finally came. I read it, and without failing to notice Bruce's tendency towards one-sidedness realised that he had more than proved his point. From then on out, I was thoroughly anti-Degler, and when I saw that utterly vile bed I became slightly bitter about the whole thing. You must remember that I still held very high ideas of fandom, and that nothing even remotely resembling Clod could well be imagined as fitting into fandom as I visualised it.

Well, back to Oakland. The next morning, after meeting George's sister and baby and devouring a big bait of finnan haddy, we drove over to Wright's to pick up Aaron. There we ran into the contretemps of having four people to fit into a car that was so loaded that it would barely hold three. Since George knew public transportation, I suggested that he and Aaron ride the streetcar, and let Rah and myself meet them at Bill Watson's. Though he could see for himself that four people could not possibly get into the putt-putt, he chose to take this as a personal insult, and stalked off down the street muttering angrily to himself. We did not see him again until the next year in Los Angeles.

Not without cussing him a bit, we left Tom Wright's and headed across the Bay Bridge into San Francisco. (The hazy reference in that last sentence is to Ebey, not Wright. Ah, this composing, on the stencil!) The car was acting worse and worse, but we made it – and, through a mixture of fool's luck and Aaron's alert eyes, spotted a hotel with a Vacancy sign and knocked off a big room with twin beds. I plunked the car in a parking garage, and started to walk the six blocks to 1299 California street, and Willie Watson. If

I'd realised it was six blocks up, as well as over, I probably would have driven.

Anyway, in due season I arrived, and was met by a most door-filling character. Bill Watson is a big fellow, sandy and freckled but good looking, poised, slow-talking, and probably packs around 195 pounds on his six feet of lazy carcass. I had known of course, that he was only 16, but nothing in either his appearance or actions gave the faintest hint that Willie was not at least 25. His affectation of boredom is a bit too obvious, and he might be criticised for tending to be a little too much the esthete, but all in all I'd say Bill Watson is one of the five or six best men I met through fandom. A brilliantly entertaining talker, mature and sophisticated – certainly a stimulating companion with whom to spend an afternoon or a month.

Sitting in a corner, with his nose deep in a book, was an owl-like looking character in the blues of the merchant marine. It turned out to be my old pen-pal Art Saha, from Hibbing, Minnesota, who was stopping over in Frisco after his first voyage. Saha was a pretty constant companion during the time I was in Frisco, but somehow he managed to get in my hair something scandalous; chiefly, I think, because he had such unbelievable naivete. When he came to Los Angeles a year and a half later he was totally changed from the bumpkin with alfalfa in his pants that haunted me in the Bay Area.

During the three days I spent in San Francisco I had three or four big sessions with Watson, few details of which I can remember, except that he showed me the bulk of the first *diablerie*, and a good part of the second one. I also did a good amount of book and magazine store haunting, usually with Saha; and got an unbelievable quantity of good stuff at give-away prices, including a whole stack of absolutely mint 1929 and 1930 *Amazings* at a dime a copy.

I did no job-hunting whatever, since the raw damp air had set my bronchitis off but good. Nearly every time I stepped outdoors, I was bent double with agonised coughing, which on three or four occasions led to my losing my last meal into the gutter – and all this despite generally sunny weather. It was obvious that I could never live in the Bay Area; in fact I'd not have stayed three days except that the car was in the shop that long. Had it not been, for the god-awful climate, I would have stayed regardless of LA, since I was sick to death of driving that pile of junk, and also had heard a good deal of disquieting, information about the LASFS from Watson – but I couldn't help thinking about that vaunted southern California weather.

One very interesting evening came when I had a big record session with Bill and Edith Dart of Oakland. I had traded records with them through *The Record Changer*, and had dropped them a note suggesting a bash if I had time on my way down the coast. Saha more or less invited himself along, but I fear he had a boring time. The Darts are both jazz purists of the mouldy fig variety, as might be deduced from the fact that he is the drummer in La Watters Yerba Buena Jazz Band, and I found their dogmatism a bit amusing. Bat they are swell people, very much wrapped up in each other and in their joint record collection, and they showed me one of the most enjoyable evenings I have ever spent.

Bright and early Wednesday morning, November 3, we found that the Weird Willys was ready to roll, so in deference to my cough we headed down the coast towards Pismo Beach, a resort town noted for its twin biological products: shellfish and Andy Anderson. The trip down was uneventful, except for the glimpses we got of the shipyards, and the covey of blimps which played tag with us for an hour or so.

We arrived in Pismo and found Andy to be a gigantic young man with big knobby wrists end ankles, a shock of curly blonde hair, end a stentorian voice. His mother, whom we saw only briefly, is extremely attractive, and very young looking to have whelped such a massive giant. I still feel bad about usurping her bedroom, but she insisted that she'd already made arrangements to stay across the street with some relatives, that we were tired, we needed the rest, and we were going to sleep there; that was all there was to it. I chatted with Andy for a couple of hours, examined preliminary sheets of the then new *Centauri*, and when I found how poorly he was fixed for stfzines sold him a big stack for \$5.00. (A good \$40.00 worth according to Garage prices.) Pretty soon though, I got so sleepy I couldn't continue, so we hit the sack with a crash and got a much needed rest. For me, it was the first night unbroken by protracted coughing for more than a week.

The next morning we fixed breakfast ourselves, Mrs. Anderson not yet having returned, and I got somewhat better acquainted with Andy, being wide enough awake so that I could see him. He seemed swell, and subsequent encounters have only confirmed this impression.

Towards noon, we headed down the line to Los Angeles, but had no more than begun enjoying the drive when the Weird Willys once more went temperamental on us. We managed to nurse it quite close to town (somewhere out on Ventura Blvd.) but surrendered and put it into a shop for a

while. We got fast and cheap service, but a new generator was indicated, and my failure to get one at the time was largely responsible for my being carless for a couple of months in early 1944. Such a pile of junk!

I had figured out from a map how to get to Paul Freehafer's apartment (2325 Ocean View Ave.) and felt rather elated that we hit this rather hard to find address with no false moves, the first time during the entire trip that previous astrogation paid off without either making inquiries or getting lost.

But it did little good; Freehafer not being home. We held a consultation, went to an early dinner; and returned to a still empty apartment. So in the hope of getting a lead I called up the LASFS. A booming voice nearly knocked the receiver, out of my hand, and turned out to be Arthur Louis Joquel II in one of his more expansive moods. Yes, yes, Freehafer would certainly be in later in the evening since he had to preside at the meeting; who was this?; oh yes, we are expecting you; come on down; this is meeting night.....

Well, I was much more in the mood for bed than a club meeting, but I was supposed to stay with Freehafer until I got established, and Aaron had to go downtown anyway to locate himself a room, so off we went. I was just at the point of entering fandom's self-styled Shangri-La.



Claude Degler. Photo from the Mike Rosenblum collection.

## Chapter Five

# Utopia in Shangri-la

It was on November 4, 1943 that I made my first personal contact with the Los Angeles Science Fantasy Society, and I encountered the club at one of its all-time highs both in membership and activity. Nevertheless, as will shortly appear, the LASFS left a great deal to be desired. Even on that night, certain features of the group left me with a slightly unpleasant taste in my mouth. But I'm getting ahead of myself.

We drove up at about 6:30, and found the clubroom in the sole possession of a thirty-ish looking man considerably inclined to embonpoint. It turned out to be Joquel, the one man in fandom whose normal speaking voice can drown out Andy Anderson. He greeted us cordially, explained that a large number of the members were even then about to arrive from their dinner at a nearby cafe, and we commenced a desultory conversation. Aaron very shortly left to find a room, and I began roaming around the room, examining the originals, which were the first I had seen except for the ones at Smith's.

Then as now, the LASFS occupied the 14x16' storeroom in the Wellman Apartments, with a street entrance at 637½ South Bixel. The room is a blend of pigsty and monk's cell. When I first saw it, it was even worse than it is now, since many of the members were using the place as an office, and their personal papers and other impedimenta were strewn around in careless abandon. There was an austere and extremely dirty couch in one corner, and a rickety old square table covered with typewriters and loose papers. A large mimeograph sat on an upended fibre-barrel, and another similar barrel was pecked to the bursting point with wastepaper. A couple or three ramshackle home-made bookcases filled with tattered magazines, and 25 or 30 uncomfortable folding chairs comprised the remainder of the furnishings. The shortcomings of the room and contents were made even more apparent by the pitiless glare of six or eight naked light bulbs set in sockets around the wall. The floor was a welter of cigarette butts and other trash, not the least of which was the filthiest and most badly worn out rug I have ever seen.

I had of course followed with great interest the accounts in *Shangri*

*L’Affaires* and elsewhere of the LASFS and its new clubroom, but the Utopian atmosphere of these accounts certainly had not prepared me for such a hole. I had imagined that a clubroom such as this would have indirect lights (probably from a couple of cheap floorlamps), a number of second-hand, but comfortable easy chairs and davenports, desks and/or tables, an old radio, facilities for drinks soft and otherwise, a neatly filed library, and some sort of workroom for mimeographing. Above all, I had assumed that the place would be reasonably clean, and most certainly designed for comfortable sitting and talking, reading, and other activities.

My disappointment must have been fairly obvious, for Joquel explained that the club was still uncleaned from a halloween party held the preceding Saturday. Our conversation had nearly died out when the place was suddenly invaded by a horde of noisy people. I cannot remember exactly who came first, or indeed much of anything about the next few minutes except that a whirling dervish which I later learned was named Walter J. Daugherty commenced laying about him with a broom as one possessed, and a quietly smiling chap who I recognised from his pictures as Phil Bronson told me not to mind, that the fellow frequently suffered from these outbreaks of frenetic energy when he had or thought he had an audience.

The next half hour was pretty much of a madhouse; I met 25 or more people, tried to remember who all of them were, and at the same time was quite astonished that most of them seemed familiar with *The Acolyte*. (At the time Freehafer, Bronson, Ackerman, and Burbee were the only Fangelenos on the mailing list – and none of the 1943 members had ever heard of Burbee, who was carrying on a one-man fandom of his own.) I took it for granted that I was being introduced to everyone, not learning until later that only known fans would be greeted by these people by anything more cordial than complete non-recognition.

Eventually the meeting came to order, and I commenced giving away to complete perplexity. Yerke, who has a metal-on-metal voice anyway, read a new constitution which seemed chiefly aimed at keeping out new members – I didn’t know whether to go or stay, but Phil pooh-poohed my wonderment and said it was all aimed at Degler. It went on and on and on, a document capable of handling a gigantic group, and subsequent arguments and quarrels about the wording took nearly as long as the original reading. Then Paul Freehafer read a resignation from his post as director effective two weeks from that night. Then, as though I had not already tried every possible

contortion trying to sit comfortably on a club chair, Walter J. Daugherty was struck by one of his famous projects. He must have spent at least three-quarters of an hour remodelling the clubroom, building lockers and other furniture as he talked, he ran about the room like one possessed, waving his arms, carpentering and hammering in frenetic blind pantomime, climbing over people and moving them out of the way of his mad gyrations, and building up to an impassioned stark height of ecstasy. An authorization for him to proceed with an initial appropriation of \$25.00 was quickly passed by the club, but so far as I know nothing more ever came of this. Just another Daugherty project.

Finally, after about two and a half hours of the hardest sitting one can imagine, the meeting adjourned. I was ready to give the club a brush-off, but in the post-meeting milling around and talking I shortly realised that many of these people were well worth knowing. I hesitated, and hesitating, was lost.

Eventually, Aaron wandered back, remarked that he'd gotten a room down the street, and commenced talking to Freehafer and me. He asked if there was any good jazz nearby, and Paul mentioned that Wingy Mannone was playing just down the street and wouldn't we like to go? We would, and so would Walter J. Daugherty. So the four of us piled into Paul's 1939 Plymouth coupe and drove the seven or eight blocks to the Club Babalu, where Wingy played all that winter, and where I spent a vast amount of time listening to him. Daugherty, on getting him away from an audience, seemed like a swell fellow Freehafer was as genial a host as one could ask for; and all four of us had a very good time. Daugherty invited me to stay with him until I got settled; but I'd accepted Freehafer's invitation before I even left Clarkston, so I declined with thanks.

When Paul and I finally got to the apartment, a tiny one-room-and-kitchenette affair, I asked him if the club was always that bad, and he mentioned its flaws that had not already been apparent to me, but pointed out that there were in his opinion enough redeeming features to counteract them. I then asked why he had resigned as director, and he explained that it was due to his health. The conversation went on for some time, and I decided that the club was probably worth belonging to after all, since I could use the mimeograph (an automatic one), and could if need be store a good deal of my stuff in the clubroom. This in addition to getting acquainted with some of the more worthwhile members, of which Freehafer told me there were several.

Before telling of the events of LASFS life in late 1943 and early 1944,

perhaps I should describe the membership of the society at that time. These vignettes of course are derived from my total knowledge of the person in question, and do not pretend to be first-meeting impressions.

The director, the late Paul Freehafer, was one of the most sunny natures I've ever encountered. His health was atrocious, and his personal appearance showed it, but though doomed from childhood to a very short life, he had resolved to make the best of it and live it fully. In this he was certainly successful. A graduate of Cal-Tech, he was making \$300 a month doing research chemistry in connection with rocket fuels; spending the money entertaining a fairly wide circle of congenial friends and surrounding himself with the appurtenances of a cultured life. Paul's chief recreational interests centered around music and the arts; he was a constant attender of the symphony, the ballet, the opera, the better class of plays – and had the most comprehensive record collection I have ever seen (comprising, I would judge, at least 500 albums). His books were of amazing variety, and were no mere facade, as a few evenings with him would abundantly show. Paul was one of the most erudite persons I have ever known, and moreover was completely without pedantry or intellectual snobbery. His interest in fantasy was still strong, though he had branched far afield from this major interest of his adolescence. I believe that his reason for remaining active in the LASFS was threefold: his interest and friendship with such members as Yerke, Hoffman, Bronson, Russell, and Ackerman; a certain nostalgic attachment for the group with which he found his first friendships when he moved from Idaho to California to attend Cal Tech; and a feeling that some day the club might realise its vast potentialities. Certainly one is justified in wondering why such a man as Freehafer, head and shoulders above the majority of the members, should elect to waste his time with such a group. As a person, Paul was universally liked, admired, and respected. He was not at all good-looking, but his quick, shy smile was most engaging and infectious; his quiet wit was sharp and brilliant without being barbed, and his general friendliness and good nature made him the sort of person everyone could not help but like.

The secretary of the LASFS in late 1943 was the redoubtable T. Bruce Yerke. Bruce is one of the most brilliant alumni fandom can claim, and it is certain that both fandom and the LASFS were heavy losers when Yerke moved on to greener pastures. He was and is a difficult person, hot and quick of temper, and possessed of a savage sarcasm and impatience with mediocrity; this did not endear him to the more muddle-headed members of

the society. Yerke is rather unique in that he grew up in fandom, discovering Ackerman and through him the club when he was only 15 years old. He promptly went overboard for the idea, and although his interest in fantasy had pretty much faded out by the time he was 16, he found sufficient stimulation both in the affairs of the club itself and in the expanding minds of a few of the members to warrant his continuing activity. At the time I met him, Bruce had grown completely beyond most of the members and knew it; yet the habits of nearly seven years kept him spending a sizeable hunk of his spare time around the club and its members. He saw the need of breaking loose; yet found this very difficult to do; and the peculiarly restricted nature of his early growing up (ie. in fandom) had not only left him with some amazing blind spots but made the exact means of breaking away rather unclear to him. He had a strong tendency to try by sheer brute force to drag the unwilling fans up to his own intellectual level, and upon meeting failure was both perplexed and angry. Bruce was not quite 21 when I met him, but looked to be at least 35 – short, stocky, and about half bald-headed. Many of the members tended to regard him with awe not unmixed with terror, due to his often outrageous practical jokes (as when he wrapped the sleeping Bronson in old newspapers and set fire to them), his boisterous and sometimes boorish manners, his pronounced intolerance, the brutality of his flaying tongue, and the split second reactions of an extraordinarily incisive and brilliant mind. I regarded Yerke as an extremely desirable and stimulating associate, whose chief fault was a tendency towards intellectual snobbery and an occasional bit of bluffing as to the extent of his attainments, particularly in the languages. However, it is so difficult to judge Bruce as a young man in his early 20's, since both his looks and actions are those of a man 15 or 20 years older, and many of his more annoying actions and traits are perfectly understandable and acceptable if one can remember that the perpetrator is not the 35 to 40 years old he usually seems to be.

Myrtle R. Douglas, then known as Morojo, was the club's treasurer. She is very short, and in my opinion, very pretty. Since she herself has listed it publicly, I'll mention in passing that she is much older than most of the club members, having been born in 1904. She has led a fairly tough life, has been married and divorced twice, and the scramble of raising a strapping son and supporting herself has left her singularly without the ability to enjoy herself freely and casually, though others enjoy her company tremendously. Her chief interest in the club was her interest with Forrest J Ackerman, with

whom she kept company for several years, and I hope he fully realises the extent of her services to him – keeping the club on a smooth financial keel throughout most of her membership, doing most of the drudgery of *VOM* and other Ackerman projects, and keeping the wolves from yapping about his heels in a score of other ways. Myrtle has an inquiring mind which is somewhat hampered by a too-conventional education, and thus is sometimes a sucker for something the least bit on the crackpot side. She is, however, an accomplished, and stimulating conversationalist, and is well worth knowing from the intellectual point of view. And beneath that occasionally austere facade, there is one of the most kind hearted persons in Los Angeles, as plenty of club members past and present could testify. She is the first person most of the older members think of when they are in trouble, and in this selfish civilization people like that are rare.

Forrest J Ackerman is a household name in fandom, but you have to live around the LASFS quite a lot to know him, really know him. In connection with someone else, Don Wollheim once spoke of the “necessary monomaniac”, and that is Forry. He has made an adjustment to life which postulates that fandom *is* life, and with one or two very minor lapses has lived that life from about 1930 until the present time. Well, it’s his life, and probably from the want of anything to contrast it with he seems to derive a reasonable amount of satisfaction therefrom. His interests are excessively narrow; being limited to stf and fantasy, fandom, stf and fantasy, and fandom, with a rather slight side-interest in the motion picture. He also has a fabulous collection of photos of nude women, and enlargements of certain portions thereof. But I believe I’m safe in saying that 95% of Ackerman’s interest in life – vocational and avocational – centers around stf, fantasy and fandom. He loves to be with fans, has certain rather closely defined standards which he feels fans should live up to, and is rather deeply hurt when they fail to live up to this code. He is not always successful in hiding his feelings along this line. He imagines himself to be a poor speaker in public, not realising how well he can talk to an informal group; this of course makes him a poor speaker in open meeting, particularly if the subject is somewhat controversial. Thus he has developed a technique of seldom showing his true feelings at the time a question comes up, and usually going along with the majority. His true feelings often do not come to light for months. One would not think offhand that such a person could be a leader, but nevertheless, Forry is the true leader of the LASFS and don’t let anyone tell you differently. Forry’s leadership

might be termed the domineering of extreme passivity – it is a far cry from the tactics of the outspoken and aggressive Yerke or the sly connivings and subtle sophistries of an Ashley – but it has moulded the LASFS almost from its inception, and no doubt will continue to do so. In the first place, Forry has a most winning personality, and always commands a block of votes among the less politically minded members. Then it must be remembered that he has missed not more than a half dozen meetings in eleven years, while at least 300 people have been in and out of the club during that time. His star is now and then on the wane, when some particularly aggressive director and his supporters get in the saddle, but though perhaps momentarily vexed he knows that they will move on sooner or later, that the things they have done or tried to do will soon be as though never thought of, and that Forry's Club, the LASFS, will be back on the same plodding path, with the same mores and traditions, that he has more or less unconsciously set for it. Whatever the reason for his ascendancy, it is an eyeopener to compare the club with Ackerman, and see how much they are alike.

Right here I'd like to interject the remark that I like Forrest J Ackerman immensely. I may have been harsh with him in that last paragraph, and I may get rough with him again before I'm through with these memoirs, but I don't want him or anyone else to feel that I have any feeling towards him other than that of friendship. The fact that so hypercritical a person as myself can like a man with whom so much is wrong should be a pretty strong indication that this man has a tremendous number of good features in order to counteract the bad ones. I do think Ackerman would be, once he was over the hump of making such a drastic change, a far happier man if he quit fandom to quite an extent and lived a more mundane life. I think that there is an awful lot of man being squandered on fandom out there at 236½\*. But it is his life and I recognise his right to use it as he sees fit, even if my attempt at realistic and factual reporting may treat it roughly now and then.

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\* *The number of Ackerman's street address at that time. [Ed.]*

Phil Bronson was one of the club's leading members back in 1943. He was still publishing the #1 fanzine, *The Fantasite*, was active in FAPA, and had been a leading light in the MFS. He had also been one of my favorite correspondents, so I was extremely anxious to get personally acquainted with him. Phil in person was somewhat of a disappointment, though this is partly due to the fact that I probably had expected too much. He was a lazy cuss,

full of a sort of ennui and welt-schmerz which made him a most aggravating companion for me with my violent runnings in circles. He had also an irritating tendency towards intellectual snobbery, and a tendency to imitate Yerke in ways in which he simply did not have the depth to carry it off successfully. He suffered somewhat from too cloistered and fannish an adolescence, first in the MFS and then here. On the other hand, Phil was generally light hearted and agreeable, witty, and easy to get along with. He was good looking, well groomed, and was able to go places in public without committing any of the gaucheries to which so many fans are prone. By and large, he was a good man, and I have hated to see him drift out of my ken.

Walter J. Daugherty is a swell guy who has a very few faults which taken together have made him my chief sparring partner all through the time I've been around the LASFS. In the first place, Walt takes himself very seriously, and has great difficulty in taking criticism. He is also one of the few really aggressive members of the society, and is not noted for tact nearly so much as he is for going off the handle over something of minor import. He has a peculiarly constituted nervous system in which nearly all the synapses discharge at once with an effect exhausting to both Walt and his associates. (This manifests itself most notably in the Daugherty projects, in which some usually good idea is built up and up and up and up into a glowing cloud structure. Usually nearly all of the available energy is discharged thru the speech centers, and nothing more comes of it.) These projects make Walt a wearing member to have around; he is aggressive enough to get and keep the floor for long periods of time; one knows from past experience that nothing much is likely to come of them; yet the originator is so thin-skinned that he is prone to take even mild suggestions as personally antagonistic opposition, and we are off but good. An illuminating side-light on Daugherty is the fact that I found that the only way to be sure of killing off a Daugherty project quickly was to let it die out from lack of opposition. Daugherty is really pretty much out of place in fandom, having but very shallow intellectual interests and but a comparatively slight interest in fantasy, but nevertheless found enough satisfaction in the LASFS to stick around it for nearly seven years. On the credit side, he is definitely fun on a *mundane* party (not a club party where he tends to crowd the introverts out of the picture and put on a one man show), is good looking despite a growing bald spot and bad pock-marks, and is a veritable demon with the ladies. He tops it off by being easily the best ballroom dancer I have ever seen in action, even if he does like to

show off his medals and loving cups. He and I have feuded with great vigor for years; I understand that he hates my guts something fierce; but I regret to say that I cannot return this favor. I just find myself opposed to most of the things he wants to do in fandom, and through a penchant for shooting off my mouth have often drifted into spearheading the anti-Daugherty faction.

Lora Crozetti was a gal somewhat past the first bloom of youthful beauty who found the club a part-time outlet, while her husband was overseas. She was too sensitive herself to be as outspoken as she often was, and by no means was an easy person to get along with. Nevertheless, she was a spasmodically active member who could perhaps have been of considerable value to the club had any sizeable number of the members made any effort whatsoever to make her stay with us pleasant. As it was, Crozetti-baiting proved a major sport around the LASFS; I'm not surprised she is no longer in the club.

Sophie van Doorn and Ada Charles rounded out the feminine contingent. Both of them were women who spent considerable time attending various small clubs of intellectual pretensions and lecture groups, neither were ever more than semi-active in the LASFS, and gradually dropped away altogether due to the club's failure to offer anything of interest in lieu of its chronic preoccupation with itself and its internecine quarrels.

A very young boy, slender and delicate, who had a not inconsiderable artistic ability was Ronald Clyne, who was around the club a great deal until the feud broke out. His chief interest in fantasy was art, and I still remember how persistent he was when someone had an original or illustrated edition which struck his fancy. He would run the person wild making offer after offer, eventually running the price up to a fabulous amount, particularly if it was a trade deal. He was very generous with his own artwork, but publishing it was not always much fun, since Ron was a perfectionist to end all perfectionists, and would think nothing of making some hapless editor have a Clyne drawing re-lithographed if he fancied he saw a slight blemish in it. Ron was too single-mindedly wrapped up in his artistic aspirations to be as good an all-around associate as some of the others, but he was a very smart kid and very likely will make a good name for himself in commercial art.

Alva Rogers was our other artist; possessed of as much talent as Clyne, he lacked that old urge which kept Clyne plugging away at the drawing board, and moreover had so many other interests that his time suffered from dispersion. Stocky, slow-moving, and slow of speech, Alva has carrotty hair

and a brick-red face, is lazy and likeable. He is much more mundane than most other fans I've met, and taken by and large was about my favorite associate until he went completely overboard for the communist party in mid-1945. His outstanding characteristic is his extreme reluctance to stay out of an easy chair for any protracted period of time, like half an hour. Alva, I might add, has one of the solidest and comprehensive knowledges of magazine stuff of anyone I've known. His presence around the club was on all counts a marked asset.

C.J. Fern, Jr – Mike – can only be characterized as a card. I doubt if the world has ever seen anyone remotely like Mike. Physically he is short and squatty, with extremely myopic eyes ensconced behind inch-thick lenses, and sandy hair of the lank consistency of piano wire. His personality is something to behold. In the first place he is almost completely self-centered, and possessed of a power of concentration impossible to describe. (I remember one occasion when Mike, reading the current *Astounding*, started to sit down and became engrossed in the story before he quite reached the chair. He stopped right there, in mid-sit so as to speak, with a couple of inches between him and the seat. Someone walked over and pulled out the chair, and he must have remained poised in mid-air in a sitting position for at least four minutes before we could restrain our mirth no longer and the hysterical roar of laughter aroused him.) Almost totally lacking in self-consciousness, Mike would do some of the damndest things in public. I recall one time in the restaurant Mike was sitting by me and suddenly started pounding his head with his fist – thwack, thwack, thwack. “My god, Mike,” I gasped, “What’s the matter?” It appeared that he had heard that incipient hiccoughs could be arrested by striking the inside of the wrist against a hard surface. Going to a meal with Mike was a constant fight if he had any sort of reading matter along; he would not only forget to eat, but would apparently forget everything but his magazine. His concentration made him very absent-minded at times, and the same concentration coupled with his marked unawareness both of himself and associates made him breathtakingly rude at times. Don't get the idea that Mike is a screwball. The little guy is smart as a whip, a glutton for work (unless it gets in the way of his absent-mindedness), about the best promoter ever to hit the club, and the kind of guy who uncomplainingly did most of the chores of routine drudgery on any of the projects on which he was engaged. It is amazing how much Mike permitted his friends to use him as a convenience – particularly in running errands.

Another thing which endeared Mike to me from the first is that he is even a worse trouble-maker than I am; as a team we were something for stirring up a fuss. Mike had about the broadest interests of anyone in the club except perhaps Yerke and Freehafer, and certainly the most insatiable thirst for knowledge. An example of this last is the way he went after my record collection. Jazz meant nothing to him particularly, but here was an opportunity to hear the highlights of a well-balanced collection and try to find out what made it tick, so Mike set to work playing my records and asking all sorts of searching questions about them. I wasn't thoroughly aware that he was pumping me until later. Since Mike went at everything in a similar manner, it is easy to see why he is so well able to hold up his end of a discussion about almost anything under the sun. The guy has a brilliant mind, and if he can learn to subjugate his tendency to insult people unintentionally, and can curb his big stunt of coming calling at some of the most awkward and weird times (like the time he came calling at midnight, bringing a friend who wanted to use my mimeograph!) the lad is going to go far.

Merlin W. Brown was Mike's closest associate when I arrived in L.A. An attempt to give a complete vignette of Mel is a hopeless task, particularly if the finished product is to be compared with Yerke's brilliant and witty analysis. ("Merlin Brown: Paragon of particularity" in the #2 *Fan Slants*.) Mel's chiefest characteristics might be listed: extreme nervousness, appalling slovenliness of both person and living quarters, completely loyal and unreasoning friendship, completely uncompromising and unreasoning bitter hatreds, wild generosity, completely unexpected lightning-fast reversals of plan and intention, strong class consciousness from the working-man's point of view, and above all a rather unchanneled yearning for erudition and culture. Taken by and large, Mel is a swell guy, whose minor idiosyncrasies and whims are easily enough overshadowed by his notable good points. Nevertheless he is a most difficult person to get along with (even I who was for a long time his best friend finally fell out with him over communism), and he often embarrasses the thinner skinned of his associates, as much with his unwarranted generosity with money and goods as by anything else.

Attempting to limn a word picture of James Lynn (Dirty Old) Kepner is fraught with difficulties if it is to be libel-free and still conscientiously factual. Jimmy is a tall and delicate young man, very frail and effeminate, who is cursed with an almost impossible block which keeps him from making up his mind about anything very often. Jimmy can see both sides of every

question with almost equal clarity, and in his efforts to be impartial and factual jumps from one side to the other with astounding ease and frequency. He is a great one for crusading, a militant idealist one might say, but his great difficulty in taking and maintaining a positive stand often vitiates his genuine effectiveness as a proselyter. The prime example of all this occurred when I was director of the LASFS in mid-1945; Kepner took the floor to make a motion on something or other, stated the motion very hazily, and without relinquishing the floor asked permission to explain what he meant. I naturally wanted to know what he was driving at, so let him go on; he commenced talking about his motion and promoting for it very strongly, but gradually began seeing the other side and to the astonishment of even those of us who knew him so well he ended up talking most strongly against his own motion. I listened in growing amazement, glanced about the room and noticed most of the members snickering, so banged the gavel and told Kepner he was out of order. He was momentarily furious, particularly when I told him that he was talking against his own motion. He denied this emphatically, and so complete had been his mid-talk change of mind that he had extreme difficulty in believing that he had reversed even when everyone in the room agreed with me that he had. Kepner has a much better than average mind that seldom comes close to its potentialities simply due to this inability to channel it in any one direction. Personally, Jimmy is extremely likeable; friendly, and good company – although his tendency to blow first one way and then another can get highly irritating if one is in his company a good deal. Still, striking a balance on the lad will end up with a favorable picture.

The scholar of the LASFS of course was the redoubtable Samuel Davenport Russell, a completely wonderful person. Sam is a beautiful example of the 1-1-6 cerebrotonic. His continued popularity around the LASFS is largely due to his polite silence in the face of the club's banalities – if the club fuzzleheads could read Russell's mind they would recoil as from a Yerke or a Laney. Polite, that is one of Sam's outstanding traits – a genial, easy-going politeness and courtesy. Quiet and unassuming, he seldom speaks up in meetings, but no discussion takes place long in his presence before his eyes light up, and in his precise way he takes the ball and starts for a touchdown. I have yet to see the discussion in which Sam was not able to contribute as much or more than anyone else present. The breadth of his knowledge and interests is breathtaking, and not a little discouraging to those of us who find other interests interfering with their pursuit of erudition. It

might be said that Sam is a bit one-sided, since his avocational rounds center about the libraries to a very large extent; on the other hand his adjustment to life is so obviously satisfactory to him, and so adult, that it is plain that he is of a scholarly bent from free choice rather than as an escape from life. After a session with the LASFS' little escapists and frustrates, an evening with Sam is like a summer trip to the mountains after a week out in the desert. The man's head is loaded with facts which he presents with devastating logic; yet he is rarely if ever pedantic, and his sparkingly dry humor and twinkling grin round him off as a jewel which someday is going to get tired of the arid barnyard at 637½ South Bixel. Bad as the club sometimes is, the time I've spent there is almost repaid by the fact that through the club I have added this prince of good fellows to my circle of friends.

Of a totally different temperament, but in his own way a swell fellow is Eddie Chamberlain, a good-looking, stocky fellow with a notable inability to handle his liquor, but nevertheless a pleasant companion who is possessed of considerably more depth than is apparent at first. Ed stands out in my mind chiefly from a long and probing discussion he and I once had down in my Georgia Street shack, in which he used me as an audience upon which to unburden some woes. Thus I learned a good deal about some of the difficulties of his adolescence, and of his attempts (which my own observation shows me are largely successful) to rise above them. I consider that Eddie has surmounted far greater psychic handicaps than those which have made life-long impossibles out of many fans, and this most certainly required a high order of both courage and applied intelligence. Though Eddie and I do not have an especial lot in common, he commands my sincere respect; something which I must admit I give but charily. He's one of the few fans I have met who really tries to improve himself as a person.

Though not a Fangeleno, strictly speaking, Michi-dogfan Dalvan Coger was pretty much of a LASFS regular on the weekends of late 1943. There is a guy I could stand knowing a lot better. Dal is in many ways an Alva Rogers without the interest or talent for illustrating. Much more mundane and practical than the typical fan, Dal's ruddy face and friendly grin were always welcome.

Well, that about covers the LASFS membership in late 1943 as it comes to mind here in March 1947. Of course there were a number of others who were in and out of the scene from time to time. I might mention in passing Ewing Brown, of whom I remember nothing more than the name and a

faintly distasteful (and unremembered) connotation in connection with him; Arden “Buns” Benson, another of the MFS expatriates, who was almost completely out of the picture when I arrived, and who has always impressed me as being one of the many normal people who quickly lose interest in fandom as soon as they see what a bunch of jerks most fans are; and a character named Vic Clark, of whose distasteful actions and habits I shall say more later on.

And of course the most prominent member of the LASFS as of November 1943 was the Ghost of Claude Degler.

Well, let’s see. Before I got side-tracked writing these vignettes of the club membership, I had gotten myself through my first LASFS meeting, which came rather close also to being my last. Back to the narrative of events....

Being tired from the trip, I spent several days and evenings doing not much of anything except trying to get rid of my cough in the luscious Los Angeles sunshine, which amazingly enough actually came up to chamber of commerce standards during my first two or three weeks here, and browsing around the city.

One of the first things I did was to look up Bob Hoffman’s mother, who turned out to be strictly wonderful – young, clever, enthusiastic, good-looking, and super-friendly. Not only did she help me a lot with my house-hunting, but she even let me unload the Weird Willys into her cellar, and kept most of my stuff for me until I had a place to take it.

I spent a goodly part of those first few days rummaging in the book stores – alone at first, and later with Freehafer and/or Rogers. I also very shortly learned that someone of other was in the clubroom nearly every hour of the day and night; being essentially of a gregarious nature, this led to my spending an increasing amount of time there.

So many of the members lived right there in the neighborhood; Brown and Kepner across the street at 628, Morojo next door at 643, Daugherty three blocks down the street, and Fern a ten minute walk away. Yerke, Bronson, Chamberlain, Benson, Russell, and Freehafer used the place a great deal as a meeting point to rally around a party to go to the theater or symphony; and Ackerman commuted nearly every night from Fort MacArthur, often spending the night next door on Morojo’s and her cousin’s guest couch. Then not only did many of the members work screwy shifts, but then as always fans were notable for absenteeism, skipping work at any time

for any reason or none. In those first three months, I doubt if I ever spent more than an hour in the clubroom without being joined by one or more other members. The evenings especially saw the premises crowded; many of the members were actively engaged in publishing, kept their typewriters and other equipment right there in the room; there was usually someone reading something out of the club library; and of course the usual droppings in and out.

Since such a large proportion of the LASFS regulars at this time were active fans, rather than hangers-on, the club made a definite appeal to me, despite its obvious flaws and drawbacks. While it is true enough that one does not turn out as much output when working in a distracting group as he would alone, there is much to be said for working with and in a group. Suppose the old output of balderdash does fall off a little; as long as one is enjoying himself what difference does it make?

After the first few days, I commenced job-hunting and house-hunting about simultaneously. The club, with its large backlog of stay-at-home introverts made an excellent foil for the extraverted way I was spending my days; and it was not until I had gotten settled in a job that I found the companionship of the fans palling on me. By December 1, I had discovered that not more than one or two were willing to go anywhere outside of the restricted rabbit-run around the Bixelstrasse, and were likewise presentable enough so that I was willing to be seen with them in public. Naturally enough, I commenced a certain amount of non-fan night life – I'd have just as soon had fans as my companions, but if they didn't want to come along (or failed to meet my not very high standards) I went anyway. This is trivial to mention, except that it was one of the first factors that disgusted me with the club. Rimel and Baldwin, by whom I tended to judge all fans, were much less one-sided.

And my disgust and discontent with the LASFS grew apace as I learned more of the club's affairs – disgust with the club itself and more or less contempt for various of the members.

One of these matters was the Affair of the Burning Bibles, with its aftermath of censorship. Ackerman, as is well known, is a militant atheist. He was manifesting this belief by getting hold of all the religious literature he conveniently could with the idea of keeping it out of the hands of possible converts, wag particularly concentrating on the vest pocket Bibles being distributed at Fort MacArthur for the troops. (One man against the American

Bible Society!) Anyway, it seems that on at least one occasion, Ackerman and one or two others held a public Bible-burning on the pavement in front of the club room. In a column in the first *Fan Slants*, Kepner had artlessly told of this performance, and in doing so had set off an explosion. Most particularly had Yerke and Daugherty hit the ceiling, and demanded a censorship of this column, holding that it tended to hold the club in disrepute, and take away from the artificially built up myth of Shangri-La. (If the truth hurts the club, so be it; better to act in a way one is not ashamed to have made public was my own attitude.) And, typically, Kepner backed down more or less against Brown's wishes, and permitted the shaking of the big stick to intimidate him and emasculate his column.

Then there was the Affair of the Stolen Artwork. Ronald Clyne, it seems, had had a number of originals he wished to publish through fan channels, and had invited all of the publishing members of the LASFS to come to his house one evening at 8:00 and he would make an equitable division. Bronson, Brown, Kepner, and Ackerman missed Daugherty; went on without him; only to find, upon their arrival, that he had not only sneaked out to Clyne's ahead of them, but had hogged every original that Clyne had. Daugherty was not publishing at the time, other than verbally.

Echoes of the expulsion of Mrs. Henry Hasse, with the resultant resignation of her husband and Bill and Peggy Crawford, were still rocking around the place. Mrs. Hasse, the former Dorothy Finn, had, it seems, threatened to break up the club; however, it was not unapparent that many of her objections to the group were only too firmly founded on fact, and it did not seem to me that the group wanted to do anything about removing these flaws.

The lack of solidarity among the membership was utterly beyond belief. Absent members were discussed more with license than with freedom – and it did not take too long for one to get heartily tired of hearing this anvil chorus. A month of it left one very well informed as to which members were sodomists, impotents, alcoholics, manic depressives, phallic succubi, communists, masturbators, overt devil worshippers, lesbians, and other quaint forms of life. Oddly enough, it did not require more than an elementary ability to count to become aware that the freaks were definitely in the ascendancy. This sad lessons in the Facts of Fan Life was sharply pointed up by the parade of homosexuals constantly being dredged up in Pershing Square and brought around the club by one of the residents at 628.

And of course to cap the whole sordid story was L'Affaire Degler. I never met Degler personally (though I slept in his bed at Ebey's), but during my first 6 weeks in Utopia, I became much better acquainted with Clod than with any other member of the club. I'll try to summarise it all briefly. On his nation-wide tour of fandom, the comic coordinator arrived in Los Angeles in the early summer, moved in on Kepner, and immediately commenced propagandizing his Cosmic Circle, particularly among Brown, Fern, and Kepner – all of whom joined. He also started using the club publishing equipment to turn out a flood of propaganda – the revoltingness of which is pretty well known. At first, the more intelligent fans largely ignored him – all except Ackerman, who joined the Cosmic Circle. Many objected to Clod's extreme filth of person (he arrived in Los Angeles wearing a dirty and sweat-stained shirt which he wore every day without washing for around four months, and finally donned once again, dirt, stink, and all, when he left town in mid-October) but they merely ignored him.

Then one night, Yerke happened to pick up a copy of *Cosmic Circle Commentator*, and the row was on, but good. Bruce hit the ceiling, and, backed by Bronson, Daugherty, and others, demanded that Degler be expelled, and that his publications be confiscated. The more moderate members tended to believe Degler's fabulous claims as to the size of his organization, and felt it would be better to capture it by infiltration, take it away from Clod, and set it up as a successor to the then moribund NFFF. This did not set well with Daugherty, who of course was NFFF from top to bottom; but it did calm Yerke down sufficiently to cause him to send out a questionnaire, aimed at finding out just how much the Cosmic Circle amounted to, and just how many of the name fans Degler claimed as supporters were actually in favor of it.

In the month following, row followed row almost daily, as various of the members got into savage arguments with Degler. Brown, Kepner, and Fern disowned the Cosmic Circle during this time – leaving it with two local members, Degler and Ackerman. As evidence came in, much of it directly from the Chief Cosman's own writings and remarks, the anti-Degler group became larger and larger, and when Yerke finally published his definitive *Report to Fandom on the Cosmic Circle* they made an all-out, full-scale attempt to oust Degler from the LASFS. And hell broke loose in Shangri-La.

In the first place, the club constitution had no provision for the expulsion of members for any cause whatsoever. And to make matters more difficult,

the progressive element ran headlong into Forrest J Ackerman's deep and abiding principle that the LASFS and fandom should be a refuge for anyone who claimed an interest in scientifiction or fantasy, and who wished to escape from the world or from his own shortcomings. And many members supported Ackerman unreservedly – some through personal friendship, some because they were peace-loving outer-circle readers of stf who had not been bothered by Degler and did not believe in arguments, and, I fear, not a few because they too were more or less misfits and feared to set a precedent by which they too might some day be expelled.

A month-long deadlock ensued. Unable to get rid of Degler by constitutional means, and unable to force a constitutional amendment, Yerke and others tried personal intimidation. From all accounts, Degler's one good point is that he stuck by his guns and refused to be run out.

Yerke finally delivered an ultimatum that if Degler ever set foot in the club again except on Thursday nights he personally would throw him out. He was heartily backed by Bronson, Daugherty, Fern, Brown and others, Kepner, typically, had taken up for the under dog, and was pro-Degler at this time. Matters came to a head one Sunday shortly after this when Yerke, out at Santa Monica, phoned the club only to have Degler answer the phone. The progressives boiled into town, augmenting their forces as they came, and found Degler alone in the clubroom. Yerke started to lay hands on Degler, and was struck down by a heart attack brought on by heat and excitement. Daugherty and Bronson, in comic opera tradition, almost came to blows with each other in quarrelling over which was to have the honor and pleasure of throwing Degler out of the premises; in the resulting turmoil, Degler slipped away. Some of the members went next door to get Morojo, and caught her red-handed in the act of taking \$10.00 from Degler in payment for a life membership in the LASFS.

Freehafer was chiefly instrumental in quieting everyone down enough to get them to sit down and talk it over. This was done in a series of meetings, during which Yerke, Bronson, and Daugherty were several times on the point of resigning from the LASFS. But the hot-heads were gradually mollified, particularly in light of the fact that Degler left town never to return. (Kepner rode up to Frisco with the fellow, and came back more bitterly anti-Degler than all the rest put together.)

These conciliation meetings resulted in the writing and adoption of a new constitution for the club, with stringent restrictions on new members,

and the formation of a club within the club – The Rentpayers’ Committee – which would have jurisdiction over the club premises at all times except during the actual Thursday night meetings. This group consisted of the more active members, who carried keys to the clubroom and paid extra dues of \$1 per month and up for this privilege.

But the Degler mess left the club deeply split down the middle, a legacy of ill-feeling that has never entirely left it, even today. It also left most of the members utterly obsessed with the subject of Degler. I heard little else during the first few weeks I was here. It horrified me to find a supposedly healthy organism which had no provision made for disposing of its waste-products; my high ideals for fandom were also outraged by the fact that anyone would support anyone so likely to bring all fandom into disrepute.

Kepner, I discovered, had two large boxes of Degler’s personal effects in his closet, which he was supposed to ship back to Newcastle. Then I learned that several members had missed things during Degler’s stay, I suggested that his stuff be gone thru before it was sent – and offered myself as an agent, since I was the only person there who had not been in the Great Cosmic War of the previous month, and hence could be considered relatively neutral. Kepner demurred violently, but of course gave in – being easy to talk out of anything.

So he and I went at it one afternoon. I nearly fainted at the stench that came out of these boxes, a reek coming from some indescribably filthy clothing which was packed in the boxes. (I fished the stuff out with a tent wire – and I’m not at all squeamish, either.) We found a miscellaneous bunch of stuff obviously misappropriated from the club and various members; we also found a huge mass of undistributed Cosmic Circle literature. I immediately demanded that this be destroyed – with the idea of crippling his propaganda campaign. Kepner of course was too idealistic, but I got good enough support from Yerke, Bronson, Daugherty and Brown to prevent the stuff’s being sent. (We later made up sets of this undistributed material and sent it out in the Los Angeles post-mailing to the December 1943 FAPA mailing, as documentary evidence to support our demand that Degler be expelled from FAPA.)

Meanwhile, I’d located a room at the Lee Hotel (6th and Figueroa) and moved out of Freehafer’s crowded little apartment. I shortly secured permission from the club to use the premises as an office, keeping my locked footlocker and typewriter in the room at all times, and spending most of my

evenings there. I worked the night-shift for awhile in the latter part of November and early part of December, which caused me to miss a great deal of club activity, and thus kept my disgust with the group from coming to a head as soon as it otherwise would have.

The jaw of even a hardened fan like Ackerman dropped when he saw the extent of my unanswered correspondence, and the way that letters kept pouring in four, five, six and even eight a day even though I was writing none in reply. I set to work and mimeographed a form letter to use in reply, typing brief notes on some answering the most urgent matters. I had figured that this would choke off my correspondence for a while and give me a chance to get out the 6th *Acolyte*. Huh! All my efforts did was to touch off a veritable deluge of mail; I shortly saw that I could answer the mail and drop *The Acolyte*, or let the mail go to hell. I decided easily enough that *The Acolyte* was more important – but my respect for fandom took another dive when I saw the crass way in which so many paltry characters seemed insistent that I correspond with them at fabulous length, regardless of other commitments, and regardless of the fact that I now got all the fan talk I wanted face-to-face, and only wanted to correspond to further *Acolyte*.

During the time I worked nights, I had Saturday nights off, and at first these were made the occasion for some ripping all-night bull-fests. Since these generally ended up at my room down at the Lee, they were known as the Lee-Cons. Kepner and Rogers were the most regular attenders, next to Dal Coger, Paul Freehafer, and Bob Hoffman. Dal Coger was responsible for my initial aversion to the NFFF, of which I had heard scarcely anything while up at Clarkston. Its president, I learned from Slan Shacker Coger, was E. Everett Evans, who supposedly was engaged in secret navy work stemming from his experiences in World War I and was being held pretty much incommunicado. Evans, according to Coger, had only been a ship's musician during his long Navy service, and, instead of ~~serving his country, as the published report in *Bonfire* stated, he was serving time in the Michigan State Penitentiary for homosexuality. Now I have no aversion to homosexuals as such. If they let me alone, I am only too happy to let them alone. But I heartily despise the dishonesty of sailing under false colors, and this bit of gossip shook me to the bottom. I felt that since Everett claimed he had been framed, he would have done much better to tell the truth, and trust to the tolerant mercy of his fellow fans. In any case, this sordid bit of deceit permanently soured me on Everett Evans, all the more when he began~~

~~publishing his sanctimonious *Timebinder*, and gave me a bitter distrust of the NFFF which was not at all lessened as I got better acquainted with NFFF's leading Los Angeles disciple, Walter J. Daugherty.\*~~

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*\* The struck-out text has PLEASE REFER TO PREFACE overwritten on the stencil in large, slanting, hand-drawn letters. See [Preamble](#). [Ed.]*

My afternoons, particularly on Saturdays, were spent in book and magazine hunting. One amusing episode occurred at a well-known Hollywood bookshop; I had gone there with Ronald Clyne, who had gone immediately to the back of the store while I had stopped to browse at a front table. A clammy hand was laid on my arm, and, startled, I looked into the rolling eyes of one of the fruitiest fruits that ever got blown, from a tree or elsewhere. "Who is youah fwiend?" he lisped. "Huh?" from me. "*Who* is youah young fwiend?" the fairy repeated. "Oh, he's just a kid I came in here with; why?" "Oh-h-h! He's *such* a, bee-ootiful boy-y-y!" came the trilling response. Since this character was one of the clerks in the store, it may well be imagined that I never went there again with Ron! (So far as I know, Ron is OK; he can't help it if he's good looking!)

The bookhunting spree came to an abrupt halt a few Saturdays later when I totted up after a jaunt with Rogers and discovered to my horror I'd spent nearly \$25.00 in a single afternoon. (Of course I had a two-foot stack of *Weird Tales* and a mint copy of the last issue of *Thrill Book*, but even so....) I told the people at the club that wine, women and song were a lot more fun and a hell of a lot cheaper – and proceeded hitting the Zenda and other spots on my Saturday nights. My tendency to cut loose was all the more augmented by the fact that I was having the first of a terrific series of battles through the mails with my dear wife, who seemed to feel that the housing shortage was something I had invented to plague her, and was kicking me in the teeth right at the time I needed a modicum of consideration and loyalty.

At about this time, an amusing passage occurred between Yerke and Ackerman one Saturday night. The clubroom was very well filled with fans, most of whom were doing crifanac to beat the band. At about 8:00 o'clock, Yerke put on his coat, said good night, and started for the door. "Bruce, where are you going?" said the Ack. "Oh, I have a date." "You mean you'd leave a roomful of fans to go out on a date?" demanded Ackerman with a strong note of disbelief and disapproval in his voice. "Oh yes, hadn't you heard? I'm a pervert. I go out with women!"

I whooped with the rest, and dismissed the whole thing as a gag.

However, I was stunned and not a little hurt to discover the change in Ackerman's attitude towards me when I myself commenced missing the Bixel style from time to time to go dancing. Though he said nothing overt, he made it very plain that he disapproved, and in divers ways he made his disapproval evident if not obvious. At the time I ignored it all, though it added to my discontent with the club.

Shortly before I arrived in Los Angeles, Ron Clyne had met Albert de Pina, a Hollywood script writer who was knocking off scientifiction for *Planet* on the side. Early in my acquaintance with Ron, he suggested that I come out to de Pina's with him, and eventually I got around to so doing. De Pina turned out to be an extremely ebullient individual, not without a certain patina of Hollywoodishness, but nevertheless a genial host, stimulating conversationalist, and all-round good fellow. He seemed particularly struck with the possibilities of the LASFS as a retreat for Hollywood characters, and we had many conversations along this line. According to de Pina, a surprisingly large proportion of the people in the film industry, including such top-flighters as Olivia de Havilland, read the better science-fiction magazines regularly; in addition he felt that among this group there was sufficient demand for a relatively unpublicised retreat where they could dodge their public that the LASFS could quite conceivably be of interest to them.

Both Ron and I told him at considerable length what sort of hog-wallow the physical plant of the club usually was, warned him of the weirdly impossible individuals who made up a good part of the membership, but he persisted. He pointed out that we'd have to get a clubroom in Hollywood or the San Fernando Valley, and fix it up somewhat more civilizedly than we had described the club as being; on the other hand, he also pointed out that it was a pretty good gamble, that he was almost convinced that he could get us enough interested and interesting members out of the film colony to repay our efforts many times, that if they did come in they could certainly be expected to pay most of the freight, and that even if his plan failed altogether the club would still gain through having secured more suitable surroundings.

Well. De Pina's scheme sounded rather fantastic, yet there was no question whatever about him, or his connections (which were well documented by his fabulously interesting scrapbooks – I myself saw his copy of his \$250 a week contract as a script writer which had been in effect at the time he was drafted), or his sincere interest in stf – which he continued to

write as a hobby long after he had been signed up at the fabulous figure of \$750 a week.

While I could see possible drawbacks to the scheme, I most certainly talked it up around the club – and my growing disgust with the LASFS got still another boost from the way the people received it. Mike Fern was about the only member outside of Ron Clyne who liked it at all; Mel Brown, forgetting that it was only a scheme to talk about, went off into a veritable tantrum and said he'd resign if any of those people tried to get in the LASFS. Daugherty was firmly opposed – after all, he *was* only a stand-in. Ackerman characteristically said little, but indicated that such a move was contrary to the spirit and traditions of the LASFS. And so on..... Oddly enough, the poorer integrated an individual member was with life, the more bitterly he objected to de Pina's scheme; even though it must be remembered that I did not even bring it up officially, but merely talked it over with some of the members, it was from this episode that I first got my belief that to most of its members the Los Angeles Science Fantasy Society was no more than an escape from reality and an attempted escape from themselves and their own woeful shortcomings, a belief which subsequent experience has only confirmed.

My report back to de Pina, oddly enough, did not deter his interest in the LASFS. Finally, one Sunday evening, I took him over to the clubroom, much against my better judgement. The room was occupied by Ackerman, Morojo, Fern, and Brown, When we entered, Brown looked up, dropped what he was doing, crowded past us and left before he could be introduced. Fern went on reading, acknowledging the introduction with a barely perceptible grunt. Ackerman and Morojo were mimeographing *VOM*; they did acknowledge the introduction, though coldly and with obvious lack of enthusiasm, then immediately turned their backs pointedly and went on with the mimeographing. Shaking with rage, I showed de Pina a chair, tried to entertain him with notable lack of success, and watched him spend half an hour trying to be friendly. Everything he said just floated out a ways, then dropped with a soggy splat on the filthy floor. If a direct answer was imperative, Morojo or Ackerman would usually mutter a constrained, monosyllable. At no time did they stop their feverish mimeographing, except when de Pina expressed a wish to buy a certain issue of *Unknown* and Ackerman stopped long enough to hunt it up for him and pocket the money. Finally, de Pina left; I accompanied him to the door and offered to drop him,

but he reminded me that he had an appointment at the Biltmore (eight or nine blocks down the street) and that the walk would do him good.

I went back into the club and proceeded to stand things on end. I was so angry I could hardly talk, but I managed to indicate what I thought of this rank boorishness. Mike I forgave up to a point when he claimed that he had been so deep in his reading he did not realise what was going on; something that was characteristic of him, though a trait difficult to condone. Ackerman muttered something about, "After all, he'd just had a few stories in *Planet*; who was de Pina, anyway?"; I blew my top at the boy, pointing out that this made no difference, that the man was as much a fan as anyone present, was this club open to fans or wasn't it, and so on – well interlarded with choice Anglo-Saxon remarks of dubious semantic bearing on the dispute. Ackerman subsided. Myrtle quite huffily pointed out that it was the only night the duo could work on *VOM* for a week, and that they were too busy; I blazed back that perhaps *VOM* was not of quite such cosmic importance as its editors liked to imagine, and besides there was such a thing as common courtesy. Brown came back in time to get a tongue-lashing from me. Later he told me that the Ack-ojo bloc in the club had decided to cold shoulder de Pina if he ever came around, for fear the members might try to take up his scheme of LASFS expansion, but I have never been able either to prove or disprove this statement.

I shouldn't have permitted all this to affect me as it did, but I never felt the same about de Pina after this, felt vaguely humiliated over the whole mess, and gradually ceased visiting him. He was as good a sport about it as one could imagine, but I never could quite look him in the eye after exposing him to such an uncalled for series of snubs.

Needless to say, this episode fanned my discontent with the LASFS to open revolt, and set me to making political plans for the first time; partly with the idea of revenge (I hate to admit it) but mostly with the idea that with a bit of support I might be able to lead the club into a somewhat less revolting groove.

I did not see de Pina for over a week after this, but when I saw him next it was under pretty exciting circumstances. An Earl Carroll girl, June Harris, had had a long fan letter in the then-current *Planet*; de Pina mentioned that she had suggested he bring a couple of friends to Christmas dinner, and wondered if Clyne and I would like to be those two. (I nearly walked through the phone saying yes!) As an aside, I should mention that Daugherty like to

fused his jets when he saw June's letter in *Planet*, immediately dashed off a letter to her in which he mentioned he was connected with Warner Brothers, and in his excitement sent the letter airmail special delivery though it only had to go from one substation of the Los Angeles post office to another, a bit of assinity which occasioned much merriment around the club. Anyway, Ron and I went out to de Pina's and shortly after he took us to June Harris'. I no longer recall who all was there, except that it was a small gathering and everyone had a very good time. In the course of things, June discovered I belonged to the LASFS, and mentioned having received a letter from some starry-eyed boy (yes, that's what she called him) that had perplexed her. She got it out, and read passages, which brought good laughter from the people around the table, as did that airmail angle; finally asking me if I knew the fellow (slightly, I said) and what was his connection with Warner Brothers. "I'm not entirely sure," I said, "but I think he's just a stand-in for someone." Whereupon, June tore up the letter. (My telling of this episode around the club somehow did not amuse Daugherty as much as it did some of the others, but then, I've never claimed to be a very good raconteur.) June was tall and ravishing, a very smart girl, and possessed of much more mind than most women I've talked with. Sure, I talked science-fiction and fantasy with her; after all, that was my speed, and mink-coated beauties with brand new Buick convertibles are definitely not. Christmas dinner with an Earl Carroll girl. Yes, I'm afraid I was a bit awed.

Apart from the regular fan gatherings, I also got in on a couple of other social events in late 1943 that perhaps should be mentioned. Lora Crozetti had several of us, including Brown, Kepner, and myself, for a luscious, home-cooked Thanksgiving dinner; and Morojo took a number of us to an exclusive Italian restaurant in Hollywood for Christmas Eve dinner, one of the few times that Ackerman has ever eaten out without going to Clifton's.

But I must veer away and pick up the political developments of November and December 1943 in Shangri-La. At that time, the club had only one elected officer, the director (actually president), who appointed the secretary and treasurer, plus any other officer's he might wish, such as librarian. These, plus the chairman of the Rent Payers' Committee, formed an executive committee which under the constitution had almost unlimited powers, though at the time I came to LA they did not avail themselves of them to any great extent.

Freehafer's resignation as director necessitated the election of a pro tem

director to fill out the balance of his one year term which was to expire December 31, 1943. Walter J. Daugherty, in one of his frequent political moods, spent a great deal of time outlining to all who would listen his proposed platform; oddly enough, no one would nominate him, so he was unable to run for the office. Jimmy Kepner and Buns Benson were nominated; when Kepner was elected, I was astounded when Buns and his supporters (Bronson, Chamberlain, Yerke, and one or two others) got up and walked out of the club. Kepner seemed stunned, but rallied enough to appoint Lora Crozetti as secretary (she did not attend a single meeting in that capacity; something of a record for an officer even in the LASFS) and continue Morojo as treasurer.

This walkout was followed in a very few days by some very bitterly worded resignations from Yerke, Bronson, and others. At the time I did not know enough about the club to realise how well-founded their strictures were, so tended to oppose them. Another factor was my very slight acquaintance with the gentlemen in question; this mass resignation occurring only three weeks after I arrived in town. So particularly when the first *Knanve* came out, with its poorly worked out Bronsonian attack on new fans, I was for a short time quite strongly anti-Knanve. It must be remembered that the Knanve resignation occurred but three weeks after my arrival in Los Angeles, and that I had but little chance to become well acquainted with the “genial knaves” during this time; also that my being around the club so much tended to give me for a short time the club’s viewpoint.

One result of all this was my faux pas with Lionel Innman. At the time the #1 *Knanve* came out, I wrote a red-hot article attacking Bronson extravagantly, signed it as director of the LASFS, and submitted it to *Vulcan* (which Phil had particularly singled out for criticism) for publication. By the time the article appeared, the feud had broken wide open, I was an Outsider and on good terms with Bronson. So I sent Innman an equally red-hot retraction, attacking Ackerman and the LASFS as wildly as I’d previously attacked Bronson. At about this time, *Vulcan* went on an irregular basis and I gradually forgot all about this article, only to have it come out about two weeks after I was once more back in the LASFS. I believe that in this *Vulcan*/Bronson episode I did the most thorough job of making an ass of myself that I ever did anywhere. If I weren’t trying to write a factual and realistic account, I’d be only too happy to suppress all mention of it.

A person standing on the outside might have jumped to the conclusion

that the LASFS, after the resignation of the Knanves, would have been a pretty much united group. How wrong he would have been! There were at least three distinct cleavage lines, marked by extreme hostility, which divided the membership into overlapping groups.

Most important was the strong anti-Daugherty feeling. Mel Brown spearheaded this, having conceived a violent hatred of WJD over the Affair of the Stolen Artwork, which was not in the least abated by Daugherty's being taken on the staff of *Fan Slants* as the only condition by which Daugherty would permit Brown to use any of Clyne's artwork. This situation came to a head in early December when Daugherty jumped Brown for running off a Clyne illustration on the wrong color of paper, and the resulting ruckus nearly brought the two to fisticuffs. I had to lead Mel outside and reason with him for nearly an hour to calm him down. Daugherty was also cordially despised by some of the members who resented his grabbing the floor for ego-boo purposes, was held in slight regard by most of the more intelligent members who resented his strident floorgrabbing tactics on the grounds that they detracted from the intellectuality of the club. At the time I was on good terms with Walt, and actually liked him a good deal, despite the fact that I tended to regard his tendency towards self-glorification as rather amusing.

Secondly, there was a marked anti-homosexual feeling held by several members. It must be remembered that the club had from two to four active homosexuals in its membership at all times, that one of the most active members of the club was also its most vocal homosexual, and that he was continually bringing other fags around the club.

The last cleavage line was that between Ackerman and the rest of the club. Ackerman was riding extremely high on his "fandom is all" philosophy, and was not only expressing strong opinions against various members who chose to vary their crifanac by music, the theater, sex, liquor, or anything else (usually behind their backs) but was developing a most exasperating habit of handing "delinquent" fans prim little notes of rebuke in which he chided them for going to the symphony, or shooting craps in the club room, or going dancing, or taking a drink.

Despite the swirling tides of antagonisms, the LASFS was rolling along quite merrily. Kepner, in his capacity of director, instituted a very successful series of discussion meetings, at which business was held at a minimum. His technique was excellent. He himself would prepare an introduction, and

would proceed to lecture the club on the chosen topic, expressing himself as extremely as possible. The moment one of his outrageously unsupportable statements would set someone off, Kepner would subside, and would resume talking only as it was necessary to keep the discussion moving along. Right at the point when the bullfest was at its height, with two or three individuals clamoring at once for the right to be heard, he would adjourn the meeting, which would immediately break up into several violently arguing groups.

I got transferred to the day-shift in early December, and very quickly got a belly-ful of the club. In typical Laney fashion, I commenced shooting off my mouth as to what was wrong with the LASFS, and before I knew it had outmaneuvered myself into a position where I had to put up or shut up. Unfortunately for my own tranquility, I am not the shutting-up type.

Brown and Fern became angered at Kepner over some of the non-fan friends he kept bringing around the club, and came to me with the request that I run for director with their support. I turned this offer down, pointing out that I'd not been around the club long enough to get elected, and that I had enough to do without taking on a task, which I knew regretfully I'd be sucker enough to take seriously. But they kept after me. Then one evening in mid-December, Walt Daugherty button-holed me on the way back to dinner, asked where we could go for a private talk. I led him to my car, where he told me that he thought my ideas would never take, that they were too close to his own ideas with which he had taken the directorship in 1940, but that he felt about the same way, and that if I'd accept, he intended to nominate me for director. We talked the matter over, counting noses and votes, and I came to the conclusion that I could probably run a pretty good race at that. Between my reluctance to back down on my severe strictures on the club and Walt's persuasive tongue I gave my consent.

This led to an idiotic contretemps. I immediately told Brown and Fern what I'd decided, only to have Brown blow his top and tell me that if I let Daugherty nominate me he not only would not support me but he would fight me with all he had. Fern backed him up. This attitude really got up the Laney Irish, and led to a six weeks rupture between myself and Brown, since I told him off but good.

Kepner was nominated against me, but after talking over my platform with him he expressed a wish to withdraw. I tried to talk him out of it, but he did. Ackerman and Morojo talked him into reopening his nomination, and this action was the first thing that set me veering towards the side of the

Knanves, since Yerke had bluntly pointed out that the Ackojo block, as he called it, stood entirely for neutrality, banality, and the status quo – I’d not believed it, but this action so clearly proved the truth of this one statement that it set me off reconsidering the entire Knanve matter, something one could not do objectively without being turned against the LASFS.

My platform might be of incidental interest: (1) Unite all Los Angeles fandom under the banner of the LASFS. (This was worded around the club in such wise as to lead Ackojo to believe I would oppose any further attempts at ousters (such as the Degler ruckus); actually meant that I intended to try to get the Knanves back into the club). (2) Continue Kepner’s discussion meetings. (3) Clean up the club and its membership both physically and psychologically. (Yes I was naive, wasn’t I? But I’ve always had a strong yen for improving myself and ironing out my own many mental kinks; my big error was in presuming others around the club had any similar motivation.) (4) Get out an issue of *Shangri-L’Affaires*, which had been in a disgusting state of suspended animation for nearly six months.

In the course of my political maneuverings, I approached Kepner, and suggested that if he felt my ideas on uniting the LASFS and the Knanves were any good (he did) that it might help unite the club if he and I made a reciprocal agreement that whichever one was elected director would appoint the other secretary, which of course was the #2 officer of the club. The effect of this of course was to guarantee the club a reasonably non-partisan slate of officers, a coalition cabinet, so as to speak. Kepner accepted this deal.

On the night of the election I happened to sit next to Kepner. As the ballots were being passed around, he leaned, over to me and said, “Are you going to be a gentleman and vote for me, or a heel and vote for yourself?” “Why, did you ever here of a Laney being a gentleman?” I tossed back. Of course I voted for Kepner. The ballot was a tie. Walter J. Daugherty was extremely annoyed, since as teller he had to pass out a new set of ballots. We voted the second time, and it was still a tie. Walter J. Daugherty hit the ceiling, accused the club of making fun of him by deliberately tying up the vote, demanded that either Kepner or I withdraw from the race, and in general put on a typical Daugherty display, including the customary threat to resign from the club. Kepner leaned over to me and suggested that we break the tie by deciding between us which one was to be director. I said, “OK, I’ve been voting for you; I’ll change and vote for myself.” “My God,” Jimmy screamed, “I’ve been voting for me too!” The club howled. It ended up that

both Kepner and I voted for Laney, so I appointed him secretary, as previously agreed, continued Myrtle in office as treasurer, and adjourned the meeting. 1943 was over in Shangri-La.

I seem somehow to have missed the exhumation of Charles Edward Burbee Jr., so before closing this chapter, I'd better backtrack. Both Andy Anderson and I had corresponded at some length with Burbee in my pre-LASFS days; when he dropped into town during the Christmas holidays he suggested we look the guy up. The idea of a mystery man who wrote long letters to fan editors, subscribed to all fanzines, yet apparently had never been around the LASFS appealed to Kepner's imagination, so the three of us grabbed a streetmap, and drove out to Burbee's house. He was most friendly, made vastly with the beer and whiskey, and explained that he had gone to the club about eight months previously, had walked into a roomful of people who ignored him for half an hour, and had finally left in disgust. (This was and is the LASFS' most annoying feature – the rude way in which visitors are deliberately ignored and made to feel as unwelcome as possible unless they are either known fans or are sponsored by some aggressive member who will force the club to recognise them.) We secured a promise from Burbee to try again, and left after a most lovely four or five hour bullfest.

So I guess it is time for a vignette of Burbee, the guy who for a long time was my best friend in fandom. Physically he is tall and slender, with a leonine head wobbling on a pipestem neck, bushy curly dark hair, swarthy features, and a pronouncedly Mexican cast of features (which no doubt stems from the fact that he is of English extraction.) He is very much married to a somewhat shrewish wife and an indeterminate number of children. Burbee is not worried about matters of child-raising – he counts noses at night, and if there are less than three he says, "Oh well," and starts another one that night. He is very easy-going, rather vain in some respects, and smooths his passageway through life with a sense of humor that can be called nothing less than unique. He is lots of fun, but never appears to take anything seriously; a factor which at times can be annoying. He is also the dirtiest talking man I have ever known. But he is a good egg, even if he is motivated only by a profound jealousy of Al Ashley's superior mind. (When I get to Ashley, I intend to say: Al is a good egg, even if he is motivated only by a profound jealousy of Chas. Burbee's superior mind. This may be a peculiar form of symbiosis.) At any rate, neither Al nor Chas can talk to me for ten minutes without commencing to run down the other, so I believe I am justified in

presuming there is some sort of obscure attraction here. Burbee, despite his easy-going ways, can be a very difficult person, but is well worthy of cultivation, particularly if you are bawdy-minded, for the guy is the best off-color raconteur I have ever known. His interest in fandom and fantasy is reading without collecting and publishing without ego boo (except of course for Charles Edward Burbee). Alter-interests include beer, bawdy reminiscences, tinkering with radios and other sound equipment, and record collecting.

Another arrival on the December 1943 scene was Jules Lazar, a hefty young jewish boy from Boston and the Strangers' Club. He was tall, heavily built, and strong as a bull. He did not fit very well into the club, being prone to take offense where none was intended, and through being essentially uninterested in fandom, yet just enough introverted so that he found difficulty in staying away from the easy associations of the club. I always rather liked Jules until his tendency to shove people around after a couple of drinks, became too pronounced. Since he was only 16 or 17 at the time he was in LA, I have little doubt but what he has grown into a pretty nice fellow. Certainly there was room for improvement.

Oh boy. The next chapter will be about the feud. Hold onto your hats, folks!



LASFS members *circa* 1941/1942. Back: unknown, Morojo.  
Front: Walter J. Daugherty, Pogo, Forrest J Ackerman. Photo  
from the E.J. Carnell collection.

## Chapter Six

# Thunder over Paradise

With my election to the directorship of the LASFS, the stormy affairs of the club became my own peculiar responsibility, or so I felt at the time. I had criticised the club savagely though constructively; here I had been given the driver's seat, and so it seemed up to me to try to do something about the conditions which I had deplored.

Trouble broke out almost at once.

My first ruckus of 1944 was with Walter J. Daugherty over my membership in the National Fantasy Fan Federation. Everett had come out of durance vile in late 1943 and had commenced his strong membership drive; his bosom buddy Daugherty seemed to regard it of prime importance that all members of the LASFS join the NFFF. "Los Angeles 100% behind the NFFF," was an oft-reiterated cry about this time. Well, I heartily despise this sort of imitation chamber of commerce stuff. Why should we be 100% behind anything? What had the NFFF ever done to warrant our supporting it? It apparently was just another new attempt of the Cosmic Circle type of mind to get a lot of free ego-boo. All I did was to ask a few searching and honest questions. Daugherty answered my three chief objections most unsatisfactorily: we should be 100% behind the NFFF because it was *the* national, the NATIONAL, fan organization. It was not new, either; was established in 1941. OK, what had it done in the past 2½ to 3 years? Uh, well ... fandom did not cooperate; the president was called away to the service of his country (!); well, uh, well my god Laney it is the NATIONAL fan organization and the LASFS should be 100% behind it.

So I turned it down cold. Daugherty told me if I couldn't afford it right then he'd put up the dollar, and it made me pretty thoroughly disgusted to be so totally unable to get across my point that I saw no need for the NFFF, and that I felt it should prove itself before I joined.

So Mr. D. sent in a dollar in my name anyway, over my flat refusal to join. I did not mince words when I found out about it, but finally allowed that the prestige of the LASFS demanded that its director belong to the NFFF, so I paid over my dollar and slid back behind the sophistry that Laney the fan was

not a member of the NFFF but Laney the director of the LASFS was. But it strained the air between Daugherty and myself no end.

(Oddly enough, neither at this time nor any other time during the feud, did anyone tell Daugherty that his idol was in the clink on a morals rap. We didn't want to hurt Daugherty. He did not learn of this until Al Ashley told him about it in the fall of 1945.)

The next fuss, coming almost simultaneously with the NFFF imbroglio, concerned a fanne named Patti Grey Wood, a cousin or something of Morojo's who had for several years been more or less active in fandom under the name of Pogo. She had been a member of the LASFS for several years, had married a club member (Russ Wood), and moved to San Pedro. Now her husband had gone in the Navy, she was going to live with Morojo, and she wanted to rejoin the LASFS. But it seems that she had had some sort of major quarrel with Ackerman, part of which is a matter of public record in 1942 FAPA mailings and part of which I never did find out anything about. The upshot of it all was that Ackerman flatly refused to have her in the club. Quite frankly, this burned me up. Pogo was a member of FAPA, had published two fanzines under her own power and three or four jointly with her husband; her stuff did not rate especially well either in quality or quantity, but it wasn't so far below average but what it could be read with more or less interest; I felt that the club needed members, particularly feminine ones, and that Ackerman had no business whatever to try to keep anyone out of the club, particularly in light of his assiduous fostering of Clod Degler.

Nearly all of us applied the pressure pretty hard; and Ackerman, appalled at the apparent loss of the esteem of most of the club, rather grudgingly permitted her to join. (His method of keeping her out was to state that he personally would boycott her in every way, refusing to speak to her or acknowledge her presence if she rejoined. Pogo naturally enough did not wish to rejoin under such conditions.) This whole thing soured me pretty completely on Ackerman for a while, and my disgust with the lad was not decreased by the comic opera bust-up with Morojo with the contradictory post cards which occurred at the same time. (Ackerman broke off with Morojo because she wanted to smoke in the clubroom, sent out about 50 postcards to fandom announcing the split-up – then had to send out another postal a day later when Morojo gave in on the smoking.)

Anyway, Pogo joined the club, so I suppose a vignette is in order. She is

a rather large woman – not fat, but tall, big-boned, and well-built; carries 140 pounds in a manner that makes them look like 120. She is brunette, pretty good looking, and notable for an air of vague helplessness which largely stems from myopia and is not at all reflective of a rather self-sufficient and competent personality... Her interest in fandom was almost entirely limited to the people in fandom, rather than in fantasy, stf, or other facets of the field; and she was far more interested in going dancing than in sitting around the turgid atmosphere of the club.

The first three or four meetings of my term ran rather smoothly. The Kepner-led discussions featured them, and for the most part I did fairly well in keeping business (or quasi-business) off the floor. This was pretty hard on some of the boys like Daugherty, whose chief pleasure seemed to be getting the floor and holding forth for half an hour on how dirty the club room was or something else of equal moment – but it did tend to make the meetings of more interest, particularly to the outer-circle members who after all did not care a faint damn who got his ego boo and how, but were more interested in serious discussions.

But what business there was turned out to be red-hot. When the Knaves resigned from the club, Yerke had retained his title of Honorary Secretary, and early in my term of office approached the LASFS with the idea of being confirmed as an honorary member. Since the club had permitted Bruce to use the title “honorary secretary” repeatedly in club publications, it seemed to me a foregone conclusion that the group would acknowledge the honor. Ackerman, Morojo, and Daugherty had a fit – claimed he had never been made an honorary member, and that he had never even been made honorary secretary, though it developed that he had held that office for over five years. An attempt to check the conflicting claims by referring to the minutes merely showed that certain sets of minutes were lacking altogether. It could have been carelessness, but at the time I felt they had been deliberately extracted and destroyed. I still think so, though I haven’t a shred of proof. The affair came to a head at dinner one night before the regular meeting. Accusations of tampering with the minutes were being hurled pretty freely, and Ackerman, who apparently felt very deeply against Yerke, seemed to think that some of us wanted to destroy the club by permitting T. Bruce Yerke to belong to it. It was all very assinine, but feeling was rising very high. Wishing to preserve a modicum of peace in the club (after all, I’d been director only two weeks) I suggested to the arguing parties that the whole Yerke matter be turned over to

me, and that I would make a constitutional interpretation on the strength of which the matter might be decided. Oddly enough this seemed satisfactory to most of them. Of course my line of thought was pretty obvious; Yerke himself had written the club constitution no more than three months previously, and I was certain that he had provided for himself therein. Unfortunately he had neglected to do so; though I spent most of the evening studying the document I could find no pretext on which I could announce Bruce as an honorary member. So of course I had to rule that the constitution did not provide for honorary officers; however, I pointed out, it would be a fine gesture if we were to grant Bruce an honorary membership, “since he has served as an officer of the club for years and moreover is one of the few local fans who has any sort of reputation outside Los Angeles.” This made Ackerman very angry; “Give him an honorary membership? Why, he has insulted the club!”

My personal affairs struck a nadir in mid-January. In the first place, I was rather dissatisfied with my job at the time, yet could not as yet figure any angles to get around the war manpower commission and make a change, particularly in light of my rather shaky standing with my draft board. Secondly, the quarrel between myself and Jackie had become terribly bitter – she seemed to hold me personally responsible for the housing shortage, raved and raved because I had not rented a house and sent for her (though she steadfastly refused to allow me to buy a house at swollen wartime prices – nearly 40% of what a house would cost today in 1947), demanded that I come back immediately and go to work for Boeing (and live with my in-laws), and so on. Well, the Weird Willys was done, finished. It would still hobble around town after a fashion, but both it and its tires were too far gone to take off on a trip. And I most certainly did not intend to spend the furniture money for a dubious used car which might turn out to be even worse. To lend greater immediacy to the situation, my room at the Lee was becoming impossible – the hotel was trying to put me out (so they could make more money on the room by renting it by the night) and had managed to make it uninhabitable – through ransacking my dresser daily while I was at work and leaving my clean clothes strewn all over the room, unlocking my door and leaving it standing open, not permitting me visitors, and so on. To top it off, I still had that bronchial cough which had been chronic since early October; I felt lousy physically, and missed enough work to cut my earnings away down – this of course leading to a certain amount of psychological upset and worry which

was not in the least abated by the letters my supposed helpmate was knocking me over with once or twice a week. I mention all this simply to point out that I was not myself during those first few weeks of 1944, and that these other conditions undoubtedly contributed to my getting so bitterly involved in the feud. Imagine it, here I was caught in a situation in which I could see no avenue of satisfactory escape, yet one tiny facet of it (the club) most definitely was susceptible to being worked on.

It was in the middle of my depressed period that I brought out the “drunken” *Fan-Dango* which caused so much unfavorable comment for the next year or so. The Sunday of January 16, 1944 saw me confronted with a FAPA deadline, a date with Pogo, and a bottle of rum. I started the afternoon cutting stencils furiously to try to get most of them done before my date; being in the dumps anyway started sampling my bottle, and first thing I knew all my disgust with life in general and the LASFS in particular started pouring out of that machine. Somewhere along the line I knocked off, went on my date, and came back around midnight gloriously potted. Kepner was there and wanted company, since he intended to mimeograph all night, so I went back at it with more force than judgement. On looking over that once notorious issue, I find myself in hearty accord with nearly everything I said. The trouble was that I did not substantiate my remarks (taking my proofs for granted without realising that most fans idealise both the LASFS and fandom) and that my language occasionally got just a shade vulgar.

Along about this time I had discovered that Pogo intended to divorce her husband, and commenced taking her out quite a bit, seeking in her and one or two other girls a bit of compensation for my own stormy matrimonial situation. And this brought me headon into collision with Ackerman. Certainly I was around the club a number of times when I had been drinking. So were a lot of others. As long as I could carry my liquor (which I definitely could and can do) I couldn't see that it was anyone's business but my own, and I not only resented the fact of meddling on Ackerman's part, but even more his refusal to tell me off like a man and his constant circulating of lurid and unfounded tales about me, tales which came back to me almost daily at about that time.

Also, when I commenced dating three to five nights a week, Ackerman and some of his friends began howling that I was neglecting the club, forgetting that I was still spending more time around the sacred styte than any director since except Ackerman himself. Though I find myself unable to

remember specific instances, I still recall vividly how bitterly I lashed out, “Was this place a male nunnery, and had I taken some perverted vow of chastity and self-denial?”, when all this finally came to my attention once too often.

The drinking situation came to a head in mid-January. Pogo and I had decided to use the clubroom and Mike Fern’s radio as a spot in which I could teach her to dance; I had part of a bottle of rum, perhaps two-thirds of a pint. We waited until the fans had left, then went over and spent perhaps an hour dancing and talking and taking an occasional short nip. Kepner dropped in and also picked up some dancing lessons by remote control. (No, Burbee, I didn’t dance with him.) About 11:30 the radio went sour, we talked for a while and then decided to play pinochle, which we did until about 2:00. We still had some of the rum left when we adjourned, so it is pretty evident no one was more than faintly happy; and we also tidied up the club, leaving it neater than it had been when we entered it.

The next evening all hell broke loose. Daugherty and Ackerman both jumped me for turning the club into a whorehouse, holding a drunken party, and destroying the members’ property. I gave right back with as good as I got, and it was a honey of a fuss. From here on out, it was open war between Ackerman and Daugherty against me.

I finally had gotten my bellyful of both the Lee Hotel and my dear wife’s fantastic refusal to face the facts on housing. I decided to lay off work and hunt full time for a rental. Then I finally saw that such did not exist, but that there were a number of cheaply available store-buildings, many equipped so as to be convertible into housing with little or no effort, I decided to make a compromise, rent and furnish a store (after all, I had to buy furniture anyway and had the money for that purpose), then sell Jackie on the idea of buying a house.

Very shortly I had located a former vegetable market, located at 1104 South Georgia. It was horribly filthy, having been empty since its Jap tenants had been put in a concentration camp in early 1943, and was in a tough part of town; on the other hand it was filled with shelving, had a small separate room in back, a toilet room, a sink with running cold water, and several gas outlets. The landlord agreed to give me a gas hotplate on which to heat water and permission to do anything to the shelves I wanted to. So I rented it for \$50.00 a month, bought a bedroom set and a living room set, and moved in. Jules Lazar helped me move and do the heavier lifting, and one weekend of

really hard work saw me fitted up with a really nice apartment. I tore out all but two sections of the shelves, rebuilt these into an “L”, using the leg (backed with the corrugated board off my mattress box) as a partition. This gave me a three room suite: 20x30' living room, 20x18' bedroom (containing the sink and hotplate as well), 12x12' utility room (which later was fitted up as a publishing workroom) and of course the toilet room back in the far corner. That was the once-famous Fran Shack. It had its flaws, notably the tendency for street dirt to blow in under the door, and the inconvenience of having to bathe out of a small pan. But I had a broom and was not afraid to use it, and you'd be surprised to know how much bath water can be made out of a gallon of furiously boiling water.

The second meeting of my directorship, I announced that since I could find no qualified person willing to take over the editorship of *Shangri L'Affaires* to replace Phil Bronson, the club would devote the last meeting of each month to getting out a jointly published issue. I asked for a show of hands to see who was willing to do what, and very shortly had a pretty good issue lined up. Daugherty came in shortly after this, and immediately had a fit, claiming that joint publishing had been tried before (under his aegis) and had failed abysmally. “It can't be done.” Ackerman, under this prodding, allowed that he was afraid of being stuck with all the work.

Since everything I had yet suggested, since my election, had been greeted not only by this Daugherty “can't be done” sound-off, but by apparently sustained attempts to discourage anyone who might want to try it my way, I called Daugherty on it right out loud, accusing him pointblank of trying to sabotage my attempts to do anything with the club and suggesting that his possible motive might be that he did not want to see anyone succeed where he had failed. Somehow, Daugherty's and my relations took a turn for the worse about this time.

But the membership went on anyway, writing and stencilling for *Shangri L'Affaires*. I wrote a two page article entitled, “Knanveism: A Boon for Fankind?”, in which I analysed the first issue of *The Knanve*, and suggested possibilities for the group, likening them to the alumni associations in mundane ayjay. The tone of this article was on the whole rather friendly towards the Knanves, though it was not without a certain amount of sarcastic undertones, and wondered out loud if they'd be big enough to rise to their opportunities. Ackerman, incensed by the *Knanve*, wrote a really rugged article called “Knanve is a Louse, by L. Sprague de Campfollower” in which

he stuck his usually retracted neck out just as far as it would reach, and put out a pretty sharp personal attack on Yerke and Bronson.

Among other things, it stated that Bronson and Yerke had stated that they would walk across the street rather than speak to Ray Bradbury, that Yerke was rejected from the army as a manic-depressive, and a number of other items which would be hard to prove. (Yerke, for example, was put in 4-F on account of hypertension.) Forry showed the article to me, and asked me what I thought of it. Well, I knew very little of the facts of Yerke's seven year sojourn in the club, so I told Ackie that if he were reasonably sure of his facts I thought it was OK. I figured it would get a rise out of the Knaves, that they probably would answer it, and that in the course of the resulting controversy the truth would probably come out. And I didn't care a rap who ended up with a tarnished reputation.

In due season, the last meeting of January rolled around, the meeting at which we were to publish *Shangri-L'Affaires*. I had done a considerable amount of advance planning, assigned Brown and Fern (both shaky typists) to the mimeograph, and had arranged that some stencils were already cut for them to start in on. Before the meeting, I went next door to Pogo's, got to talking, and let the time for starting the meeting roll past. It made no difference, really; everyone knew what was planned and that there was to be no formal meeting other than a call to order, reading of minutes, and adjournment; and the secretary (Kepner) was supposed to preside in the absence of the director. For some reason, Kepner could not bring himself to call the meeting to order, and a number of the people (notably Joquel) got extremely angry because I was not present. Joquel had a tantrum and stormed out of the club, and shortly I got a phone call from Fern, who also seemed in evil mood. I asked if the meeting had started, found it hadn't, and told Fern to tell Kepner to call it to order and get it over with, that I'd be over as soon as I finished my drink. A few moments later, Fern came into the apartment without knocking and walked right down my throat. I blew up at him, told him I didn't intend to preside, that Kepner had certain definite duties in my absence, and that I would come over as soon as the club was ready to start publishing. Following which, I shoved him out the door and slammed it on him, and went back in for another drink.

I arrived at the club, finally, just as Kepner was adjourning the meeting, doled out assignments to the few who did not already know what to do, and commenced stencilling my own article. I cut the two stencils, checked to see

that everyone had something to do, and took Pogo, around the corner for a short drink. Everyone seemed furious at me. I got back, found little had been done in my absence except cuss me, but I merely sat down and composed an editorial on the stencil. I got it finished all but two or three lines, was called across the room to settle the order in which certain unforeseen items would fit into the issue, looked around and saw that everyone had a half an hour of work while I had perhaps two minutes, so took Pogo around the corner again for another drink.

When I came back, the atmosphere was pretty tense. Mel remarked he needed a stencil to run off, so I sat down to finish mine only to discover that Ackerman had finished it in a most insulting way. I blew up about it, and the meeting ended up in a savage quarrel. Ackerman, Brown, Fern, and Daugherty (the latter having just dropped in) waded into me for neglecting my duty; I came right back to point out that I had written and stencilled three pages out of a twelve page issue, had coordinated the work, that I was only one-fifteenth of the people present but had done a quarter of the actual work, and what did they expect for two bits. I further gave Ackerman the tongue-lashing of his career for sabotaging my stencil. The upshot of it all was that we did not quite finish the issue having, as I recall, 10 of the 12 pages done.

The next day at work, I thought the whole thing over, realised that while I probably should have made a point of being on hand every second there was nothing to make such a fuss about, since after all I had done my part of it (if I was that much faster a typist that I could go out for a while too that was just the reward of genius (!!)) or something) and that anyone would resent being sent for in so insulting a fashion when there was no need to send for him at all. On the other hand I realised that I had never had any serious trouble with anyone while I was merely a member of the club, and it occurred to me that I'd better give the club back to the nitwits and confine my fanning to publishing *The Acolyte*. So that night I wrote out a resignation as director, which I thenceforth carried in my pocket, with the resolution to use it the moment another fuss came over the horizon.

But that was on Friday.

Sunday the whole complexion of the brewing feud changed sharply. Along about noon I was puttering around Fran Shack when there came a rap at the door and there were Phil Bronson, Buns Benson, and Bruce Yerke. Yerke was at the point of a temper tantrum over Ackerman's "Knanve Is A Louse" which the three had just read, and peremptorily demanded that I

suppress the article. I told him I was double-damned if I'd be intimidated, particularly in my own house, that I took orders from no one on club affairs, but I would be only too happy to talk to him about it if he could present his case civilly. He more or less subsided, grumbling like a bear, and Bronson took the conversational ball, from time to time subduing Yerke. Benson throughout the afternoon said little or nothing.

It seemed that all of them had taken violent exception to the article, particularly on certain points which they assured me were totally unfactual, and that they felt Ackerman's characteristic ducking behind a pseudonym would make the publishing of it an official sentiment of the club.

I pointed out that Ackerman had submitted the article to me in advance, that I had told him it would be OK if he were reasonably sure of his facts, and that since it was patently impossible for me to have witnessed most of the stuff the article was talking about I could do little but take Forry's word. However, I pointed out that the pages of *Shangri L'Affaires* were open for a rebuttal, that if necessary I would mimeograph the Knanve's article myself, and that I was quite willing to put it right in the same issue as "Knanve Is A Louse" and let fandom as a whole pass judgement on who was truthful.

Yerke looked very much startled. "Just where do you stand between the club and us?"

"I'm trying to be neutral, but I'm getting sick of some of the stuff that goes on around the LASFS," I replied, and went on to tell of the various troubles I'd had, and of my intention to resign as director. I got out the resignation and headed it to Phil.

He read it over, burst out laughing, and remarked that it read like Yerke had written it. "My god! Are you one of us?"

So we settled down for an afternoon of conversation which definitely was the turning point of the feud. I did my best to talk the Knanves into rejoining; pointing out that four more votes would control the club, and that if we could only maintain political control for a while we could probably raise the standards of the club sufficiently to make it an organization worth belonging to. Bronson at length seemed willing to rejoin, Benson said he wanted no further part of fandom, and Yerke seemed wavering but more or less unwilling to back down on his previous resignation unless the club could make some concession.

We commenced comparing notes on the LASFS during the past two months, and very shortly discovered that both Ackerman and Daugherty had

done everything they could both to turn all club members against the Knanves and to convince the Knanves that the club was united against them. Before long we had worked out a nebulous sort of pact; Bronson was to rejoin the LASFS for voting purposes and attempt to bring Chamberlain in with him, Yerke was to remain outside the club but it was vaguely understood that if the matter of his honorary membership were to be settled one way or another he would rejoin and take over the secretary job once more, with Kepner being kicked upstairs to a post as program director. At the same time, he made it plain that he was dubious as to the possibility of the club amounting to anything, and that he felt a separate group, minus Ackerman, Daugherty, Morajo, Crozetti, and one or two others, would be the best ultimate solution to the problem of having an adult and intellectual fan club in Los Angeles.

At about this point in the conversation, I remembered my anti-Bronson blast I'd sent to Innman. Gulp! So I told them, about it, handed Phil the carbon, and dashed off an airmail note telling Innman to kill the article. (Our comparing of notes had shown beyond a shadow of a doubt that I had largely based my article on erroneous conclusions.) Phil was pretty angry over the carbon, but Yerke exploded into gargantuan laughter when he read it, reminded Phil of a letter they had received on the same subject from Art Sehnert, and shortly we were all friends.

Late in the afternoon, the Knanves headed towards the club with the intention of talking Ackerman into withdrawing his article. He withdrew it.

The next evening, I learned of this, and was stunned. In the first place, this necessitated rerunning over half of *Shangri L'Affaires*, and for no good reason that I could see. In the second place....

“Regardless of what the Knanves said or did not say yesterday, that article is either more or less true, or more or less false. If it is more or less true, then your withdrawing it under pressure brands you as a coward. If it is more or less false, then your writing it at all brands you as a liar. Can't you say something reasonably objective to me, that will give me an excuse to preserve a good opinion of you?”

Forrest J Ackerman said nothing.

“Then as far as I'm concerned, you are a lying *and* cowardly son of a bitch,” I said coldly, and walked out of the club.

The feud was on.

Two days later, on Wednesday, Fern and Brown came to me, apologised

for their part in the row with me at the publishing session, pointed out that they were sick of the club in general and Ackerman in particular, and could I as director use a couple of new henchmen who were willing to vote to expel Ackerman from the club.

I welcomed their support, naturally, but pointed out that I wanted a more or less united club, that Ackerman was easily the most interested fan in town, and that he belonged in the club. I went on to say that I felt he was riding entirely too high, that his self-righteousness was driving the better class of members out of the club, and that he most certainly needed a shaking down.

“Why don’t we just suspend his honorary membership for 30 or 60 days with the idea of handing him, with a jolt, the factual picture of what he is doing to the club, which we all know he thinks so much of?” Of course I didn’t know Ackerman as well then as I do today, or I never would have made such a suggestion. I wrongly supposed that he would be shocked into examining objectively his relations with the club, see for himself how his actions were alienating so many of the members, and mend his ways somewhat.

The next night, Bronson rejoined the club, and I appointed him to the executive committee as a member at large, and called a meeting of the group to be held in Pogo’s apartment for a half hour before the meeting. Knowing that Morojo would not countenance any disciplinary action directed at Forry, I did not inform her of the meeting, which of course was a grave error in political tactics, as well as ethics. But I was afraid that she would talk the other members of the executive committee around against me, and that she would thus nullify the effect of what I intended to spring as a surprise. The only way around it would have been to dismiss her as treasurer, something I did not feel justified in doing without cause, particularly in light of her long service in that office.

Present at the committee meeting were Jimmy Kepner, secretary; Mel Brown, librarian; Mike Fern and Phil Bronson, members-at-large; and Pogo as an interested bystander. Now Kepner had been my chiefest supporter through the entire month previous, but when it came to actually implementing some of the things we’d been talking about he had one of his frequent changes of heart and flatly refused to have anything to do with it, adding that he intended to get Forry and Morojo and run me out of office. I asked for and received his resignation as secretary, on the grounds that my administration had to be united and that if it did something the club didn’t

like they could get a new administration in which Kepner, no doubt, would find a place. He immediately left the meeting and went tattling to Ackerman and the club. I appointed Mel Brown secretary, and we fell to discussing the Ackerman ouster. Cold feet became in evidence at once, particularly from Pogo. I emphasized that the last thing I wanted was for Ackerman to leave the club, that all I wanted was disciplinary action to try to bring him to his senses a little, and that I felt it would do the trick if we, the executive committee were to vote unanimously that we felt his honorary membership should be suspended for thirty days, saying why of course, and that we should couple this announcement with some remark from me stating that I felt the matter had gone far enough to open someone's eyes, and announce that I should like to hear a motion to table this report for a period of thirty days. He so agreed, and went over to the club.

Kepner had really stood them on their ears, and the place was buzzing like a hornets' nest. And by no means was the sentiment all pro-Ackerman, either. Forry gave me a look that I will never forget – a half-hurt half-angry stare – and never looked directly at me again until the feud was over. (Nor did he speak to me again for three months.) I called the meeting to order, ran through the prescribed ritual of minutes and treasurer's report, announced that Brown had replaced Kepner as secretary. Morojo had passed Pogo a note, requesting to talk with me; I saw it, and declared a recess for a second meeting of the executive committee, including Morojo. She did her level best to talk me put off my ideas, but failed to get very far because she insisted on getting off on a tangent explaining why Ackerman was more worthy of being #1 fan than Tucker, who had just succeeded to that position. She and I agreed, however, that Forry was badly in need of psychiatric care, that he was harming the club with his fanatical puritanism and other actions, but disagreed violently on what to do about it. She emphasized that if the club suspended Forry he would commit suicide, a possibility that had never occurred to me since I could not envision anyone becoming wrapped up in fandom to that extent. Finally, we decided to let the matter rock along (after all, Forry had been given ample evidence that his ways were offensive to a sizeable portion of the members – which was all I had ever intended to do). So we went back, I called the meeting back to order, remarked that everyone knew what had been discussed earlier in the evening, thanks to the “loyal cooperation of my late secretary”, that the only intention was to show someone that his attitudes and actions around the club needed a certain

amount of attention, and that the matter was dropped. I adjourned the meeting, but then made a side-remark that if we were going to purge anyone, it would be a good idea to start in with Walter J. Daugherty. I then went over to Ackerman, and tried to tell him the underlying ideas of the apparent attempt at an ouster, but he turned his back and refused to listen.

So the next day, before going to the Bixelstrasse, I wrote Ackerman a friendly enough letter, in which I set forth the things he had refused to let me tell him the night before. When I arrived at the clubroom, I walked into an imbroglio de luxe. Walter J. Daugherty, who had not been present at the meeting the night before, had heard that I suggested purging him, and for some reason did not seem to like it. He lit into me and I lit right back. In response to his remarks I told him just precisely why I considered him to be a liability to the club: his utter intractability, his complete lack of reliability, his floor-hogging, his apparently deliberate attempts to sabotage everything that was not emblazoned with the name of Daugherty and the complete lack of accomplishments (other than on a verbal level) of anything that was emblazoned with the name of Daugherty. Oh, it was a honey of a spat! I daresay ten people sat quiet as mice in that room while we had it out. I expected him to take a poke at me any moment; it was running through the back of my mind that I shouldn't get into a fist fight with him because I'd be giving away twenty-five pounds (FTL, 155 lbs; WJD, 180 lbs); at the same time I was mad clear through with an inner fury that was like icy fire, and I was damned if I'd back down a fraction. No blows were struck, as it turned out, but it was mighty near to it more than once. In retrospect, I've felt that I gave a definitive statement of the case against Daugherty that night – at least, everyone present except Ackerman has been strongly anti-Daugherty ever since.

Right at this point in the feud, I realised that I had gone far too far to think of backing down, yet realised with a sudden burst of clarity that my following, such as it was, was in the first place almost entirely losing interest in fandom, and secondly was too lacking in common interests to make an enduring separate club. I finally came up with an idea for a club within the club which, it seemed to me, would guarantee political control (thus preventing a few of us from being suddenly expelled if the Ackojo block should ever get the upper hand) and at the same time try to lift the club to a higher intellectual level, despite the hard feelings which, I felt, would gradually die out if we could avoid any further hostilities for a few months

and couple this interregnum with an attempt at a constructive program.

I went so far as to draft a rough charter, in which I gave a few of the possibilities as a basis for discussion. I called the group “The Outsiders and Others”, and set it up as an honorary political organization, semi-secret in nature, whose avowed purpose was to build up the Los Angeles Science Fantasy Society through both example and precept. Even to this very day (April 1947) the LASFS has suffered acutely from a general low level of membership standards and a preoccupation with political wrangling in preference to constructive activity. Since the club claims to take to its bosom anyone professing an interest in fantasy, it is a lodestone to crackpots and psychiatric freaks of all descriptions, and the presence of so many of these impossibles tends constantly to drive away the few worthwhile people which the group attracts. A reasonably mature and intelligent person very shortly finds greener pastures than the LASFS unless he happens to be deeply involved in fan publishing or to a lesser extent collecting, but the fuzzleheads, socially unacceptable almost anywhere else, not only find themselves welcomed by the club but find enough other impossibles to associate with that driving them out is almost impossible. And the preoccupation with its own inner affairs, which can never be of other than clinical interest to the newer member, prevents the club’s having anything remotely resembling an intellectually stimulating plane of activity save in spurts; if for no other reason than because the constant grind of intrigue and counter-intrigue and the long and deadly business meetings consume all the time and energy available to the group.

Through the establishment of the Outsiders I proposed to cope with both these major problems. The group, as I envisioned it, was to be invitational and highly selective, with a unanimous ballot required for admission. Since we would refuse to accept the more dubious specimens, their inability to get into the inner circle would tend to drive them away, and our being united would make it possible to expel the more thick-skinned ones. In short, I wanted to substitute the cold shoulder for the glad hand, and reserve our hospitality for worthwhile people, instead of wasting it on the misfits, crackpots, and impossibles.

Since the club revolved so exclusively around its own politics, I proposed making the Outsiders a political machine to end all political machines, take and keep political control of the club, and then attempt to focus the meetings on something worthwhile for a change. Previous attempts

at discussion meetings frequently ran foul of someone's desire to get the floor and, through lack of intellectual depth sufficient to present anything of interest, talk about the club's already too much talked of affairs. I wanted constitutional changes put through which would force all club business to be submitted in writing and passed on by the executive committee before being allowable on the floor. This would eliminate 90% of the business I have seen brought up in the LASFS between 1943 and 1947, because so little of it is really business; most of it is just Daugherty or someone like that trying to get some ego-boo. I wanted extreme powers vested in the director, under the theory that he should perform much as a city manager, discharging most of his duties without a lot of time-wasting palaver, and being subject to recall or impeachment if he got out of hand. I wanted more stringent controls over the recruiting of new members, with a reasonable probationary period so that we could spot the worst cases before we saddled ourselves with them.

I proposed to exercise and maintain this control through the use of block voting in all elections and club business. Whenever necessary, The Outsiders would meet and discuss any proposed piece of business or select the next group of officers or do whatever else was needful. Among ourselves, we would use completely democratic methods, with full and free discussion, then vote. Each Outsider was to pledge himself to vote in the ensuing LASFS meeting the way the majority of Outsiders had voted in their own meeting. In this way control of the LASFS would be child's play, since we would have had at most times a bloc of 10 to 12 votes to cast en masse in a club of 20 to 25 members, some of whom would be sure to vote our way just on the intrinsic merits of the matter under consideration.

It may be wondered why I kept harping so much on political control of the LASFS, but it must be remembered that without this control there was no way of keeping the less worthwhile things from coming on the floor and consuming an entire meeting, nor was there any means of trying to build up a qualitative membership.

In the form I have just described, The Outsiders never existed. Yerke opposed it because he felt that we would do better to get clear out and away from the club and make a fresh, clean start. Kepner and one or two others had their idealism outraged by the realism of the bloc voting and other points. However, the real-death blow to the club-within-the-club came in the rushing events of the next few days.

Immediately following the abortive disciplinary action aimed at

Ackerman, Jules Lazar sought me out and was going to knock my block off for taking overt action against Forry. The best my occasionally glib tongue could do was to calm him down a little; he was completely unable to see any reason why we had attempted to set Forry down a notch. Two or three days later, Jules and one or two others had a crap game in the clubroom; Ackerman got wind of it, and handed Jules one of those primly stuffy little notes of rebuke he was so free with in those days. Lazar hit the ceiling as though he had just attained critical mass.

Of more practical importance, he came to me, apologised for wanting to knock my block off, and gave me the most extreme anti-Ackerman lecture of the whole feud. He added that his vote was strictly anti-Ackerman from then on, and that he also held the proxy of Alva Rogers, who had just left town and returned to his parents' home in San Diego. (It might be added that Rogers had given this proxy to Jules with verbal instructions to use it as Ackerman directed, not realising that Jules was going to change sides.)

Well, this gave us two more votes; I counted them over in my mind and nearly fainted when I saw that we could for the first time in the feud probably carry a two-thirds majority vote. So at the next meeting, I instituted a motion to elect T. Bruce Yerke to honorary membership in the LASFS. Apart from Bronson, who made the motion for me, I took no one into my confidence as to what I intended trying; and in fact set up as a smoke screen the discussion among the Outsiders of what we could do to ruin the LASFS just before, we resigned – such as send the entire treasury to Ziff-Davis for long term subscriptions in the clubs name, or elect Walter J. Daugherty director, or perform some other heinous piece of sabotage.

It appeared that 14 persons qualified to vote attended the meeting. Lazar submitted the proxy of Alva Rogers, but it was with a sudden sense of misgiving that I heard Ackerman submit the proxy of John M. Cunningham, a character whose army career had carried him briefly through Shangri La but long enough for him to part with ten bucks for a life membership in the LASFS. (The category of life member, and the dues for it, were easily decided when Cunningham asked about becoming a life member and the club discovered he had ten dollars.) It was pretty obvious that if Ackerman were going to write to every fan who had ever been a member of the LASFS and tell them a few carefully censored and misleading half-truths he could get enough proxy votes to run the club by himself, even though he turned every fan actually on the scene totally against him. The idea of challenging

Cunningham's proxy flashed into my mind, but I quickly saw that it was more important to try to get Yerke's honorary membership (with the consequent return of Bruce to the club), and that it would be easy enough for us to quash this proxy idea if we had the two-thirds majority vote in hand, since we could even amend the constitution with that.

I asked if there was any discussion on the motion to grant T. Bruce Yerke an honorary membership, looking directly at Ackerman as I did so. There was a short silence. Finally someone called for the question. I appointed a couple of non-voters to act as tellers, and stupidly declared a recess while they passed out the ballots. Even more stupidly, I neglected to watch them like a hawk, and was stunned when they announced the result of the vote before I had called the meeting back in order. The vote was 11 for and 5 against, giving Bruce his two-thirds majority by a margin of one vote. I knew that this ballot would certainly be challenged, since it took place while the club was in recess, and tho we probably could have bulled it through (such as by my claiming to have reopened the meeting) it seemed evident that the motion would carry, and it seemed far better to have it absolutely in order. So I apologised to the club, explained what had happened, and requested a new ballot.

As these new ballots were being passed out, Ackerman got to his feet and said, "If T. Bruce Yerke is given an honorary membership in this club, I shall feel that all honorary memberships are without honor."

The result of the new ballot was an 8 to 8 tie.

I was completely stunned by this reversal. I shan't make any comments on the tactics Ackerman used, except that their success showed me beyond controverting that there was no use trying to do anything with the club as long as one member could sway that many votes with so little effort; particularly when that same member's actions were nearly all in direct opposition to making the club into an adult group, and when he could get proxy votes right end left.

I suddenly remembered the resignation as director which I had written a couple of weeks previously, and the next thing I knew I was reading it. Burbee made his long promised visit to the club just in the middle of the recital and he has told me since that he could not understand why a whole roomful of people would sit quietly and hear themselves torn apart so insultingly without doing something about it.

This resignation caught everyone by surprise, including me. It elevated

Mel Brown to the director's post, and the meeting fell into chaos for a few minutes while he was getting the feel of things. I went over to the typewriter and wrote out a brief resignation of my membership in the LASFS, dating it to take effect two weeks hence (thereby giving myself a chance to wind up the 6th *Acolyte*), showed it to Pogo. She immediately signed it too, passed it to Bronson who signed it and passed it on, and the next thing I knew it was circulating among all the Outsiders, all of whom signed it except Mel Brown. It finally came back to me, I asked and received the floor, and read it. Mel then stunned us by pulling a paper out of his pocket and reading to the group a resignation of his own, a two page affair which for sheer vitriol has never been approached by anything else I've ever read anywhere .

Walter J. Daugherty, after a whispered consultation with Ackerman, took the floor and demanded that the resignations be made effective immediately. This was refused by us. He then demanded that we be kept out of the clubroom, on the ground that, we would destroy the mimeograph and other club property. This insulting remark led to some very bitter discussion, at the end of which a motion granting "all resigning members the full and free use of the club and its properties until their resignations actually took effect" was carried by an 11 to 4 vote.

This motion was implemented by Morojo the very next day, when on her own authority, and in direct violation, of the vote of the club, she had the lock changed on the door, thereby, keeping resigning members from using their keys. (This didn't bother us much, since Brown and Fern talked Kepner out of his key for a short time – long enough to have some duplicates made for those of the outsiders who wanted them!)

Mel then remarked that since the club lacked a director, the floor was open for nominations. (I'll skip the maze of constitutionalities which first tend to show that an election that night was illegal and later indicate that it was in order. You readers who have not been around the LASFS will just have to take my word as to the astounding complexity of the organic law for this group of 18 or 20 people.) I immediately grabbed the floor and said, "Since we have just been accused of wishing to wreck the club, I'd about as soon have the game as the name. Since the worst piece of sabotage I can think of at the moment is to saddle the club with an incompetent director, I'd like to nominate the man whom I feel is most capable of making this club even worse than it is now – Walter J. Daugherty."<sup>2</sup>

Phil Bronson and others, then commenced tossing in nominations until

nearly everyone present was nominated. When the victims of this merry prank had gotten their names withdrawn, Walter J. Daugherty and I found ourselves standing alone to be voted on. (I've always been hugely amused to think that Daugherty wanted to be director so badly that he accepted a nomination, even from me and in such language.) The poor visitors we had used before found themselves again passing out ballots. (Boy, they must have just loved that meeting!). As they called the votes aloud, nearly everyone in the room kept a tally. Laney, Laney, Laney, Daugherty, Laney, Daugherty..... I took the lead from the beginning and held it the whole way. Daugherty was white with rage, but the last vote was for Daugherty and brought it into a tie: 8 to 8.

One or two other pieces of business were then tried, but ended in that same futile 8 to 8 deadlock. Finally Kepner took the floor, stated that his resignation had never been accepted in due form as prescribed by the constitution, and claimed the directorship. Mel looked blank, but I rushed to the gap, withdrew my own resignation on the same grounds, and found myself once more director of the dear old LASFS. Strictly comic opera, wasn't it? But all I did was to adjourn the meeting and go home. I did not attend another meeting of the LASFS until I rejoined the club the following summer, though I did spend a considerable amount of time around the club finishing up the *Acolyte* stencils which I'd previously cut with a spacing that made them runnable only on the club mimeograph.

And of course the quarrel between Ackerman and myself reached the stage of sheer idiocy long before I finished up the last stencil. Since I was seeing a great deal of Pogo at this time and Ackerman of course was keeping company with Morojo, he and I managed to run into each other at least once a day, either at the club or in Myrtle and Pogo's apartment. But Ackerman positively refused to speak to me. This of course made sense, but it did not make sense for him to hand me a long and vitriolic letter almost every time he saw me. Since he would not talk to me, I fell into the habit of answering these letters, stopping only when I left the club neighborhood for good a couple of weeks later. He continued to send me weirdly conceived letters, clippings, and postcards for a few weeks after that, but after I had failed to answer three or four of them in a row he stopped. But it didn't take me long to learn that I could make Forry horribly uncomfortable by tossing succinct remarks at him; I regret to say that I was not above this sort of childishness.

Also during the post-club pre-Outsider interregnum I had a most

amusing brush with one of the club queers, a character who from sponging off one of the residents at 628 had taken to hanging around the club. The moment the fruit saw Ackerman, he fell madly in love with 4sJ. Ackie, with his all-inclusive brother love for anyone supposed to be a fan, probably did not even realise that the guy was a fairy, and most certainly did not realise that he, Forrest J Ackerman, was the object of the nance's unrequited yearnings. He saw in this pansy an industrious new fan, sincere, unassuming, and worthy. The poor swish spent the next three or four weeks drawing for *VOM*, cutting stencils for it and *Shaggy*, and even running the mimeograph for Ackerman. He finally gave up and commenced trying to make some of the others of us. I was alone in the club one afternoon, trying to finish up my *Acolyte* work, when I smelled an overpowering whiff of very cheap perfume. Turning around, I saw this dear fruit standing clear across the room from me. He immediately commenced a gambit, which I cruelly egged on until he was thoroughly committed – then burst out at him with a full-voiced roar of the well-known Laney laugh, a reaction which caused him to leave looking, believe it or not, rather deeply hurt. Faugh!

The last three or four days of February found me in bed, sicker than a horse. Several of us had spent Sunday afternoon at Paul Freehafer's apartment, playing records and drinking a little wine. Pogo and I had been invited to visit de Pina; when Alva Rogers heard of this and wanted to go, we decided to take him along. About halfway between Paul's apartment and Hollywood, we were struck by one of LA's famous cloudbursts, this one laced with hail and driven by a high wind. With two windows broken out of the Weird Willys, it took perhaps 30 seconds for us to become soaked to the skin; yet we were marooned in the car by the swirling water which was running six inches deep over most of the sidewalks. So we kept on to Hollywood, called de Pina and explained we were too nearly drowned to come on out, went to The Streets of Paris for a short, warming drink, and back to LA. This exposure touched off my bronchitis but good, and I made up my mind to spend the next few days trying to throw it off altogether, resting, baking in front of the fire, and so on. Except for a couple of trips to the corner grocery, I spent three days and nights absolutely alone.

During that time, I did a whole lot of hard and often unpleasant thinking, made myself face a number of facts I'd done my level-best to avoid. I realised that my besetting curse was a lack of confidence in myself, coupled with a hitherto unrealised oedipism, and that my tendencies towards

introversion would always rob me of the better things in life unless I forced myself to overcome them. For the first time I realised, with a start, how seriously fandom was hampering me in leading the sort of life I wanted to lead, and yet, at the same time, I thought I could see ways in which I could make fandom serve me as a stepping stone to new contacts and new confidence. (Most of these ideas turned out, on being practised, to be utter poppycock – probably merely indicative of my narrow escape from being completely submerged in the microcosmos.) The chief results of this painful session with myself were, so far as these memoirs is concerned, a resolution to ease out of fandom and a determination to try to replace the semblance of success that had greeted *The Acolyte* with an attempt to succeed in something more mundane and worthwhile. My determination to quit fandom was seriously weakened by the reservation that I should fulfill all my existing commitments, but at least it gave me something to strive towards. And the total results of this big session with myself have done me lasting good; though I strayed from the straight and narrow and fell back into fandom more than once since that time, on the whole I have managed to keep forging ahead bit by bit towards the goal I then set myself of adulthood. I don't know how he'll like it, but since that time I have consistently used Forrest J Ackerman as my personal bug-a-boo: "There, but for keeping trying, goes FTL", or something like that. After all, Ackerman is my superior in every native ability that matters, except in physical strength (about equal) and manual dexterity (I think I've got him skinned in this one). We are near enough the same age to give point to the comparison. And, though I admit it with extreme reluctance, I have been as deep or deeper in fandom and similar escapes as Ackerman. He just hasn't made himself look at the handwriting on the wall as yet.

---ooOoo---

Don't get the idea that January and February was all childish feuding, as far as I was concerned. During those two months, I finished up the #6 *Acolyte*, the issue which I consider to be the best of all fourteen. And I made some personal contacts, strictly through fandom and *The Acolyte*, which made my resolutions to quit pretty much of a dead letter for some time.

Mike Fern, an aggressive little devil if there ever was one, made it a habit to look up any of the great and near great that he could scrape out an excuse for meeting. Thus it was, while in San Francisco, he dug out a gentleman named William A.P. White, who is better known to you under his pseudonyms of H.H. Holmes and Anthony Boucher. They corresponded to

some extent later, and, unbeknownst to me, Mike gave him a big build-up on *The Acolyte*. Tony shortly expressed a wish to be sent a complete file up to date; I sent him the five issues and forgot about it.

One day in late February, I received a bulky envelope from Boucher, containing no less than five unpublished short-stories (three of which were as good or better than any of his stories in *Unknown*), and a medium long, brilliant letter of comment on the five *Acolytes*. Needless to say, I was thrilled half to death, and commenced a spasmodic correspondence with Boucher. His next letter took up the matter of Craig Rice and a friend of hers named J.F. McComas – both, said Boucher, were great admirers of Lovecraft; Rice, though a highly successful who-dunnit author, had been unable to hit with fantasies, though the failure to do so distressed her; and several of these people and their friends were somewhat interested in forming a Lovecraft club similar in concept to the Baker Street Irregulars.

Of course Craig Rice was not the name in 1944 that she is in 1947, but she was still definitely big-time in anyone's language; while I am not a celebrity chaser by any means, it may well be imagined that I lost no time following this up. She was the personification of cordiality, urged me to come out to Santa Monica any Sunday afternoon and see her.

So it was that I spent several Sundays as a guest of Craig Rice, in real life Mrs. Lawrence Lipton. The Liptons, it developed, held open-houses nearly every Sunday, and the assorted collection of people that dropped in and out was as interesting and stimulating as it was heterogeneous. Most were writers, musicians, cinema directors and technicians, and others of artistic tastes – but you never knew, until you got to talking with an individual, who or what you had stumbled into. One thing, though, I never met a bore or an uninteresting person out there – the Liptons were exceedingly gifted collectors of people.

I can no longer remember one visit from another, nor even how many there were (between three and five). But when I went I'd arrive about one in the afternoon and stay until nearly midnight. It was at Craig Rice's that I met J. Francis McComas, Mr. and Mrs. Cleve Cartmill, and Mr. and Mrs. Fritz Leiber Jr. I believe that sums up the fantasy celebrities.

Some vignettes are perhaps in order.

Craig Rice is a woman in her early forties, attractive enough and friendly to a fault, she is capable of any kind of conversation one can imagine, though her best facets are literary criticism and writing shop-talk,

and rapid-fire badinage. She has a fine sense of the dramatic, and plays excellent piano, both boogie-woogie and bar-room. All in all, she was a terrific hostess.

Her husband, Lawrence Lipton, is a novelist in his own right; is short, dark, debonnaire, and full of fun. One of his chief interests in life is making phonograph records; he has file after file full of acetates, and what a gamut of sound they cover. Radio shows, news-shots of famous events, dubbings of hundreds of unobtainable commercial and not so commercial records, originals of Danny Kaye at the Lipton's, Meade Lux Lewis beating out boogie on the Lipton piano, trick combinations (such as Shostakovich and Raymond Scott dubbed together in an utterly spine-tingling fantasy) ... well, just name it. If it can be put on a record Larry probably has it ten-deep.

I did not get particularly well acquainted with the Cartmills. They had happened to drop into the club during one of our most furious brawls; we recognised each other; I shied away from him because I was ashamed of the company he had seen me with before; he shied away from me just as any intelligent and informed person would shy away from a known member of the LASFS.

J. Francis "Mick" McComas is a big, jolly, roly-poly Irishman, with a rich booming voice, and a terrific personality. He is more a salesman and promoter than a creative artist (west-coast representative of Random House), though he has written successfully under pen-names, and is an editor of no small qualifications (cf. *Adventures in Time and Space*). But his most noticeable characteristic is a joie de vivre that just doesn't quit. Mick has read *Astounding* for several years, and also has a very nice collection of fantastic books – but fantasy plays only a minor, point in his life, as it should.

Fritz Leiber Jr. is one of the most interesting men I have ever met. Tall, rather heavy, with dark bushy hair and his father's leonine head, he is as fine a figure of a man as one can imagine; and his quiet, rather slow, speech is packed with interesting experiences, valid literary criticisms, and everything else needful to make Leiber into one of the finest conversationalists in the fantasy field. He and I struck it off very well from the first; he had been one of HPL's last correspondents, and with Derleth and one or two others was one of the tiny handful of HPL's old friends who was really trying to keep the Lovecraft fires burning as it were. From Lovecraft we gradually came to discuss other things. In passing, I might mention that Leiber, more than any other person, was responsible for the last 8 issues of *The Acolyte*; he kept

handing me such superlative material, much of it written especially for *The Acolyte*, that no matter how ennuied I felt at publishing a fanzine I felt almost a compulsion to bring out another issue, just to feature the Leiber contribution. Vocally at least, *Acolyte*'s readers never appreciated Leiber as much as I felt they should have.

On different occasions Sam Russell and Pogo accompanied me to the Liptons'. All these soirees were rather similar, except of course for the conversations. The pattern centered around a profuse use of liquor – everyone present having entree to the refrigerator and passing around drinks to all present whenever someone got dry, a practice which often led to one's having two or three drinks in front of himself simultaneously. I never saw anyone get out of line from drinking out there, but on the other hand the amount of booze flowing around the place made it really rugged for me, since I was supposed to be working regular hours, while few of the others were. These parties used liquor in the way I've always felt the stuff was designed to be used: as an ice-breaker and tongue-loosener; and such was the high level of most of the conversation that partaking in it burned up most of the alcohol as fast as it was drunk.

The best discussion I recall at the moment was an afternoon spent psychoanalyzing Lovecraft, his methods and his stories, and later branching out through a psychoanalysis of various members of the Lovecraft circle, to an attempted psychoanalysis of the whole fantasy field – fantasy, its psychological appeal. A number of people partook of this session, chiefly Rice, Laney, Russell, and Leiber, but it eventually ended up as a duologue between Leiber and Russell which I would have dearly loved to have had transcribed for publication.

The Lipton home was loaded with phonographs, at least three of them, and every room had stacks of records somewhere in it. The Liptons seemed most interested in humorous recordings, something I never cared too much for, but there was also a lovely lot of jazz, including a stack of rare Bessie Smiths and a flock of Muggsys, and I saw to it that I got loose in these more than once. Of interest, perhaps, is the fact that I never did hear any symphony out there, except for the fragment of Shostakovitch blended with Raymond Scott.

I had in my possession Duane Rimel's series of 36 letters from Lovecraft; these I loaned to Craig for source material for some Lovecraft article she contemplated at the time for *Saturday Review of Literature*. She in

turn loaned me various books.

In addition to the phonographs, there was a good deal of other music around the Liptons'. Craig played the piano a great deal, as did many of the other guests, and there was also a certain amount of singing. I recall with especial relish the time that Craig improvised a little song for everyone present, and the half-pleased, half-embarrassed expression of Sam Russell when he suddenly realised that one of these songs was not only for and about him, but that it summed him up perfectly, though Craig had only known him for a couple of hours.

I've often regretted that I drifted away from these bashes, but at the time my reasons for so doing seemed perfectly valid. In the first place, I invariably slept through my alarm and missed work the next day, with a resulting hole in my paycheck. (Not that these soirees were such drunken brawls as all that, but it must be remembered that they were not only an hour or more from town, but that they were being held by people who could, and probably did, sleep until noon the next day.) The other reason was that I began to feel somewhat like a sponger going out there so much, what with drinks and eats in such profusion; I began to doubt if I had any business trying to associate with people so far beyond me financially; and to top it off began to wonder just what I could contribute to such gatherings to warrant my presence. Well, anyway, I left before I wore out my welcome entirely, and those sessions are something I'd not have missed for anything. I met some brilliant people, and had some delightful Sundays – what more could one ask?



Left to right: Morojo, T. Bruce Yerke, Pogo. Photo from the E.J. Carnell collection.

## Chapter Seven

# On the Outside Looking In

The mass resignations from the Los Angeles Science Fantasy Society took place so suddenly that we were not prepared for them. Though another organization had been discussed, it was the club-within-a-club idea, and nothing had come of it. Yerke gathered with several of us the Saturday following the resignations, we went out to dinner en masse, and empowered Bruce to write a letter to fandom on the subject of the resignations.

At this time, Mel Brown's apartment was a scene of heavy publishing activity; the Knanves having moved Bronson's mimeograph there and being busily engaged in turning out the #2 *Knanve* and what developed to be the last issue of Bronson's *Fantasite*, then the #1 fanzine. So we retired to the top floor of 628, and Yerke turned out a rough draft which we all approved and signed; most of us then went about our affairs leaving Yerke, Fern, Brown and one or two others to turn it out and mail it in an edition of about 80 copies. (An amusing sidelight to this letter is Chamberlain's signature; he at first refused to sign it, then changed his mind after it was all mimeographed, and had to sign each copy with a pen.)

During the next couple of weeks, most of us were just resting from fanning and feuding, though we came to discuss the formation of a club at greater and greater length. Since Yerke at the time was working nights for North American Aviation in the photographic department, one of our first acts was to set aside each Saturday evening as a dinner meeting of the as yet unnamed new club, this being the one evening that Yerke could meet with us. These dinner meetings were held at Freed's Coffee Shop at 6th and St. Paul, and continued regularly until Yerke resigned from the group.

My old title for the club-within-the-club seemed peculiarly appropriate for our new group, since we all felt very strongly that we had been turned away from the LASFS for daring to question the mores of the group and of Forrest J Ackerman. The Outsiders. It was not long before fandom began to hear about us.

Our original roster consisted of the three surviving Knanves: T. Bruce Yerke, Philip P. Bronson, and Edwin Chamberlain (Benson was never an

Outsider); two members of the LASFS: Paul Freehafer and Samuel D. Russell; and those of us who had resigned from the club: Francis T. Laney, Pogo, Merlin W. Brown, O.J. Fern Jr., and Jules Lazar – with a former member of the LASFS, Jack Rhodes, very shortly joining us on the recommendation of Bronson and Yerke.

I suppose a vignette is in order for Rhodes. He was older than most of us, about 38, I imagine; was married, had four children, and might best be described as a chronically dissatisfied person. His earnest adoption of Alfred Nock and other promulgators of vitriol and pessimism made him a singularly depressing companion much of the time, though he was otherwise widely read, and was gifted with occasional bits of puckish humor. Very quiet, very serious, Jack had little interest in fantasy or fandom, and did not stay with us long, particularly after *The Outsiders* became committed to a large publishing program.

Just before my big sick spell and thinking session in the latter part of February, *The Outsiders* had its first full-scale business meeting which, in common with almost all our serious meetings, was held at Fran Shack on a Thursday night. (Our first decision of policy had been to make our meetings conflict with those of the LASFS so as to force local fans as well as visitors to make a choice between the two groups.)

All of us except Yerke attended this first meeting, and the contrast between it and any LASFS meeting I've ever seen still astounds me every time I think of it. Though this meeting set up all of the group's policies and most of the means of implementing them, with some very sharp differences of opinion arising from time to time, there was no gavel, no chairman, no formality. We were a group of friends sitting around talking things over; we did not have any Daugherties to assuage and to give ego boo to, nor did we have any Ackermans to coddle and cater to. Everyone spoke his mind freely, everything that was brought up got discussed enough but not too much, and when a given item seemed worked out Phil or I would write it up in a few terse sentences, read them, and inquire if this suited the pleasure of all present.

In addition to setting up our constructive policy, the group had just received an almost unforgivable letter from Ackerman, and it resulted in our dropping our original intention of letting the LASFS alone and deciding to attack the club as much as possible. The letter summed up the affairs of the past month or so, bandied around the word "treason", implied that the writer

intended to run all of us out of fandom, and closed with the utterly gratuitous remark that our only activity would probably consist of “getting drunk and taking turns in publicly copulating with Pogo”. Needless to say, several tempers got lost over that remark, and it was decided that those of us with any amount of correspondence would undertake a poison pen campaign against the LASFS, in which we would simply tell the truth about Ackerman and the club; that we would make a point of trying to get national newszine coverage of our activity and thus try to overshadow the LASFS, and that we would continue *The Knave* as a satirical political fanzine.

The Outsiders decided that the focus of the group was to be half social and half serious; that the social portion of our activities should consist of gradually larger dinner meetings which eventually would feature stimulating outside speakers and of Fran Shack soirees patterned frankly after those out at Craig Rice’s; and that the serious portion of our activities would revolve around writing and publishing.

Our great *raison d’être* was to be “Project M”, a sinister sounding designation which once caused the handful of remaining LASFSers to waste a gob of time in fruitless speculations. It had occurred to Bronson and myself that all of the worthwhile Los Angeles publishers and writers with the exception of Ackerman were members of our group. This of course was before the rise of Charles Edward Burbee, and during one of Kepner’s frequent interludes during which he had quit publishing. We figured out the amount of work that was being lavished on our separate magazines: *Fan Slants*, *Fantasite*, and *Acolyte*; examined our backlogs of material and our potentialities for getting more good material; and realised that if we were willing to assess ourselves \$5.00 a month apiece, we would have enough money to try a semi-pro printed fanzine.

This was Project M. We gave it this cryptic designation, and bound ourselves to secrecy, because we did not want any inkling of our intentions to leak out. If it fell through, we did not wish to be accused of fostering a Daugherty project. And if it succeeded, we felt that the presenting of a concrete accomplishment would pretty much “make” The Outsiders, and that the element of surprise would do much to make the magazine successful. One grows tired of reading glowing advertisements that never pan out.

To make certain that Project M would have the best available material and editing, we agreed to abandon all fanzines other than limited editions circulating exclusively in FAPA (with the proviso that each editor might

finish the issue on which he was working at the time), and that all writings of any Outsider be submitted first to Project M.

Project M was to be a somewhat glorified *Acolyte*, but was to include scientifiction, and a limited amount of the better type of stefnistic material featured by *Fantasite*. Bronson and I were to be co-editors, and Sam Russell was to be literary editor, but with powers which virtually made him editor-in-chief so far as selection of material was concerned.

Project M occupied most of our time for the first month. It took several evenings to work out the details of the publishing agreement, to decide on policies, and to go through some of the material we then had on hand (most of it out of *Acolyte*'s backlog). Mike Fern was appointed business manager, and spent many hours canvassing back-street print shops, finally coming up with a fantastically low bid from a rather large shop which was willing to do the work at cost if we could get the paper, since the management was having difficulty finding enough paper to keep even a skeleton crew occupied and feared that its business might fall by the wayside altogether. The paper of course required a priority, so Mike promptly stunned us all by wangling an allocation for several times as much paper as we would have needed. By the middle of March, we had Project M well under control, with the first issue pretty much figured out.

But at this point we found ourselves confronted with a FAPA mailing. And since we had originally decided to permit ourselves to keep up FAPA activity, Project M was temporarily shelved, in order that we might pour some stuff into FAPA.

The last, and in some ways the most important, facet of our publishing program was to be *The Knanve*. We designed it as our organ to fandom, and intended it to carry out its original policy of exposing and attacking stefnistic abuses, satirizing the foibles of fandom, and serving as a organ for the occasional venting of spleen.

So there we were, the fan club that was the new hope of Los Angeles. Humph!

The Outsiders as a group carried the seeds of its own demise from the very beginning. In the first place, the majority of us were for one reason or another heartily sick of fandom and all fandom implies. Secondly, there was no common bond of interest among all of us. Brown, Russell, Freehafer, and I were still quite deeply interested in fantasy itself – collecting it, writing about it, talking about writing about it, and even reading the stuff. Yerke,

Bronson, Freehafer, and to a lesser extent Brown and Russell were deeply interested in classical music. Yerke, Russell, Freehafer, Rhodes, Fern, and I were interested in various cultural subjects; all of those named knew enough about some of these subjects to talk about them; others professed an interest, but regrettably their knowledge did not compare with their volubility. Lazar, Pogo, and I liked to go out socially with members of the opposite sex – some of the others talked a lot about it. And so on. There was no clearcut, positive interest which bound *all* of us together. This is one of the chief factors which has hampered the LASFS for as long as I have known the group – lack of a common focus. And we, being LASFS alumni, carried this lack right into the Outsiders with us. We were bound together by a common motive – anger at Ackerman, Daugherty, and the LASFS – but this was bound to evaporate in a short time. Third, the strong attitude held against newer fans by Yerke, Bronson, Russell, and to a lesser extent myself kept us from making any sustained or successful effort to attract the younger new arrivals away from the LASFS as fast as they showed up – something we could very easily have done had we made up our minds to.

But we didn't do so badly in the short time we were functioning. Our first social event was a house-warming of Fran Shack, held on my 30th birthday, March 11, 1944. It was nothing more than a drunken riot, but it definitely was the most rousing party I ever saw in fandom. The invitations were worded urging attenders to bring "bottles and babes; neither is required though both are requested", and resulted in a full-strength gathering of Outsiders, most of them with bottles and several with women. As the drinks began to take effect, more and more of the misfits began to forget how introverted they were – first thing you knew people were dancing, necking, going in twosomes to be alone for a while, and generally cutting up. Through the entire brawl, Yerke remained relatively sober, and took a series of photographs which can only be described as classic.

Some things took place which showed that The Outsiders, alas, were not much better than the despised LASFS. Brown spent the evening pouting in a corner reading Stapledon. Fern started the same way, but shortly found himself tending the phonograph. Lazar got too much to drink and shoved some of the people around, called me a foul name when someone jugged my elbow and made me spatter a drink on him; I threw the whole glass at him and a fight was prevented only by some remarkably quick action on the part of others. Bronson passed out with a cigarette burning in his mouth, crumpled

it into the daveno and nearly asphyxiated from the strangling fumes when the upholstery started to smoulder. But all in all it was quite a party – all good clean fun; thank god I don't have to have that much good clean fun every night!

Also in March, either just before or just after the housewarming, the ubiquitous Mike Fern promoted us an arrangement with the Carolina Pines, a swank eatery in Hollywood, whereby we could hold dinner meetings there and at the same time have free use of a most attractive two room upstairs meeting place. We held several meetings there, after some of which we adjourned to Jack Rhodes' nearby home for a party.

But at about the time of the Fran Shack Warming, I myself was forced to strike the first blow at the Outsiders. Evening after evening passed, but every evening at least one fan would come straggling in, and often-times not want to leave even when I pointed out that I had a date or was otherwise not at home. I found it necessary to promulgate a rule – no visiting except on Tuesdays and Thursdays, except by special arrangement. This did not sit very well with some of the group, even though Fran Shack was my own place, and I was supporting it entirely with my own money.

The next rift in The Outsiders came when Jimmy Kepner made another of his famous reversals of opinion, and expressed a wish to become an Outsider. I opposed his being admitted, because I felt him to be untrustworthy; on being voted down, I made it a point to treat him as cordially as though nothing had happened. Not so Lazar, who resigned from the Outsiders in a huff.

Lazar's resignation, however, was not to be wondered at. He had already gotten the group into a peck of trouble with a very ill-timed and poorly considered letter in which he told of the blowup in the LASFS, and cited as one of the chief reasons the fact that overt homosexuality was running rife in the club, and that Kepner was one of the chief homosexuals. This letter he mailed to Julius Unger, editor of *Fantasy Fiction Field*; Unger sent the letter on to Walt Dunkelberger, who was publishing *FFF* for him; Dunkelberger stencilled the letter verbatim and published it without deletions, an act of stupidity which soured me for all time on both Unger and Dunkelberger, who after all are grown men chronologically and should have known better. Kepner and the LASFS were outraged. We in The Outsiders were beside ourselves. Regardless of the truth in the Lazar letter, it put us on an awful spot, and moreover gave The Outsiders a black eye which we never quite

lived down. We promptly disavowed the letter, read the riot act to Unger and Dunkelberger and got a profuse public apology from all concerned. It was right at this time that Kepner expressed a wish to join The Outsiders, and Yerke, that astute politician, saw that by taking Kepner as a member we could really implement our disavowal of Lazar. So we admitted D O K to our ranks.

Paul Freehafer had been a doomed man almost from birth, suffering from a chronic heart condition which could never be cured. We all knew that Paul was in poor health, but few of us realised how poor, since Freehafer had resolutely set out to make the most of what life he had, and had done so so well that it was difficult to think of him as an invalid. Paul caught a bad cold in the same rain-hail outbreak that put me out of circulation for three days. He found himself unable to throw it off, and took a leave of absence from his job with the idea of going home to Idaho to rest for a few months. The Saturday night following the housewarming, Paul met with us for the last time. A week later, he passed away quietly in his sleep, having lived just long enough to get home.

When we heard of Paul's death we were both stunned, and crushed. In the first place, Paul Freehafer was at all odds the best beloved of the entire local group; friendly, cheerful, tolerant – totally above all rifts and quarrels; a well-integrated and brilliant adult who was almost entirely free of the maladjustments and adolescencies so characteristic of most of the other localites. And secondly, none of us were quite able to adjust to the fact that Paul was gone.

It was indeed in a sober mood that we brought out Yerke's eulogy for Paul, an essay which I believe is one of the finest pieces of writing fandom has ever produced. We mailed it to nearly all the fans on our mailing list.

But it was with bitter fury that we learned of the LASFS' reaction to Paul's death. The club mourned his passing sincerely; I did not believe it at the time but have since come to realize it. But it came to us very, very straight that the first action of Daugherty and Ackerman, upon receiving the telegram from Idaho, was to go right up to Paul's apartment and try to talk his roommate out of Paul's collection, for the then nebulous Foundation. When I heard of this I went completely berserk – ghouls and vultures were the mildest epithets I could turn out – I started walking the half-mile to the club with the intention of beating Ackerman into a red mush. Somewhere along the way, the realisation struck me for the first time, that Paul was really dead.

I burst into uncontrollable tears, and somewhere along Bixel between 8th and 9th had one of the darnedest cries you can imagine; finally allowing myself, spent and trembling, to be taken back home by the Outsiders who were with me, and who had been trotting along with me trying in vain to calm me down (so they told me; I'd not even known they were there).

Perhaps some of you are smiling because FTL sounds like such an emotional dope. Well, perhaps he is. But I thought the world of Paul, and his death was one of the hardest things I've ever had to take.

The Outsiders did not feel happy about the memorial brochure put out by the LASFS, holding it to be cheap, tawdry, and in utter violation of nearly every precept of good taste. I just reread, it, and now, three years later, it looks even worse to me than it did then, particularly Ackerman's sidetracking himself into what is almost a defense of atheism.

The memorial edition of *Shangri L'Affaires* made us even angrier. It bore a lithographed portrait of Paul, which was fine – but on the back of the picture, the pettiness of the LASFS could not bear to see all that blank space, so they had smeared on three of the most atrociously horrible poems in the history of fandom. Purportedly memorials to Freehafer, they were written by people like Cunningham and Daniels (the latter of whom had never even seen Paul), and moreover were grotesquely lacking in both taste and literary merit. We weren't the only ones who were annoyed; Art Joquel, who had been one of the mainstays of the post-Outsider LASFS, had been editor of this issue of *Shaggy*. Both the picture and the poems were inserted without his knowledge, and he quit both the editorship and the club as a result.

Paul's death could, conceivably have brought the warring factions together. As it was, it alienated The Outsiders still further from the LASFS.

Early in The Outsiders' career, an aftermath of the last bitter fighting in the club brought us one of the funniest letters I have ever seen. When Ackerman commenced his collection of proxies, I at first tried to match it. Among others I approached was the same John M. Cunningham whose proxy Ackerman had actually voted at the meeting where we all resigned. Cunningham made a lightning-fast reversal of form, wrote to the club cancelling his proxy and raising the devil with Ackerman for asking for it in the first place, and sent a new proxy to me. Someone around the LASFS evidently didn't like this, for just about the time we'd forgotten all about the proxies came a most official sounding letter in duplicate to LASFS and Outsiders from Cunningham. He used official army forms, official army-style

rhetoric, and made with a beautiful gob of unintended humor. Cussing both Laney, Ackerman, Outsiders, and LASFS with God-like abandon in his well-known incoherent style, Cunningham outdid himself with the punch-line: “I am therefore of my own free will resigning my life membership in the LASFS at the request of Walter J. Daugherty.”

In mid-March I had a spat with Pogo, whom I had been buzzing quite consistently for a while, taking her dancing and what-not; and we quit dating each other. Rather to our surprise, Pogo quit the Outsiders almost at once. She has since gotten her divorce, remarried, and apparently gotten into a satisfactory life-groove which has no reference to fandom. More fans should do the same.

Also in mid-March, Yerke startled us by asking us if we would be willing to publish his memoirs for him. He had for some reason started reminiscing to himself of his seven years in the LASFS, had actually written down portions of the first section, and felt an urge to continue if publication would be guaranteed in advance. Not only did we know that Yerke’s memoirs would be one of fandom’s best pieces of folk-lore, but we also realised that if Yerke told the truth about the LASFS it would damn the group with anyone who read them. So our answer was obvious. It was decided that Yerke would stencil the memoirs, that the group would run them off, and that they would be submitted to FAPA under the franks of Bronson, Brown, and myself. He promised four booklets of approximately 30 pages, but only the first was ever completed, since Bruce dropped the project a couple of months later when he finally quit fandom entirely.

The responsibility of getting these produced, and of trying to get some of our other proposed publishing completed, weighed rather heavily on me. I suggested to the group that we suspend work on Project M for the nonce – it had about reached a stasis anyway – and institute a month-long program of publishing, during the course of which we would not only bring out the first volume of *Memoirs of a Superfluous Fan*, but a third issue of *The Knave*, and as much FAPA material as possible. This was quickly agreed to.

Our equipment was meager as compared to that of the LASFS, but we did have the manpower to make the most of it. My old LCSmith was the only typewriter regularly at our disposal; although Brown’s rented Underwood occasionally made the trek to 1104 and Phil’s portable was there about half the time. So most of the stencils were cut away from Fran Shack, though of course a good deal was done on publishing nights. Among us we found we

had four lettering guides, though we sorely missed the LASFS Speedoscope. And there were two mimeographs – junk heaps in comparison with the flossy automatic machine at the club – but in good enough working order: my old original machine from Clarkston, a 1906 model Dick; and Phil Bronson’s little Sears Roebuck job from Minneapolis and the MFS. Both were hand-crank, hand-feed models, and required two persons for most efficient operation, one turning the crank and the other slip-sheeting.

It was evident almost immediately that these sessions would have to be organised, so I took matters into my own hands and put a stop to the old LASFS custom of everyone doing his own work. We went cooperative altogether; stencils to be run off were turned over to me, and I not only doled them out to the mimeographers, but pretty much bossed the whole show, suggesting needful tasks to unoccupied Outsiders and taking steps to assure, as much as possible, an even flow of stencils. It worked like a charm. Most of the time there were four people actually mimeographing, one person de-slipping, one or two cutting stencils, and one or two lending moral support by talking, playing records, or what not. We changed off often enough as not to get tired of the same old drudgery, and we still found enough fun in each other’s company that we found the same evening of fun we had always had was turning out an imposing stack of completed pages that we scarcely realised we had done, so busily were we talking and joking and cutting up.

The #3 *Knanve* was the first item put out under the new program. Most of it was written, stencilled, and run off on a Sunday and the following Saturday night. When the bunch left about midnight, two pages had yet to be run off, and Mike Fern and I, having a midnight snack, suddenly decided to go back to Fran Shack and finish it off. We worked on the fool thing until 4:00 in the morning.

But that was the only one of the publishing sessions which went to any extreme; as a rule they were confined to Tuesday and Thursday evenings; commencing about 7:00 and lasting until 11:30 or 12:00. And these sessions certainly paid off; from them came not only this one issue of *The Knanve*, but over 130 pages of FAPA material, and nearly all of the #7 *Acolyte*. Since they lasted only a couple of months in all, one has only to compare these results with the average two months output of the LASFS in order to find another of the many things wrong with the club. Publishing is usually drudgery, but group publishing is fun – no matter what you are putting out; and any group wishing to establish a common focus can by adopting a group publishing

program not only accomplish this aim but in addition add mightily to both the quantity and quality of contemporary fan publishing.

In the latter part of March, the feuding factions were treated to a protracted visit from a Chicago fan, Frankie Robinson. Frank is chiefly notable for the possession of the most fantastic eyebrows in the world. At the time of his visit here he was just short of 18, had never been away from home very much, and found the strain of the two factions vying with each other to attract him a bit too much for his poise. He ended up rather sadly disillusioned with fandom, having stayed with Yerke, that master of intrigue and innuendo, that fountain head of devastating gossip. Frank's experiences with the LASFS were not happy; he met them all at their worst the night he was in town fresh off the train when Yerke and I in a moment of madness invited the LASFS to come out to Bronson's with the Outsiders and have a joint welcoming party. Ackerman sat on the davenport and pouted, saying scarcely a dozen words all evening; and Daugherty got into a three way verbal battle with Bronson and me which surpassed even the epic row Daugherty and I had had that night in the club. Needless to say, Frankie was revolted; and his subsequent experiences with some of us went far to sour him on the Outsiders as well.

It might be of passing interest to back-track at this point, and say a few words about the LASFS during the spring of 1944. In the first place, the feud utterly shattered the club. Despite Daugherty's and Ackerman's valiant efforts to get fandom to think all was well with the LASFS, a moment's glance at the dark window would have told the true story. Before the feud, the room was packed every night, with various members working and publishing, some reading, and a half dozen others dropping in and out during the evening. On meeting nights, 25 to 30 people usually showed up; though many were visitors. After the inception of *The Outsiders*, the club was almost invariably dark except on Thursdays; for a time Ackerman tried to hold the fort alone, but between the echoing silences of the deserted room and the frequent heckling from Outsiders as they walked past the club on their way from the street-car to my place, Forry very shortly took to doing his fanning in a more secluded spot. And the meetings had dropped off to nearly nothing. Daugherty was director, the newcomer Burbee had been saddled with both the secretary ship and the editorship of *Shaggy*, Morojo was treasurer, and Ackerman was chief mourner. Crozetti came to most of the meetings with her five year old daughter who also joined the club as the old guard strove

valiantly to increase the roster. And there was one new member who stuck, Glen Daniels, a friend of Kepner's who shortly became coeditor of Crozetti's *Venus*. Kepner pulled out of the club a month after the feud, utterly fed up with Daugherty. And, rumor has it, there were a few casual dropper-inners, who came once or twice, saw the LASFS was moribund, and moved to greener pastures.

After Kepner had joined the Outsiders, he quickly became one of the most active of the group, particularly in the publishing sessions. He was not at all quiet about comparing our activity with the inanities of the dying club, so very shortly both Daniels and Crozetti expressed a wish to join the Outsiders. Yerke, Bronson, and others opposed the membership of both of these individuals – which of course was perfectly within their rights – but made the mistake of peremptorily telling me not to allow these two at Fran Shack. Well, now. I promptly announced that the Tuesday night sessions were open to everyone, LASFS and Outsiders alike, and only the Thursday night sessions were limited strictly to the Outsiders. This considerably weakened our homogeneousness.

At about this time, Burbee became quite friendly with the Outsiders, spending as much time with us as at the LASFS, and even having all of us to dinner at his house to celebrate Yerke's birthday in mid-April. This last furnished me with my favorite S. Davenport Russell anecdote. Yerke, always a brilliant conversationalist, was outdoing himself that day, and a terrific discussion was in full cry. I kept noticing Sam, sitting across the room from me. He at first tried to read, but Burbee's two-year-old daughter kept pestering him so finally he gave up and lifted the little girl into his lap; where he held her, talking quietly to her and very obviously making a terrific hit. She lay back in his arms, looking up at him with her heart in her eyes, hanging on every word. Sam in turn was looking down on her most affectionately, talking to her, talking.... Suddenly a silence fell on the other conversation, and Sam's flat voice cut through it: "Cthulhu. Yog-Sothoth. Nyarlathotep..." (!!)

Burbee never joined the Outsiders, though we considered him as a member. (Our organization was so completely informal and nebulous at all times that this sort of thing could happen with the greatest of ease.)

But the brave little group was foundering. Mike Fern, one of our mainstays, left us early in April to go to New York, where he managed to make himself quite unpopular with his lack of tact and his inquisitiveness and

his free comments on different ones. (A rumor came back to me a year or so later that I had financed his trip in order to spy on the Futurians. If anyone has positive information on the origin of this idea, he will confer a great favor on me by dropping me a note about it; something tells me that the inside story on this one would make priceless reading). Jack Rhodes left us about the same time, tired of us as most of us were of him. Yerke was obviously approaching a crisis – he had broken loose from one fan club only to find himself floundering in the same kind of morass he had tried to escape – and his irritability and obvious dissatisfaction with the group had repercussions with Bronson, who fell into a sort of listlessness, characterised by an Ashley-like unwillingness to do anything more drastic than just sitting around talking. And Eddie Chamberlain had gone into the United States Navy by the end of April.

By May 1st, the Outsiders consisted of Yerke, Bronson, Laney, Russell, Brown, Kepner, and the anomalous Charles Edward Burbee Jr. Though this was not the strong group with which we had started, it still possessed a certain amount of potential. Yerke, Russell, and I wanted to re-commence work on Project M. Kepner and Brown had gotten off onto a socially-conscious tangent which eventually culminated in their joining the communist party; Burbee at this time was just feeling his way into the editorship of *Shangri L’Affaires* and had no time for other commitments.

A number of factors came up that had to be handled at once. In its six issues up to that time, *The Acolyte* had been prompt as clockwork, and its contacts with the pro world seemed to me largely to depend on this promptness and regularity. An issue was due June 15; either it had to start by May 5, or Project M had to get far enough along so that I could depend on it to take *Acolyte*’s place. We had the material for Project M, but it was all *Acolyte* material except for a short story Yerke had written for us. Bronson both failed to turn over his back log and refused to do any work. “Aw, let’s just sit back and blow smoke rings,” he used to say when we’d suggest doing something. I had no intention of publishing an ambitious magazine single-handed, and in fact in the 6th issue had announced a curtailed circulation and a decreased number of issues per year.

A week or so of Bronsonian lotus eating, led me to approach Sam Russell, and ask him if he would be co-editor of *Acolyte*, with a 50-50 split on both work and finances. (This last meant nothing, since the magazine had been slightly more than breaking even since its 4th issue.) “I am committed

to Project M,” said Russell.

“Suppose *Acolyte* withdraws from Project M?”

“Since Project M, basically, *is The Acolyte*, in that case I’d be only too pleased to step in and help it out.”

That tore it. I gave Project M. to Bronson, with my compliments, and SDR and I picked out the material for the #7 *Acolyte* that very night.

When Yerke, still working on his night shift, heard of this development he had a fit. Under date of May 16, 1944, he wrote *The Outsiders* a letter of resignation. In it, he assailed us savagely for our shortcomings, particularly berating Bronson. Phil was crushed, for he had always maintained a semi-heroworship for Bruce, and Yerke had in this letter flayed him unmercifully. This letter was the end of both Yerke and Bronson in fandom. Yerke had some spasmodic dealings with Bill Watson that summer, and Bronson, more from habit than anything else, kept coming around for a couple of weeks – but neither of them ever again did anything of a fan nature. An amusing sidelight on Yerke’s letter of resignation and renunciation was that he called our roll, so as to speak, describing to each of us his personal habits and peculiarities which made him impossible to associate with. Only SDRussell got a clean bill of health. But oddly, with the exception of Bruce’s remarks about Mel Brown’s unkemptness, every single one of these accusations applied to Yerke with as great force as it did to the person he was condemning for it.

But the *Outsiders* no longer existed, except as a name. Mid-May of 1944 saw the LASFS with four or five members and *The Outsiders* with about the same. Neither group had any longer sufficient momentum to expand itself. If Los Angeles was to have a fan club, it was pretty evident to me that the two factions would have to combine, and fast.

A certain amount of intermingling was already in evidence. Crozetti and Daniels did a good deal of work on *Venus* at Fran Shack with *Outsider* equipment, and since Daniels had also become co-editor of Brown’s *Fan Slants* and Kepner’s *Toward Tomorrow*, a good deal of work on these two *Outsider* fanzines was performed in the LASFS clubroom. Ackerman still refused to speak to me, and there was considerable resentment between various *Outsiders* and Walter J. Daugherty, but by and large the groups seemed drifting towards a merger.

I commenced angling around, trying to work out some sort of truce with Ackerman. Walter J. Daugherty stepped into a role of peacemaker, telling us

how implacable Ackerman was towards us and telling Ackerman how these overtures of friendship merely presaged some sort of Trojan horse deal. I dated Myrtle a time or so, and in the course of talking things over with her saw that she would eventually cause the hatchet to be buried.

Matters could have drifted on, except that Lora Crozetti, the very evening after Brown, Kepner, and I had spent a couple of hours helping her run off *Venus*, took the floor in the LASFS, told the club that the room had been so full of Outsiders she couldn't work, and demanded that the club ban all Outsiders from its premises, under pain of having them thrown in the pokey for trespassing. Director Walter J. Daugherty allowed such a motion to pass, appointed Burbee to come down and tell us about it, then came down himself and did not allow Burbee to more than say hello as the Great Daugherty read the riot act. I tried to talk to the fellow in a conciliatory fashion, despite some rough remarks from a rather intoxicated Bronson, who quit fandom completely when it became evident that Brown, Kepner, and I were and had been dickering with the LASFS.

This last week of May was devoted mostly to negotiations of one sort and another. The reconciliation was finally implemented by Morojo, who talked Ackerman around into seeing both the need for a merger and the advisability of letting bygones be bygones. The feud was closed despite Walter J. Daugherty's efforts as a peacemaker, when one Sunday morning, a nervously doubtful Forrest J. Ackerman tapped diffidently on Fran Shack's door until a dumbfounded Francis T. Laney opened it and peered sleepily out at him.

But that, and the happenings that led from this surprise visit, belong in the next chapter.



The Battle Creek crowd. Left to right: E. Everett Evans (with cigar), K. Martin Carlson, Walt Dunkelberger, Roy Paetzke, Art Saha. Photo from the Mike Rosenblum collection.

## Chapter Eight

# On the Inside Looking Out

Such had been the power of the Shangri-La propaganda, the Russell J. Hodgkins hush-hush publicity policy, which gave a cover-up to the manifold failings of the LASFS and its members, that fandom generally had not completely adjusted to the idea that there was a rift when lo! all was peace once more. Or was it?

In any event, nearly all established fans maintained a strict neutrality. Larry Shaw Raymond Washington, and Claude Degler publicly sided with Ackerman and the club. Shaw especially ran the matter into the ground. He was publishing a newszine called *Nebulah* with an occasional supplement called *Beulah's Scrapbook* in which he ran editorials, feature stories, and other material which was not suitable for the terse, factual news sheet that *Nebulah* tried to be. In *Beulah's Scrapbook*, Shaw ran a long and biased letter from Ackerman, giving his side of the feud. This was of course all right, but Shaw, removed from us geographically by more than 2000 miles and speaking from the depths of a profound ignorance of the situation, wrote an equally long editorial taking sides with Ackerman. Fern and I promptly wrote semi-official letters to Shaw, taking issue with his lack of neutrality, and I wrote an official account of The Outsiders up to that time and sent it to him for publication. Through some sort of odd coincidence, Shaw quit the newszine field almost at once – blaming a variety of factors for it, but we always felt that it was because he was unwilling to be impartial. The Futurians, notably Wollheim, took sides with us privately, but maintained public neutrality. The rest of fandom wrote letters of inquiry, raised an occasional eyebrow but were otherwise unaffected.

Jack Speer happened to take a poll of the top 15 fans in the spring of 1944, with the idea of seeing how what he called expert opinion correlated with that of the general fan public as reflected in Widner's compilation. Since Bronson and I were both in this list, we decided it would be fun to omit Ackerman from our top ten voting, and both vote for him as the worst fan of the year. This of course ruined Forry's standing in Speer's poll. So in some distorted poll figures, the feud was reflected nationally.

But apart from what I've just mentioned, the only effects of the Big Fuss were strictly local.

---ooOoo---

One of the first things the LASFS did after we resigned was to write and adopt a new constitution. It was written largely by Walter J. Daugherty, and was chiefly aimed at keeping the Outsiders out, and preventing a recurrence of the feud. Since much had been made of the fact that I had been in the club only a couple of months before I started criticising it (as if one had to eat an entire egg to know that it was rotten) the Daugherty constitution provided a threemonth probationary period for new members, during which time they were required to attend 75% of all club meetings and were not permitted to vote. (Ackerman, I am told, had wanted a special clause requiring six months of this probation for any former member of the club who wished to rejoin, but Freehafer talked him out of this.) The Daugherty constitution otherwise pretty much continued the old organization – rent payers' committee, executive committee, and so on – except it added one of the most pernicious dictatorial arrangements I have ever seen in an organization, the Governing Body. This group was a self-perpetuating, self-elected committee of up to five members, serving for life. Their control over the club was absolute. They could set aside any vote of the club, even a unanimous vote: they could set aside any election of officers, they could suspend or depose any officer elected or otherwise, they could expel any member. Any of these actions could be taken; nothing could be done about them. As originally constituted, the Governing Body was not quite so bad, since it had the well-liked and balanced Freehafer on it, and a couple of others having enough emotional stability to give a certain amount of assurance that these extraordinary powers would not be called upon except in time of great emergency. Original membership of the Governing Body: Forrest J Ackerman, Walter J. Daugherty, Myrtle R. Douglas, Arthur Louis Joquel II, and Paul Freehafer.

But Freehafer died only a week or so after the committee was set up. And at about the same time, Joquel quit the club in a huff over the mishandling of Freehafer's picture in *Shangri L'Affaires*, leaving a three-man governing body: Ackerman, Douglas, and Daugherty. Myrtle was OK. She is level headed and kind-hearted enough so that she can be trusted with this kind of extreme power. But all that Daugherty needed to do to rule the club to suit his whim was to sway Ackerman (and Ackerman is not, shall we say, unswayable) and there he was. The minute I heard of this setup I smelled a

rat, and when he explained to me that the GB lay quiescent unless it was needed, something still smelled bad.

So the earlier part of our negotiations with the LASFS were largely confined to trying to work around the Governing Body setup. It must be remembered that Ackerman was still not speaking to me, and that it looked probable that we would have to be admitted over 4e's objection. At the same time, we were unwilling to come back if there was any hint of surrender about our action – it merely seemed desirable that Los Angeles continue to have a fan club, and obvious that ten members in one club might conceivably have a chance of accomplishing something while two separate clubs of four or five were certain to founder for good, and soon. It had been arranged that Myrtle, in her capacity as a member of the Governing Body, would favor our readmittance under some sort of peace treaty which would demand no apologies or retractions from either side, and which would waive either the requirement of attending meetings or the requirement of the three month probationary period. In his role as Peacemaker, Daugherty had gone so far playing both ends against the middle that we felt he would have considerable difficulty in voting against our readmittance – though then as now, Daugherty was unpredictable.

Forry's early morning visit to Fran Shack changed the entire picture. Myrtle finally talked him into coming down and discussing the matter personally. I had had a very rough Saturday night, and when the first Sunday in June 1944 was heralded by a light but persistent tapping on Fran Shack door my first thought was to kick someone's tail clear across the street for waking me up at 9:00 AM. When I saw it was Ackerman, I nearly swooned with surprise, but I invited him in and excused myself while I doused my face with cold water and lit a cigarette in an attempt to get partially awake. When I came back into the front room, Forry was browsing along my bookshelves with every air of surprise – he had reiterated so often that I was a fake fan that he had come to believe it himself and walking into what was at that time a first class fantasy and stf collection upset his notions considerably.

We sat down and commenced talking, asking each other about various things that had happened in the past few months, occasionally trying to explain our motivations to each other. In the course of a two hour conversation we got onto a more friendly basis than we had ever been before – particularly when it came home to both of us that we had each separately been trying to carry a club on our shoulders. I reassured him that there was

nothing political about returning to the LASFS; he reassured me that we need not fear the Governing Body.

So the following Thursday, Brown, Kepner, and I rejoined the LASFS – not without a considerable amount of balking from Mel Brown, who is almost unable to back down on anything he has ever said, or do anything that looks as though he might be backing down. However, he had already agreed to rejoin the LASFS under terms which Kepner and I were willing to accept, so he came along. But the end of the Outsiders really ended Mel Brown in fandom. He took an active part in the LASFS through most of the time following, but dropped all his publishing and most of his collecting.

My chief motivation in rejoining the club has not as yet been touched on. I had finally established what looked to be an entente cordiale with my wife, and it was evident that Fran Shack's days were numbered. This being the case I was faced with the problem of either joining the club, or folding *The Acolyte*, since it was very unlikely that I'd much longer have room for a mimeograph of my own. My increasing contacts with the better class of fantasy lovers and the surprising amount of first class materials continually being submitted to *Acolyte* by Leiber and others made me very reluctant to suspend the magazine, particularly now that I had Russell for a co-editor. And, despite my resolutions of a few weeks previously, I was having great difficulty in quitting fandom in the face of all this good material, a fast growing interest in FAPA, and a still unsatisfactory job coupled with a considerable amount of pathological self-doubting.

I had finally gotten Jackie to see that perhaps the housing shortage really existed, that I had not just made it up as an excuse not to send for her, and she had agreed to come to Los Angeles without Sandy and Quiggie, leaving them with my mother in Idaho, stay at Fran Shack for a while, and hunt for housing on a full-time basis. I agreed to go back up North if she was unsuccessful; she had agreed to do a whole-hearted job of looking. She still seemed to think we could get a rental.

But her trip needed money, and it seemed highly desirable to me that I spend as much time around the club and away from money-spending temptations as I could. So, once back into the LASFS, I moved my typewriter and trunk of immediately needed papers to the club, and shortly fell back into the habit of spending a good part of my spare time there.

Ackerman came in with me, and it was not long before the LASFS had an approximation of its pre-feud hey-day, with a number of people in the

place every evening. Alva Rogers had just come back to LA from San Diego, Daugherty was feverishly active at the time, and Brown, Kepner, Daniels, and to a lesser extent Crozetti spent a good deal of time around the club on non-meeting nights.

A vignette of Glenn Daniels is in order. He was short, slender, ugly, and vivacious – definitely a boon companion type of person despite the oddity of his sexual tastes. His chief motivation apparently was sexual, but he was an interested and uninhibited conversationalist; and was almost as great a doer of fanzine and other drudgery for people as Mike Fern. From the national point of view, his activity in fandom was reflected only in a pile of mimeography and stencil-cutting for *Venus*, *Toward Tomorrow*, and *Fan Slants* but locally he was one of the most active members of the LASFS from about March until August 1944.

The new entente cordiale with Ackerman was implemented by both of us in various ways. I commenced writing a good deal for *VOM* and even mimeographed one issue for Forry; I invited him to my place as an “accidental” dropper-inner the night Fritz Leiber came over to see my collection and talk fantasy (an evening which Ackerman reported for me in an article for *Fan-Dango*); and I was enabled to see a revival of *Metropolis* as 4-e’s guest.

The Leiber visit occurred just before Fritz left town to take over a good editorial job in Chicago, and was just another of those big bullfests that is stimulating at the time, but of which little stays with one as specific impressions of that specific event. I remember how I kept trying to keep the conversation steered into fantastic channels because I had noticed how completely lost Forry seemed to be if anything outside this one narrow field was mentioned; and how nature took its course, and Fritz and I got wound up on literature generally. And I especially remember seeing Leiber to his bus, and how we loped back and forth for over an hour between 8th and Olympic, just missing a bus on each street, until finally we subsided, panting, on Olympic and talked far into the wee small hours until an owl bus came bumbling along. I’ve not seen Leiber since.

The showing of *Metropolis* was held at the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences’ little theater located far up in an open-air arcade which opens off Hollywood Blvd. just east of the Pickwick Bookshop. It was part of their regularly scheduled program, to which they sold season tickets at \$15.00 each. I would not have been able to go, except that Myrtle had already seen

the picture a couple of times, and she and Forry asked me to use her ticket. The picture itself was mediocre, if interesting. It is replete with very brilliantly conceived sets and special effects, but the overdone hamminess of the acting proved such a major drawback that the picture as a whole was stupid. Individual scenes, however, made it worthwhile, and then of course the big attraction was Fritz Lang himself, who took the floor after the showing and answered questions and talked for well over an hour. At first he stayed pretty close to *Metropolis*, but before long was talking about his experiences in leaving Germany, and eventually was discussing the broad field, of cinematic art from the point of view of the director. Good listening indeed! An amusing sidelight was the country bumpkin awe with which I regarded Lang's monocle, and the way it stayed in place despite the extreme animation of its wearer's features.

About the chief social activity of the LASFS during the spring and summer of 1944 was miniature golf. There was a course located two blocks from the club at 5th and Beaudry, and nearly all the members except Ackerman, Myrtle, Crozetti, and Burbee spent at least five evenings a week there. Particularly after Brown began clashing again with the club, the golf course proved an invaluable place to work off his steam, though playing 36 holes with Mel required a mighty degree of fortitude. His always great nervousness became hugely intensified, and he would rage, swear, prance up and down, throw his club, chew his finger, and in general behave like a maniac. I still think half the golfers on the course that summer went more to see Mel's performance, than to play golf themselves.

Two or three weeks after we rejoined the club, Ackerman received a letter from Donald A. Wollheim which utterly soured me on the Futurians in general and Wollheim in particular. It wasn't very long, but it attacked me pretty strongly personally, told Ackerman that my only purpose in rejoining the LASFS was to destroy the club utterly, and belaboring him in no uncertain terms for letting me back in, closed by urging him to throw me out. What precise purpose Wollheim might have had in mind escapes me entirely; he is known to have been bitterly inimical to Los Angeles fandom and particularly Ackerman, and perhaps he may have thought that by stirring up the feud once again he could destroy the LASFS. As it turned out, Ackerman showed me the letter, and nothing came of it except to turn me very bitterly against the Futurians, whom I had previously known scarcely at all.

Though I was heartily sick of feuding and club politics, it was not long

before I was once more embroiled, up to my ears in a row with Walter J. Daugherty. The club was in sorry straits financially, and various plans were being discussed to increase the revenue without turning the club into an insupportable burden for its handful of members. Since this discussion was taking place on a non-meeting night, I did not see any reason why my being disenfranchised should prevent my taking part in it; particularly since my chief reason for rejoining had been to use the mimeograph, something I obviously could not conveniently do if we found ourselves unable to support the clubroom. 4e, Myrtle, and others liked some of my ideas – particularly one aimed directly at the people who kept personal property in the club for their own personal use – and asked me to incorporate them in a bylaw amendment for them to bring up at the ensuing meeting. I did so; the bylaw passed in the absence of Walter J. Daugherty, who just didn't happen to be there; and from, then on the three individuals who maintained personal property for their own use in the club had to pay a minimum of \$3.00 a month key rent rather than the former rate of \$1.00. Ackerman, Daugherty, and I were the only ones who came under this heading.

It so fell out that on the ensuing Sunday, Daugherty called the club to see if anyone was there, and I happened to answer the phone. He wanted someone to help him bring in a large buffet, which his landlady had given him, and which he wanted to store his supplies in. Sure, I was willing to help him, but in passing, I mentioned that it would cost him \$3 a month rent if he kept it in the club, due to this new bylaw. I told him this, and the fellow practically walked through the phone. Five minutes later he was in the clubroom, shaking with rage, and foaming at the mouth about my having insulted him, having seized control of the club, having conspired to make his membership impossible, and god knows what else. It was not long before I had enough of this, and I told, him off but good, and we were off. Bellowing something about the governing body, he dashed off after Myrtle and Forry, and wasted nearly their entire day trying to have the Outsiders evicted from the club. I went on halfheartedly cranking out *Acolyte* with Mel's help, expecting any minute that we would be expelled, for having incurred Lord Walter's displeasure. Ackerman and Morojo, however, refused to act against me. After all, I'd only told him of an action of the club – of an action on which I couldn't even vote – and it is difficult to see how Daugherty could justify his reaction. After some three hours of Governing Body deliberations, Myrtle came over and told me of her desire to keep the peace in the club, and

that Walter would be willing to forgive and forget if I would write out an apology to him. What an apology that was!

The old LCSmith virtually smoked as I expressed myself in blazing sentences studded with four-letter words of Anglo-Saxon derivation, none of which were used in a masochistic fashion. “There’s my apology to that bastard,” I snarled, and thrust the paper on Myrtle.

She read it, and turned faintly pink. “Oh, but this will never do. It will just make him angrier.”

“He can shove it up his ——— if he doesn’t like it in his face,” I remarked. “That’s my last word on the subject. Do you want my resignation from the club?”

“Oh, no.”

She left the room, and about 6:00 o’clock reappeared with Ackerman, having pacified Walter J. Daugherty in something like seven hours.

When I next saw this mercurial gentleman, he seemed to have forgotten the whole thing, and was happy as a lark as he bubbled with plans for the next Daugherty Project, a portfolio of caricatures of fans drawn by Virgil Partch.

But I realised that in order to stay in the club at all, I was going to have to take part in politics. As the group was constituted under that pernicious Governing Body setup, the only way one could get along with Daugherty was to keep a wedge driven between him and Ackerman. I expounded this idea strongly for the next few weeks, and pointed out that if we once caught Ackerman right after Daugherty had made him angry (something that happened from time to time) we’d not only fix Mr. D’s cookie, but would be able to toss out the entire governing body idea in toto. (We did, too.)

The FAPA election for the 1944-45 fiscal year took place at about this time, and Al Ashley, that caffeine soaked politico, had in appointing the ballot counting committee blithely ignored the feud, and appointed a non-partisan board, with Daugherty as chairman, and Brown and Bronson as assistants. This led directly to another mess. In the first place, Daugherty did not read of his appointment, and Ashley, unable to imagine another fan who would not read breathlessly every word in the official organ, had not notified him by mail. In the second place, Brown and Daugherty on a committee worked together about as well as Molotov and Senator Taft. And worst of all, Bronson not only lived 18 miles from the club neighborhood, but had no phone and had definitely quit fandom. Poor old Walter J. Daugherty had a

hell of a time, which was not especially helped by his native inclination to procrastinate. Before the ballot counting delays were over, a feud had sprung up between Daugherty and Larry Shaw (that's one I loved; no matter who got the worst of it, I liked it fine.) and FAPA had ground almost to a full halt. I finally wrote to Ashley about it. I'd struck up quite a correspondence with Sultan, arising out of the letter he wrote me about the drunken *Fan-Dango* of a few months before. I'd been impressed by his extreme fairness and courtesy, particularly as contrasted by the reception that issue got from FAPA as a whole, and very shortly he had me highly interested in FAPA, both from the point of view of the contents of the mailings, and as an arena for the practising of organizational politics, something I tend to enjoy as an end in themselves. I happened to mention, with the idea of knifing Daugherty a little, that he had totally disregarded the secrecy of the ballot, and had made a tabulation of who had voted and how. Al was overjoyed, made a few anti-Futurian remarks which of course fell on fertile soil, and asked me to get these results for him. So I did. I mention this episode, since it was the first stirring of the abortive group later to be known as the O O D, Order of Dagon.

Due to the three-month's probationary period, before persons joining the LASFS were permitted to vote, and the extremely small size of the club at this time, it was not long before the futility of all LASFS meetings was starkly underlined. The typical LASFS meeting in June and July 1944 was attended by from 8 to 12 people, of whom sometimes as many as four were eligible to vote. But traditionalist Ackerman, reigning as director for a three month term, never thought to try turning the club away from its habitual bumbling rut of business meetings, and some rare scenes arose from this. It made no difference if a person were eligible to vote: if he had something to say and sufficient aggressiveness to get up and say it he could hold the floor for hours. But when the time came to vote on whatever was at hand, only a very few could or would exercise a franchise. I'll give two examples which illustrate the two types of things that habitually happened to club business during this madcap summer, I might add that virtually everything that came up was disposed of in one of these two ways.

One night, in connection with a discussion on improving club finances, we discovered that the club was holding the sack for over \$50.00 worth of mimeographing supplies which had been used by different members who had subsequently left the club without paying their bills. I got the floor, suggested

that the club drop its requirement of using club materials on the club mimeograph, allow any member to use any supplies he wished as long as he paid the club a commission on their value to pay for the use of the mimeograph, that all club supplies be locked in the closet, and that they be issued under a cash only arrangement on whatever nights Ackerman might choose to be there and act as stock clerk. I dilated on the advantages of this scheme until I began to run out of breath, pointed out that I was unable to vote, and consequently could not put this into the form of a motion, and would someone else please do so. There was a prolonged silence as the notorious apathy inherent in the LASFS rose to new heights, I sat down mildly disgusted, and after a long and embarrassed delay, director Ackerman carried the meeting on to something else. The payoff came about two weeks later when I discovered to my utter amazement that the club was operating under my scheme and had been doing so ever since I had mentioned it. “What the hell...?” I asked Ackerman. “Well, it was brought up in a club meeting,” he said. “—???—”, I replied with my chin hanging down on my chest. “Well, no one seemed to say anything about it,” said Forry, “so I presumed it had been passed.” Comment by me at this late date would be superfluous.

The other way business was disposed of was even worse. Not only was Morojo on the threshold of her permanent split-up with Ackerman, but she was in very poor health; came only to the early portion of the meeting long enough to collect any money she could and read her treasurer’s report, and then left for the evening. Walter J. Daugherty, as ever (even when director) only came to about two meetings in five. Daniels and Rogers were both in arrears with their dues, and hence could not vote. This left the regular voting members limited to director Ackerman, Burbee, and Crozetti. Since the latter two did not like each other very well, they habitually voted on opposite sides of whatever came up, regardless of the topic’s intrinsic merits. The height of this folly came up one sultry July night when 13 persons, including visiting San Franciscans Ebey and Watson, spent nearly two hours wrangling over some now forgotten topic, finally got it to a vote, and (yes!) Crozetti voted yes, Burbee voted no, and Ackerman, characteristically, refused to cast the deciding vote, although it was his clear duty as chairman to do so. The net result, of course, was to waste the entire evening.

My wife, Jackie, had arrived in Los Angeles early in July, and spent most of that month on a full-time house-hunt. Giving up on rentals, she finally consented to our buying, and very shortly we had a house. During this

month, she naturally saw a good deal of the LASFS, and this added another source of trouble for our already tottering marriage, since there were few of the local misfits whom she could tolerate. I'd been around them so long that I'd gotten used to them, scarcely realising myself how bad most of them were. Had her manner of attack been less dictatorial and less "You do my way or else ..." I undoubtedly would have quit fandom completely in late 1944; the things she said about the club and its members were only too true, but I could see no future in permitting myself to be led around by the nose.

The chief worthwhile Los Angeles activity in mid-1944 was the publication of Jack Speer's mammoth *Fancylopedia*, a scholarly and entertaining encyclopedia which not only gave definitions and background for all terms and words with fannish connotations, but in passing gave a considerable glimpse into stefnistic history. Jack had spent over two years writing and revising and sending the manuscript around to various elder fans, had then stencilled it and turned it over to Phil Bronson to publish for him. Phil went all out for lotus-eating, but did turn publishing permission over to the Outsiders, who even went so far as to buy some of the paper for it just before the final disbanding and resumption of LASFS membership. In the meantime, Speer, understandably miffed over the protracted delay in publication, had gotten after the NFFF, under whose auspices Bronson was supposed to have been working, and Evans had re-assigned the job to Walter J. Daugherty, who amazingly allowed the LASFS to take it over. So we spent a full month mimeographing, using three machines: the club's old automatic ABDick, my old *Acolyte* machine, and Walter J. Daugherty's flossy new Niagara. The NFFF is given a lot of undeserved ego-boo by being shown as publisher; Forrest J. Ackerman published it, furnishing 95% of the incentive and well over half the actual work. He worked pretty much along the lines of an Outsider publishing session, and the finished results show that even the LASFS can do something worthwhile if a certain modicum of intelligent direction and channeling is given to the club's potential.

Walter J. Daugherty had an acute outbreak of projectomania in June and July 1944, starting new magazines and brochures by the dozen. Most never got beyond the talk stage, and all were so delayed in publication that their eventual publication was greeted only by amused surprise on the part of local fandom. The second edition of Daugherty's *Directory of Fandom* came out first; he compiled a vast array of names and addresses, stencilled them, and ran them off like a house afire. For over three months, the completed

directory gathered dust and obsolescence around the club because Walter J. Daugherty could not figure out a cover that suited him. No wonder it was so out of date when he finally sent it out. Stray pages turned out at this time for various other short-lived projects appeared in *Fan* at various times during the next year and a half; some of the stuff, I believe, never did get published.

In her column in *Shangri L’Affaires*, Lora Crozetti very aptly took to describing the rooming house at 628 South Bixel as the “Bixel Fairy Palace”. (From November 1943 until now (April 1947) this building has always had at least one, and sometimes as many as four, members of the LASFS who were also actively overt homosexuals). Anyway, this was too much for some of the alate\* ones, who frantically rushed into print with a new name for their house of assignation: Tendril Towers. Burbee and I took great glee in making up new alliterative take-offs on this euphemism – most are now forgotten or unprintable – but I still remember Goosey-butt Grotto with a certain amount of relish. (Lest I seem to be casting slurs, perhaps I should point out that the Bixel Fairy Palace has always had heterosexual LASFS members living there too.)

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\* Presumably “alate” – “having wings” – is a Laneyism for “fairies”. [Ed.]

As the summer of 1944 wore along, I received a letter from Mick McComas that went far to thrust me back into fandom. This note mentioned that the Random House *Great Tales of Terror and the Supernatural* had just topped the 30,000 mark in sales, that McComas and a friend had been commissioned to compile a companion volume of science-fiction, and could I help them any? This led to a big session with McComas and his co-editor, Ray Heally, as an upshot of which I agreed to do a vast amount of preliminary scouting and story recommending. The first thing I did was to monopolise a club meeting, asking the members to suggest suitable stories, look them up in the club library, and tell me where they could be found. I sat there typing like mad and ending up with two single-spaced pages of story recommendations. During the next year and a half, I must have had at least ten long sessions with McComas and Heally, some of which I will describe in their chronological place in these memoirs.

Jackie returned to the North in early August, to sweat out the eviction time granted the tenants of our new house I sat tight in Fran Shack, trying to avoid spending money and as a result becoming more deeply involved in the club for a while, bringing out gobs of crud – *Acolyte*, *Fan-Dango*, and

independent writings. It saved money, since I was doing no collecting to speak of, but getting deeply enmeshed in the LASFS once more was a very bad thing for me otherwise, and I've often regretted it. But in addition to the immensely exciting collaboration with Heally and McComas, and the ever increasing flow of good material for *The Acolyte*, Tony Boucher stunned me with the first of two highly enthusiastic reviews of *The Acolyte* in his book column in the *San Francisco Chronicle*. This one squib brought *Acolyte* no less than 23 cash subscriptions, and the ego-boo involved was a bit more than my equilibrium could stand. I began to have visions of building *Acolyte* into a genuine semi-pro, and going on from there into professional editing – a harmless enough will-o-the-wisp to chase if one does not take it too seriously. I'm afraid I took it too seriously for a while though – never stopping to think that I was making more money on my job than I could hope to get as one of the lesser editors, and that I am temperamentally unsuited to tackle publishing except as a hobby. (I.e. why take the fun out of a hobby by making a job out of it?)

Early August saw a major political upheaval in the LASFS. It had once more become time for a new director to be elected. Morojo announced that she would positively refuse to be treasurer again (having served continuously since mid-1937), and a wave of consternation ran through the two or three voting members who took the club seriously as they realised that they had no one available to take over the job. Finally (and I've always thought it was at Morojo's suggestion) Ackerman and Daugherty came to me and asked if I were willing to be treasurer of the LASFS.

"Can't," I said. "I'm not eligible either to vote or to hold office, and won't be for another month."

"Well," said Daugherty, "we can waive that about holding office."

"You mean you are willing to waive the rest of my probationary period?"

"Oh no," said Walt, "you won't be able to vote, but you can have the job if you take it, and of course you can keep the job after your probationary period is over."

"What the hell do you think I am? If I can be trusted with the club's money I can be trusted with the other privileges of membership. And furthermore, Brown and Kepner came back into the club with me, and I'll consider no special consideration that does not apply to them as well."

"We can't do that."

“Well, I don’t want the job anyway. I told you when I came back in the club that I was through with club politics. What’s the matter; can’t you find some public spirited fan like Ackerman and Daugherty who is willing to sacrifice the tiny amount of time the treasurer’s job requires?”

“No.”

“If you need a treasurer bad enough to restore all of us Outsiders to full membership now, I’m willing to take the job just to do you and the club a favor.”

The result of all this was a foregone conclusion; while Walter J. Daugherty had a few minor fits, the Governing Body gave the executive committee permission to waive the three-months probationary period for Brown, Kepner, and myself – this after only seven weeks of novitiate. And it is noteworthy that this three-months probation was thereafter honored only in the breach –until I became director again and chose to apply it in one or two instances as a political move. (The best way to kill a bad law is to enforce it rigidly.)

So Morojo found herself elected director, Alva Rogers was secretary, and I was treasurer. Something about the idea of the arch-Outsider in control of the LASFS funds seven weeks after his return to the club, and moreover by the request of Walter J. Daugherty, has always struck me as being rather funny.

Morojo’s term of office was short, and anything but sweet. Walter J. Daugherty had taken to collecting mimeographs – I think he had some idea of using the clubroom as an office for a commercial mimeographing service – anyway he very shortly owned two late-model, fully automatic Niagaras, a post card machine, some sort of broken down standard mimeograph which I never saw out of its box, the Phil Bronson machine, \$30.00 worth of stylii and lettering guides, and the cabinet from an old table radio. (I never did figure out what that last was for.)

Anyway, in light of Daugherty’s mimeographical resources, it was not odd that the executive committee shortly got in the mood to buy one of the Niagaras, particularly when the club machine broke down. We voted to do so, against Myrtle’s protest. She went ahead the next day and had \$25.00 worth of work done to the old machine. We decided to sell it to Daugherty anyway, and turn it in on a reconditioned Niagara, with automatic paper feed, inking, and slipsheet. Myrtle chose to take this as a personal affront and resigned her gavel, after serving for only about a week. (I’ve always thought she was

just looking for an out anyway, since she very shortly made her final break with Ackerman, quit being Morojo, and became, as now, Myrtle R. Douglas, an extremely inactive member of the club.)

This resignation elevated Alva Rogers to the post of director, and he replaced himself as secretary by appointing Walter J. Daugherty. About the only piece of business transacted during Alva's term was to elect Myrtle an honorary member of the society. Otherwise the group bumbled along, held a few entertaining discussions, and that was about all.

Sometime during the latter part of the summer, Bob Hoffman came to town to spend a protracted furlough. Paul Freehafer had left his entire collection to Bob, with the proviso that Bob pass on any of it he did not personally want in any way he wished. Bob decided to give all this stuff to me; including a number of prozines, a fat bundle of fan photos, and a very fine collection of fanzines. The bulk of Paul's collection turned out to have been in Idaho; and I'll never forget the amazement with which we unpacked the gigantic boxes of stuff which his sister sent to us. Paul's collection was the nucleus of my collection of fanzines, and since 1944 I have kept constantly expanding it until it is, in my opinion, one of the four or five best such collections in captivity – containing as it does almost all major fanzines from 1930 through 1946 in complete files, and large quantities of the lesser items. It is the one portion of my fan/fantasy collection that I have not discarded or weeded out; so far as I know now, I will probably keep it always – partly because I enjoy browsing in old fanzines, partly because fanzines tend to bring back to me memories of the more pleasant part of my fanning, and not a little because the collection, started as it was, is in a sense a memorial to Paul Freehafer.

Considerably publicised by the club in 1944 was the acquisition, on a loan basis, of Donald Warren Bratton's fantasy file and bibliography. Don Bratton is a pleasant but quiet young chap in his early twenties, notable for rosy cheeks and a deep, if not vociferous, interest in the bibliographical side of fantasy. The file, contained in a large oak card case of some fifty or sixty drawers is an attempt at a complete cross-indexed file of all fantasy everywhere, is nowhere near complete, but even so contains thousands of cards, and has proven highly useful to many of us. The file, and its making and augmenting, is Don's chief interest in fandom.

Another character who came on the scene in 1944 and was for a time the club librarian was Leonard Golding Pruyn. He was a peculiar person,

unknowable to the nth degree, and was of so hyper-refined a nature that the casual conversations of the more virile members shortly caused him to drift away.

Of a more sturdy nature among 1944's members was Captain Vern Glasser, USA – a glib and handsome New York lawyer who found himself on the coast for a few months, who had read stf for many years, and who heard of the club through Rae Sischo, a girl who happened to work for Reed's Litho Company (the concern which turns out most LASFS lithography). Vern was in his element when it came to bullfesting; he had the actual experience as well as the background of reading to back him up; and sessions with him were among the chief highlights of the latter part of the year. He faded out of the picture when the army transferred him elsewhere.

And in the early fall of 1944 I got a letter from Art Saha, announcing that he felt he had done his bit in the war after having served over a year in the US Maritime Service (after all, the guy was 4-F), had retired from the sea, and was undecided what to do next, except that his hometown of Hibbing, Minnesota no longer appealed. So I tossed him off a note telling him that he'd just as well come to LA for a while and get a bellyfull of the LASFS. He did and he did. The Saha who arrived In October 1944 was a far cry from the gawking bumpkin I'd met in Frisco the year before; the rough edges were knocked off, and here was a poised and personable guy who very shortly was one of the more desirable members of the club.

The latter part of 1944 saw me get into a most deplorable feud with A. Langley Searles of New York City, publisher of the scholarly and erudite *Fantasy Commentator*. This was just one of those things. I had had a certain amount of desultory correspondence with Searles – wherein nearly every thing he said to me was couched in such words as to make me furious, and apparently my own remarks to him acted much the same. But nothing came of this definite antagonism between us until he got the idea my friends and I intended to steal his bibliography of fantastic books, which at the time was running spasmodically as a supplement to *FFF*. This misunderstanding arose when, arising out of a suggestion by Tony Boucher in the *Shaggy* letter section, a shortlived "Great Bib" movement arose, in the course of which some of us volunteered to help Searles with his existing bibliography. Searles apparently felt that he was doing all right on his own hook, with a coincident wonder as to where all this proffered help was during the earlier stages of his research; he refused the offer in such way as to make me mad; some of us

decided to put out a bibliography of our own and announced this intention In *The Acolyte*; Searles threatened to sue for infringement; I blew up editorially in *Acolyte*; Searles demanded a withdrawal of the editorial under threat of suing me for libel; I found on second glance that I would not be able to prove some of my allegations (under California law the truth is a defense against libel); and eventually made a rather grudging apology. Sam Russell acted as peacemaker, and actually got a short-lived, friendly correspondence going between Searles and myself – but a plan for Searles and I to swap contributions for each other’s magazines fell through when Searles failed to write an article for *The Acolyte* (I did two for Searles, both of which he published.)

The fuss with Searles was considerably augmented by the stand he took in FAPA over the inclusion of certain matter which he considered to be obscene – Langley having stated point-blank that he was tired of the wrangling of the members over this matter, and the next time he saw something he did not like he was going to turn it over to the post office department. While I usually admire direct action, on the other hand I have always been one to over-react towards anything which smacks of a restriction on personal liberties. And by the time the LASFS FAPA members had gotten done kicking Searles’ threat around, nearly all were ready to boil him in oil – Forrest J. Ackerman going so far as to write a really nasty personal attack, in which he referred to Searles as a “white Jap”; the FAPA publication of which led to a permanent rift between Searles and Ackerman.

The FAPA election of 1944 had seen the 75% triumph of a Futurian slate of officers, riding high in an attempt to regain their former prestige in fandom (or for some reason I don’t know) – anyway, Futurian Doc Lowndes was elected president, and Futurian yes-men Suddsy Schwartz and Larry Shaw were elected secretary-treasurer and, official editor respectively. The old Futurian leader, Donald A. Wollheim, was nosed out of the vice-presidency by Al Ashley – a circumstance which shortly led to trouble in FAPA. The first act of the Futurians was to jam through, without warning, an election of constitutional amendments – some of which made sense, and some of which seemed to cover or be capable of covering something else. I didn’t like the suddenness of the election, which effectively prevented discussion, nor did I have any reason to love the Futurians personally; so I drew up a petition of protest, got it signed by nearly all local Faps, and mailed it to the membership. The petition discussed each proposed

amendment in detail, usually disfavorably, chided the Futurian administration for its railroadish tactics, and urged the members to reject all amendments. (All amendments were passed except for one which proposed to prohibit discussion of racial prejudice.)

But though the petition did not appreciably affect the election, it led directly to two results of major importance as they affected my subsequent fan career.

Jimmy Kepner was one of the signers, and almost immediately he was subjected to a strong barrage of letters from Wollheim and perhaps others, urging him to change his mind. He actually wanted to put out another local letter to fandom, or rather FAPA, withdrawing his signature from the petition and urging the adoption of the amendments. I talked him out of this, but it was not long before the Tendril Towers bunch had swung en masse to the Futurian camp, a move which considerably complicated the political situation both in the LASFS and in FAPA.

Of more importance, it led directly into a political hookup between myself and Al Ashley – who by then was up to his ears in waging internecine warfare with the Futurians, a warfare which for the most part was unpublic, but which bore fruit in such leaflets as *These Amazing Amendments* and *The Precipitant*.

I'd already interested myself in FAPA politics. At the time I arrived in Los Angeles, Clod Degler was still a member of FAPA, and it seemed to several of us that it would be highly expedient to expel him. Our first attempt came out as a signed petition dated in December 1943, urging the officers of FAPA to take some action. Al Ashley, in his typical let-somebody-else-do-the-dirty-work fashion, fluffed this off; mentioning, however, a constitutional expedient which might be used for the expulsion. Bronson and I promptly took this up, filed the necessary piece of legislation, and were gratified to see it passed in the 1944 Fapa election, although by a very narrow margin.

I was, however, highly disgusted with the shilly-shallying attitude manifested by so many members of FAPA, and by the actual antagonism which this ouster aroused in certain quarters. Discussing the matter with Bill Watson, we gradually got the idea of forming a FAPA political party (which never received a name more dignified than "potty"); aiming it directly at the conservatives in FAPA. Watson was to file for Official Editor, and I for secretary-treasurer. We got Bob Tucker talked into running for vice-president, and asked D. B. Thompson to file for president; however, Don

shied off fast, explaining that he wanted no part of organizational politics. As second choice, we approached Norm Stanley, and he accepted the bid, though later he withdrew.

We had a number of ideas we wished to try out. At that time, FAPA was stifled by non-productive members, yet boasted an imposing waiting list – we wanted to tighten up membership requirements both quantitatively and qualitatively so as to get rid of the dead wood and get the new prospects admitted to membership before they got tired of waiting and lost interest altogether. Most of our proposed legislation centered around this one aim, though we did have other proposals which I have by now forgotten.

The political rapprochement with Al Ashley led to complications, since by the time it happened Watson had definitely aligned himself with the Futurians and Al had reached the point of almost open feuding with them. But in October 1944, the point at which this chapter is supposed to break off, the potty consisted of candidates Stanley, Tucker, Laney and Watson – with loyal supporters Thompson and Ashley.

In connection with my attacks on Degler, I got into a rather amusing fracas with Raymond Washington, the one reputable fan who continued to support Degler after all the rest of established fandom had turned against him. Being right on the spot and knowing what Degler was, I felt rather strongly about Washington's misguided loyalty in sticking to Degler, and demanded in one of my anti-Degler petitions to FAPA that Raym be directed either to sever connections with Degler or resign from FAPA. This did not sit well with most fans, including many of Degler's strongest opponents, nor did it sit well with Washington. But Raymond wouldn't fight back, and it rather annoyed me that my blood-and-guts facet had grown so anemic that I couldn't get a rise out of someone with it. (!!!) So I proceeded to snipe at Raymond every time I got the chance, trying the rather Hearstian tactic of discrediting him by coupling him in the public mind with something distasteful. Since Raymond was a year or so younger than the general run of fandom, I commenced referring to him as "Young Washington", dismissing everything he said as being too puerile to be worthy of attention. (It wasn't of course, but it made an amusing line to take, particularly as I imagined at the time with a certain amount of justification that this psychology was working with quite a few fans.) So this sort of thing went on for months, in *VOM*, in FAPA, and in my correspondence. And never a peep from RW.

Then, like a veritable bombshell, Raymond Washington blew up in my

face, sending an open letter about me to the LASFS. Oh it was a honey – took me around and around – and incidentally was the most effective piece of attack work I saw in half a decade of fanning and feuding. The other members of the club had already read it when I arrived and were sitting around in pleased anticipation waiting for me to explode. I read it, was disappointed to find Raymond going all out for a form of idealistic unreality that I have always deplored as being impractical, and sorry to see that he had a number of totally erroneous ideas about me (as for example that I bore him malice, when all I was doing was having fun sniping); but at the same time was delighted to get a rise out of him. The LASFS was audibly disappointed as I sat down and wrote Raymond a long conciliatory letter which eventually led to a protracted correspondence that I at least found highly pleasurable.

But my big time in fandom was about over. My family was to arrive around November 1, and we were to move out away from the club neighborhood to the house at 1005 West 35th place. Fran Shack was about to fold up and vanish; I offered it to the LASFS for the same \$30.00 a month I was paying, it being about three times as big as the clubroom, and fitted up with a toilet and cooking facilities to boot – but it was too far away for the timid provincials of Bixel Street who after all, being emissaries of the future and supermen one and all could hardly be expected to wander seven blocks out of their habitual orbit – even to get a nice new clubroom.

My plans had not contemplated making my family live in the store, but a delay in getting the tenants out of the house dumped us all right there. It was a horrible place for the kids – no yard, no nothing – and as a result Jackie and I took them away as much as we could. It seemed natural to gravitate toward the LASFS, and the children made such a hit with local fandom that it proved a hard habit to break. I had rather expected the LASFS to object to Sandy and Quiggie, but instead the whole membership fussed over the little girls something scandalous. Sandy, who was then 4½, very shortly found herself cranking the mimeograph from time to time, running errands for the members, going out to play miniature golf with them, and in general fitting in like she was one of them. Quiggie had her choice of a half-dozen laps to sit in, people to carry her piggyback. And both of them had a big time looking at the pictures in the club's magazines, drawing and doodling on the crud sheets lying around, going out to dinner with local fandom, or what have you. I did not regard the relationship as particularly wholesome for the children, but for the two weeks it didn't hurt them, and it was amazing to see how reputed

child-haters like Forry allowed Sandy and Quiggie to lead them around by the nose.

I was still treasurer of the LASFS; I intended to serve out my term and then cease activity in the LASFS – dropping in maybe once a month – and confining my fan activity to a decreasing output of *Acolyte* and *Fan-Dango* – with an eventual cessation of activity altogether – probably by the end of 1945.

We moved out of Fran Shack in early November of 1944, and off I went, not without a nostalgic letter to Tucker about the end of an era as it were, to what I thought would be the beginning of the end.



Left to right: Arthur Joquel, Ed Chamberlain, Gerald Miller, Henry Hasse. Photo from the Mike Rosenblum collection.

## Chapter IX

### Ebb-Tide

The first two or three weeks after I'd moved into my new house were almost totally lacking in fan activity, as I worked away getting moved in, continued getting re-acquainted with my children, and what not. About all I did was to write two or three letters to Ashley and Tucker concerning the FAPA political situation, though I did have *The Acolyte* in the back of my mind, and intended to get to work shortly on another issue. My interest in fandom, however, was definitely waning.

It was given a powerful fillip one day in the latter part of November 1944 when I returned from work to find waiting for me an envelope bearing the return address of the Hotel Stilwell, a local hostelry. Opening it, I was stunned to find a note from A.E. van Vogt, announcing that he had just concluded a permanent move from Toronto to Los Angeles, that he was very anxious to meet me, and would I please get in touch with him. I was knocked over. Back in 1942 I'd gotten van's address from Johnny Mason, and had sent him an *Acolyte*. He'd written a nice, and publishable, letter of comment, and I'd continued to send him *Acolyte* without ever hearing from him again. But I had a very high opinion of the man, both from his published stories and from the glowing accounts Mason had given me of him, and it was with high excitement that I drove downtown to meet him at his hotel.

Alfred E. van Vogt turned out to be tall and skinny – with the same grasshopperish build as Bob Tucker (or myself for that matter) – has a rather high forehead, straight dark hair, and is bubbling over with a vivacity which is sometimes hidden by a superficial shyness. At the time I met him, he wore a rather old-fashioned pair of pince-nez with a ribbon dangling over one ear as an anchor, but the salubriousness of the local climate soon caused him to toss these artificialities to one side. I believe we were both rather ill at ease during much of this first meeting – I know I was. But there were so many things to talk about – the world is van's oyster, and he can talk about most phases of it, particularly the more obscure ones, endlessly and fascinatingly. I found myself liking him enormously, and subsequent meetings with him have only strengthened this feeling.

When I told the people at the LASFS that I had just had an evening's session with A.E. van Vogt they thought I was pulling a hoax. But he has been around the club so much since that he is almost taken for granted: he's certainly spent more time around the place than any other pro author. (Why, god only knows!)

Another extremely worthwhile person came on the scene for the first time in the tail end of 1944: Niesson Himmel. I never did know just how he got hooked up with the club, but he is quite a *fait accompli* nevertheless. A police reporter for several years, he has worked for the *Los Angeles Daily News*, the *Los Angeles Times*, the *San Francisco Chronicle*, and is at present a Hearst hatchetman with the *Los Angeles Evening Herald*. Here is a lad who spins the prettiest line of bull I ever encountered, who had been mixed up in practically every big murder or juicy sex case that has hit LA for the past four or five years. Talking to Himmel is more fun than reading Raymond Chandler. In appearance, Niesson is the typical college half-back, though his chief athletic sport, aside from treading work, is bending the elbow. His interest in stfantasy is almost nil, but he evidently enjoys associating with many of the fans, judging from the amount of it he does. An ornament to the LASFS, even if no one outside of LA ever did hear of him.

Having gotten pretty much settled in our house, we decided to throw a housewarming party on the last weekend of November. I was humiliated to discover, with rather of a start, that I had been sticking so close around the LASFS since early summer that I'd practically gotten out of touch with any non-fan acquaintances. But the brawl (and it was that, believe me!) did have about every LASFS member, plus a couple of girls from work and some others. Even Walter J. Daugherty attended – he and I got along fine, but his girl friend Tillie got into a ruckus with Jackie which nearly led to blows.

Two things made the party notable. In the first place, it was the debut of A. E. van Vogt and his wife (E. Mayne Hull). I had misgivings as to how well respectable people like them would fit in with such a commotion, but as it turned out they seemed to enjoy themselves. I particularly remember van backed into a corner of the dining room, hemmed into this culdesac by half a dozen yapping fans.

The second thing – Forrest J Ackerman had decided to prove to himself that he was right in frowning on the use of alcoholic beverages, and showed up with a pint. I had intended to mix his drinks personally, to make sure that he did not get too stiff – having some vague idea that if he were properly

guided-guarded he might find the release of a moderate amount of alcohol sufficiently desirable to wish to try it again. However, someone (Rae Sischo, I believe) started mixing doubles and gave one to the Ack. He sat there looking like the wrath of God, and waiting for something horrible to happen. It commenced to hit him a little, the old frozen repression started to slough off, and first thing you knew, the boy was having a good time. Then, all of a sudden, he realised that he felt the liquor, and collapsed moaning in a heap, spending the remainder of the evening stretched out on the bed. Most of us felt at the time that the deal was pretty much put on, but of course we may have been mistaken. At any event, he proved to himself that liquor and Acks didn't mix – which was about all he had in mind.

I left my own party quite early to accomplish the dual purpose of taking van and Mayne back to their hotel, and giving some fresh air to the excessively intoxicated Burbee and Saha. We got involved in a couple of bars, from the restroom of one of which we had a hell of a time dragging the regurgitating Burbee, who quietly passed out in the car. Saha got in the back seat by himself, and I started buzzing out towards the house. Art made some pleased remark to the effect that he had at last gotten himself a room in Tendril Towers, goshwowboyoboy, and was shortly to move in. Little realising how much he'd take it to heart, I remarked casually that of course he knew that all the fans in TT were fruits, and that of course he'd have to pass a novitiate of promiscuity with all of them before being allowed to settle on any one or two of the boys, that they made all the new tenants kick through to them in all sorts of fascinating ways.... (So far as I know, that was just a gag – the place has had some heterosexual inmates!) But Saha really hit the ceiling; by God they weren't going to do that to him he'd show them by God just let one of those fruits try anything... and so on. So I told him what one of the Tendril Towers fruits had actually said about Saha's moist, ruby-red lips – and Art went positively berserk, getting into such a screaming frenzy that I overshot 35th Place and was clear down past Exposition before I realised it. I cannot recall ever having kidded anyone with such spectacular success.

In the LASFS itself, a political farce was enacted in mid-November, when director Alva Rogers finally realised that he had not only served out the balance of Myrtle's term, but had gone six weeks into the next three months term without calling an election. I immediately proposed that he be nominated and elected by acclaim – having been a very good director – but he demurred and nominated Walter S. Daugherty. I nominated Alva anyway,

but was astounded when Mel Brown leaned over to me and told me that by god I had to run for director or he and Kepner would quit the club. Having no wish to be left alone in the LASFS with my *Acolyte* publishing at the mercy of Walter J. Daugherty, and figuring that I had about as much chance of being elected as Joe Stalin has of becoming president of the NAM, I said “Sure, go ahead.” So Mel nominated me.

Well, I had fully intended to drop LASFS activity for the most part as soon as I was finished with my term as treasurer, but, I thought, if it would keep Mel and Jimmy in line, I’d be willing enough to be a forlorn hope, particularly since there was no chance of netting this headache wished off on me anyway. Bland optimist!

When the ballots were passed around, I got to thinking that it would be cruel to have just one vote for Laney (figuring that Kepner would vote for Rogers) so I voted, for myself so as to have two votes to bring up the rear of the election returns with. (Never end a sentence with with.)

The final results: Laney 3, Rogers 2, Daugherty 2. So single-handed and without the aid of Walter J. Daugherty I elected myself to be director. And was I stunned at this outcome! I had no prospective officers in mind, no program, no nothing. On the spur of the moment, I appointed Saha secretary and Kepner treasurer, and told the people that I’d try to have some sort of program outlined in the next week or so, that I had not expected or intended to be elected, but that I was too weak to go against this great and overpowering popular mandate.

So December 1 found me director for four months (the balance of the split term plus the first three-months term of 1945). Oddly enough, if I’d not resigned during the feud, I would have been director anyway, since my election in 1943 under the old constitution was for a full year. Ain’t fan politics silly?

The next event of the winter was one from which local fandom has never quite recovered, the advent of Elmer Benton Perdue, formerly of Washington, Wyoming, and other places, and an active stefnist from the time of the Chicon on. He had announced in FAPA that he had been declared insane, that he was coming somewhere for psychiatric treatments, and that he had a prescription for benzedrine sulfate to tide him over until he could be placed under psychiatric care. I for one was anxious to meet him, since he was about the only other fan who shared my interest in jazz, and when I received a card from him announcing that he was coming to LA, I was quite

agog at the prospect of meeting this character.

As it turned out, he arrived one evening when a group of us were partaking of the hospitality of the Burbees: Jackie and the kids, 4e, Saha, Kepner, and perhaps others. A phone call came from Myrtle that Elmer had arrived, and shortly he broke in upon us in all his weird grandeur. He was higher than a kite on benny, had driven non-stop from Wyoming alone, and was apparently at the point of physical collapse. As his footsteps were heard on the stairs, 4e quickly put a recording of Elmer's own piano playing on the phonograph. "Jesus, what stink-finger piano," blurted Elmer as he staggered through the door, not realising that it was his own pianistics he was hearing.

I suppose a vignette is in order, but I hate to tackle it. Elmer Perdue is such a character that it would be easy to fill a dozen pages with fantastically unbelievable descriptions and anecdotes. And too it may not be strictly accurate, for Elmer has, superficially at least, changed a lot since he commenced courting Betty Browder, who is now Mrs. Perdue. But I knew him best in 1945 and 1946, when he was a very regular visitor at my house, and when we spent dozens and dozens of hours together playing records and talking of this and that, mostly of jazz.

Physically he is pretty much of a chunk, rather tall and heavy set, and pretty generally husky. He has a swarthy, seamed complexion – looks a couple of decades older than his 25 or 26 years – wears his lanky dark hair about four inches longer than it needs to be, and usually in those days his clothes not only looked as though they had been slept in, they had.

He is a long way from being insane as he almost proudly claimed himself to be, though he does have quite a few quirks of one sort and another. However, he is one of the most exhibitionistic persons I ever encountered, and takes such a keen delight in acting batty that it is highly difficult to tell just what is put on and what isn't. Leaving some of the more dubious antics out of the picture and trying to consider Elmer objectively, there are one or two things that stand out. For one thing, his drinking during much of 1945 and 1946 was definitely bordering at least on the psychopathic, and caused both him and his friends a lot of trouble. It irritated me to such an extent that I was forced to tell him, in mid-1945, to stay away from me unless he was sober. He had used my house as a passing out ground just once too often, and I enjoyed his company too much to be willing to put up with him when he was so sodden as to be unable to focus. Because Elmer is definitely a brilliant chap, possessed of depth and background and a keen analytical ability which

combine to make him a most stimulating companion. He could hardly be said to suffer from delusions of grandeur, yet when he gets on what Burbee and I call his Homo Superior facet he is not easy to tolerate. (But he can be backed off this groove quite easily if you know how to do it.) Let us say that he has an exceptionally high opinion of himself and let it go at that. And I have more than once wished that he could be more at ease with casual feminine acquaintances, quit calling them “ma’am” at every other breath, and talk more as he does with a bunch of the fellows, when his conversation is usually worth listening to – whether you are looking for wit and humor or serious discussion. When Elmer gets really amused about something, he tends to lapse dangerously near hysteria – in fact I myself have seen him refuse to finish reading something of Burbee’s until he gets under control.

Well maybe I’m making my boy sound unprepossessing. And in lots of ways he definitely is. On the other hand, Elmer is one of the three or four fans with whom I always would like to be on good terms, regardless of my own activity in the field. He has more wrong with him than a lot of us, yet on the other hand he has enough good points to make him come out on the credit side despite his faults – and that is something I can honestly say about very few of the other LASFS adherents.

By December 1944, the Battle Creek-Bloomington-Los Angeles axis had its plans for the anschluss of FAPA well in hand. Our front was a nebulous group which we intended to call the Freedom Party. This group was to include all FAPA members sympathetic to our overall program, which included strengthened activity requirements both qualitatively and quantitatively, FAPA sponsorship of important joint publishing projects such as fanzine anthologies, and other things of constructive worth. Politically, we stood in direct opposition to the Futurians and others who might at any time wish to use FAPA as an arena for playing power politics, or who might perform official duties inefficiently.

Backing up the Freedom Party, was a secret and self-perpetuating group known as the Order of Dagon. Founders consisted of Al Ashley, Bob Tucker, and myself. This group proposed to implement the Freedom Party by the use of block voting in all FAPA elections, and through the intelligent wielding of a block of 10 or 12 votes control every FAPA election. All Freedom Party candidates for office were also to come from Dagon members, who were bound not only to vote en masse in FAPA but also in their own party caucuses. Since Dagon was to remain entirely secret, the effect publicly

would be of free elections, but in actuality we intended to take FAPA over and run it progressively and dynamically, and thus prevent it from falling into interregnums, spasms of delayed mailings, and other disruptive contretemps. Ashley, Tucker, and myself each had an A list of prospective Dagon members, those whom we felt were definitely ripe for Dagonhood – as well as a B list of questionables and a C list of doubtfuls and impossibles. The combined A list of Ashley and Tucker consisted of: Walt Liebscher, Jack Wiedenbeck, Ollie Saari, Paul Spencer, Milt Rothman, and Les Croutch. (This list is taken from a letter from Bob Tucker to Ashley and Laney dated February 14, 1955.) I don't know which of these were actually approached, but I know that some of them are, and that some of them accepted.

My own list consisted of Forrest J Ackerman, Elmer Perdue, Mike Fern, and Les Croutch – all of whom I approached, and all of whom joined the Order of Dagon. In the election of 1945, Ackerman and Perdue both voted according to Dagon orders, giving Bob Tucker the vice-presidency over Harry Warner who otherwise would have had it – since these two comprised Tucker's margin of victory, and their vote was gotten through Dagon – Ackerman in fact changing his vote when reminded of Dagon. (How do you idealists like that one?) (And I'm sorry, Harry – but the vice-president, with his power of making constitutional interpretations, is in many ways FAPA's most important officer – he had to be a Dagonite, particularly since you are known to be too idealistic to play the kind of politics we were, regardless of how justifiable the ends in view.)

Willie Watson having definitely allied himself with the Futurians, we threw him off the ticket, telling him why; since Ashley was ineligible to run again for editor, I changed to that job and slated Al as secy-treasurer. The rest of the slate still consisted of Norm Stanley for president and Bob Tucker for Vice-president. Stanley knew nothing of Dagon, but was acceptable to us both for his fine reputation in FAPA and because he seemed sympathetic with our program as we'd outlined it to him.

Right around New Year's, Stanley wrote me a letter in which he mentioned that he'd just discovered Russell Chauvenet intended to run for president, and that he'd not run against him and consequently was backing out. (As it later fell out, Chauvenet quit fandom before the election, and Stanley not only ran but was elected.) But right at that time I was finding myself very much cramped for spare time, was trying to cut down, on fan activity, and when I thought of how much time Dagon had already taken I

boiled over and withdrew from the slate myself – retaining however an active interest in Dagon itself.

It was not difficult to get disgusted with FAPA anyway. In the first place, the Futurian administration was rapidly getting the group into a jam from which it has never entirely recovered. Suddsy Schwartz, the secy-treas, was to say the least being careless with the FAPA funds, and messing up his office in other ways as well. And the Futurians had also put out an illegal surprise mailing (between mailing dates) which had annoyed several of the members for various reasons. I was especially irked, because this mailing included an incomplete *Fan-Dango*. (I was at the time taking a music poll of FAPA, and due to my move had been unable to prepare the post card ballots at the time I sent in *Fan-Dango* itself to get rid of it. As a result of the premature mailing, I was forced to prepare a supplementary *Fan-Dango* to explain the card. While I was at it I asked the Futurians point blank why they seemed to be inimical to the LASFS, but was never given any reply except for some nebulous remarks by Doc Lowndes which actually said little or nothing.)

In the second place, I was getting some pretty rough treatment in the mailing comments. My “drunken” *Fan-Dango* of a year previous had said bluntly, too bluntly perhaps, that fans were pretty much impossible, poorly adjusted, and that what most fans needed more than anything else was a normal sex life, (Now, three years and more later, I still feel the same way about it, though I do deplore the faults of the *Fan-Dango* in question: a certain crudity of diction, and a failure to substantiate my charges due to my imagining that everyone was aware of the underlying facts about fans and fandom.) In any case, for one reason and another, FAPA didn’t like it. In some instances, I imagine I hit too close to unpleasant truths certain of the members were trying to avoid noticing about themselves. And so I came in for a good hauling over the coals. Moreover, since I am constitutionally unable to let someone else get in the last word, I was having a hard time getting the acrimonious little wrangle choked off.

So I decided to give FAPA a rest, missing two mailings.

My available spare time was further curtailed by my rather abortive enrolling in a LaSalle course in higher accountancy. I had done office work before the war, and feared that I’d have to return to this sort of misery after the war, and wanted to get enough training so as to be able to approach the kind of money that a man can make working in a shop. So, grumbling half-

hearted protests at the cruelty of life, I commenced working toward a CPA degree. (I dropped the course in late 1945, after having discovered that I had reasonably good chances of staying on in shop work as long as I wanted to.)

In between times of working on that accursed correspondence course and doing odd bits of carpentry around the house, I put out a rather half-hearted *Acolyte* (#9) but it meant very little to me – I was just putting it out because it was cheaper to continue than to stop and have to refund \$50.00 or so of outstanding subscriptions all in one chunk.

But fandom was shoved down my throat to a fare-ye-well when, in late January 1945, Jackie decided to take a job for a while in order to build us up a small nest egg for after the war. She went to work as a cocktail waitress in a nearby nightclub, and very shortly was dragging down more money in tips than I could bring home working for a living. The job was supposed to be temporary, but she kept on at it until our bustup – the contacts and what not she was making proving too pleasant to her for her to terminate. Well anyway, feeling that I should try to help all in the building up of the nest egg, so I commenced staying home every evening taking care of Sandy and Quiggie so as to avoid paying off for child care at a buck an hour. Through lack of anything else to do, I commenced working more and more with fandom – at first putting a great deal of time on the *Acolyte*, and then, as that palled more and more, occupying myself with political shenanigans of one sort and another, (Well, after all I could scarcely play records all evening every night.)

Not without misgivings I commenced taking Sandy and Quiggie to the club meetings – they seemed to have a good time and not to bother the members too much so this became a regular practise. The two little girls missed only three or four meetings of the LASFS during the first eight months of 1945 – in fact I remember one meeting which consisted of Sandy, Quiggie, Ackerman, and myself. The club meetings on Thursday nights gradually became my only outing except for going to work – other nights I sat tight at home, usually alone, playing with the kids until it was their bedtime, and then banging out crifanac with increasing disgust. As Jackie and I commenced overtly breaking up, I saw less and less of her – even on her nights off – often, going for 3 and 4 days at a stretch without even seeing her to speak to her. But this is not a chronicle of an unsuccessful marriage.

The necessity of taking care of the children made it almost impossible for me to do any mimeographing at the club, so it occurred to me that perhaps

I could arrange to take the club machine out to the house on certain specified occasions. (I no longer had a mimeograph of my own, having given my old machine to the LASFS to be used as a partial payment on the new club machine.)

So one evening I sprang a proposition of the members, pointing out to them the obvious impossibility of my taking care of S&Q at the club if I were going to mimeograph, indicating that the machine was out of use most of the time anyway, and requesting permission to borrow it for one week every three months. I asked that no discussion be held on this proposal, but that it be considered by them during the ensuing week, so that they could talk about it in my absence, and that I would bring it up for a vote the following week – going on to point out what a poor precedent it was to set, that as director I really was opposed to it, but that I saw no other possibility of continuing *Acolyte*. Actually, I was half hoping they'd refuse permission – because that would choke off *Acolyte* once and for all, and I was getting increasingly sick of the magazine.

But the LASFS graciously granted permission, and I found myself with full permission to take the machine as requested, provided that I fitted in my schedule with those of other members who might need to use it about the same time I would. This arrangement led to a well-nigh chronic war with Walter J. Daugherty, who seemed to take the granting of this permission as a personal insult.

Until E. Everett Evans arrived on the local scene in the late summer of 1945 and calmed Walter down a little, Daugherty and I indulged in open war – with most of the incidents revolving around the mimeograph. This all came to a head in the late summer, when the machine broke a spring the day I was to take it and Daugherty bought one out of his own pocket. He announced that he was retaining title to this spring, that any LASFS member might borrow it from him but me, that my week to have the mimeograph would soon be passed, and that after that time I'd have to wait three months before I could ask to borrow the machine again. I arrived on the scene late Saturday afternoon, after all mimeograph supply shops were closed, to borrow the machine under my agreement only to run into this situation. When I got to the club, Ackerman was finishing up an issue of *VOM*, the machine was purring along nicely, and of course I had no inkling of anything untoward. I told the Ack not to hurry, that I didn't mind waiting on him, and commenced chatting with the various people who happened to be in the clubroom. Ackerman

looked ill at ease, finally told me he had something private to tell me, and took me out of the room. When he told me about the spring and the rest of the sordid story I really hit the ceiling, raving about it for nearly an hour. Everett Evans, who had just arrived in town left looking perturbed. I later learned that he tried to buy the spring off Daugherty, and that Daugherty refused to sell it to him because he was afraid Everett might let me use the mimeograph. Everett then went down town, and of course found all the known mimeograph shops closed for the day, but did locate a spring of sorts which he bought and brought home only to find that it could not be made to fit. Everett then got after Daugherty again, who finally agreed to donate the spring to the LASFS if a panel of members (whom Daugherty named at the time) agreed that he was in the wrong. They did so unanimously, the spring and the mimeograph were on the way to the Weird Willys within ten minutes, and the largest battle of the Great Mimeograph War between Daugherty and myself was over.

The first half of 1945 saw the LASFS faltering into what appeared to be an almost certain demise. Not only were the members apathetic as always, and bitterly at odds with one another over this and that, but the total number had shrunk to a mere ten or twelve, three of whom worked nights in the same war plant (Burbee, Perdue, Kepner). When this situation was topped by an increase in the club's rental from \$20.00 per month to \$30.00, the group found itself within a hairs breadth of vanishing.

It may well be imagined then, that my terms as director (there were four of them in 1945) gave little opportunity of presenting a dynamic program of accomplishment, but were mostly spent in a bitter last ditch struggle to scrape up the next month's rent and to try to keep the staggering society together. Being director was especially frustrating, not only because the members were more willing to grumble about the club's ebbing fortunes than to get in and do anything about it, but due to the horrible vicious circle which brought to naught every thing that was done. What the club needed, of course, was members – and in one way and another a number of likely prospects passed fleetingly through the local picture. Having more members would of course both have made the club more nearly solvent and improved the interest level of the meetings, most of which were shot through with ennui and boredom or else frittered away in an acid battle between a couple of angry neurotics. But in order to hold new members it was necessary to pep up the meetings, something that proved impossible to do in the face of the LASFS' notorious

apathy, a pose of boredom with it all which makes the liveliest efforts at introducing something worthwhile fall flat.

Several newcomers came on the scene during the first half of 1945, and some of these stayed around long enough to rate vignettes.

The most active was Gerald Hewett, a bright-eyed thirteen-year-old to end all bright-eyed-thirteen-year-olds. Gerald was short, slender, noisy, and excitable – and his fourteen years of life had not given him either the poise or the background to make a success of associating with so many people who were so much older. When he first hove on the scene, he was smitten by the most violent case of hero worship I have ever seen, the worshipee being Ackerman, who was excessively embarrassed at the rapt way in which Gerry would spend evening after evening watching 4e's every movement almost with awe, and the breathless manner in which the kid hung on his most casual words. I imagine Forry suspected he was being kidded. As Gerry got better acquainted with the club, he passed through a short period of being a useful member (during which time he was pro-tem editor of *Shaggy*) but shortly turned hoodlum. After several months of making himself increasingly disliked by the club, Hewett finally resigned and moved on towards greener pastures. He was very fortunate to get out of the club when he did, as he thus avoided the pitfalls of being a fan, and has now a reasonably good chance of living a normal adolescence and growing up into an integrated man.

Portly, jolly Bob Bradford – an ex-Marine of about 35 – came on the scene about February 1945, never became especially active in the club but still drops around from time to time. He's just an ordinary civilised man, with no interest in fandom, but with a yen for reading stf and getting into bull fests. He's a good man to go on a beerbust with, and a good man to talk with. Everybody likes Bob, and for some inexplicable reason he seems to like almost all of the club members.

In one day of February 1945, I got subscriptions from two hitherto unknown localites who had read of *The Acolyte* in *Startling*. I wrote come-ons to both of them and both joined the LASFS. Lloyd Casebeer, a pleasant, intelligent chap in his late forties came around for several meetings, but soon got fed up with the hurly-burly of inane futility characterising the club. That he retained an interest in fantasy is shown by the fact that he renewed his *Acolyte* subscription nearly a year after any of us last saw him personally.

Pete Grainger was my other recruit, and he is still an occasional dropper-inner, though his chief pleasures are intellectual discussions with Ashley,

Burbee, van Vogt, Wiedenbeck, and others of our local braintrust, and the playing of a wicked game of chess. Pete is tall, dark, and slender; looks a good deal like Bob Tucker; and in fact might be described as a Tucker with brains. ((Hiya, Boob?)) He is very quiet and reserved on first acquaintance, but among those he feels are his friends is noted for a scintillating wit and vivacious conversation.

A handful of other new faces showed up during the first half of '45, but none of the rest stuck around long enough to rate a mention. After all, you don't have to eat a whole egg to tell if it is rotten, and one or two meetings of the LASFS are enough for most people.

Despite the struggle to maintain bare existence, my administration attempted a certain amount of permanently constructive business.

The first bit of accomplishment was the engineering of a deal with Elmer Perdue, under which the LASFS took over the custody of his printing press and type. Both were too badly battered to be of maximum utilization, but nevertheless made an excellent nucleus for what could have been rather cheaply developed into a first class amateur printing plant. The whole idea gradually fell into disrepute and the press and its appurtenances were finally moved out to Art Joquel's – due mostly to the lack of interest with which LASFS members collectively seem to greet anything which confronts them.

Discovering that the publicity director of the National Amateur Press Association was an Angeleno, two or three of us got the idea of working with the NAPA to form a local amateur press club, which could share expenses on our clubroom non-meeting nights on the same basis as members of the LASFS.

Though it had somewhat fallen into obsolescence under the Daugherty and succeeding administrations, the rent payers committee as originally set up by Yerke to be used in keeping Deglers out of the clubroom as much as possible still existed. We revamped the setup, wording the rent payers' document (a constitution of sorts) so that members of as many clubs as the rent payers wished to include might join the committee, regardless of affiliation with the LASFS. None of us were astute enough politically to see what this did both to the LASFS and the infamous governing body – in effect it turned the clubroom and all its contents over to the jurisdiction of the rent payers committee at all times except when the LASFS was actually in session on Thursday nights. The LASFS, in other words, became a mere appurtenance of the rent payers committee, existing in the clubroom only on

sufferance – and except on Thursday nights the LASFS, for all practical purposes, ceased to exist and was supplanted by this committee. Sounds metaphysical, but in actuality it was an overthrow of the Daugherty faction in the club, since the governing body no longer had control of anything except for a brief time once a week, and anyone could join the rentpayers without being a member of the club itself. It left Daugherty holding an eggshell from which all the contents had been removed.

In early 1945, one of NAPA's top men, Burton Crane of New Jersey, was in and around LA for a couple of weeks in connection with his preliminary training for the OSS. Crane had published, in early 1943, a brief castigation of FAPA and fandom in one of his NAPA publications, and in my earnest way I had written him a letter taking issue with several of his allegations, sent him an *Acolyte*, and given him a few selected fanzine publishers to contact. I'd forgotten all about it when about a year later came a most cordial and interesting letter from Crane, telling me that he'd looked into fandom more in detail, had found it of considerably more worth than he had imagined, and mentioning his intention of taking a minor part in it for a while. Very shortly we had worked up one of the best correspondences I have ever had, so I was highly excited when word came that Burton was in town.

Burton Crane is one of the very few individuals I have met who may rightfully be described by the word fabulous. The fabulous Burton Crane. Here is a tall, rather athletic man who very probably is in his late forties but who has that ageless approach to life which makes him fit in with any group, of any age. He is handsome, though balding, has one of those rich voices which is resonant without being booming, and a personality which must be encountered to be believed. Winning, analytic, witty, sympathetic, natively brilliant, Burton Crane is a man who has been everywhere and done everything – and who can apparently do almost anything with near-championship skill. He is probably the nearest thing to a genius that I have ever encountered in the flesh, easily the best integrated, most adult person I have met. He is by profession a newspaper man, but he has also met success as a playwright, as a magazine author, and as a musician. If he cared to commercialise his hobby of fine printing he could very easily make his mark as a 20th century Aldus. He spent many years in Japan in the twenties and early thirties, speaks the language well and idiomatically, and is definitely qualifiable as an expert on the Land of the Rising Sun. At present he is in charge of the New York Times office in Tokyo. During his previous

incarnation in Nippon, Crane was one of Columbia's top recording stars. Billed as the Japanese Maurice Chevalier, he waxed several dozen sides of American hit parade tunes sung in Japanese. And what a voice that man has! Some of us were out at my house talking about this and that, his recording career came into the conversation, and without warning he threw back his head and commenced singing the Japanese lyrics to *Walkin' My Baby Back Home*. I'd rather listen to Crane than Crosby anyday, and that isn't just idle flattery either; if I thought his singing stank I'd say so.

Anyway, Crane, in his magnetic way, did a lot towards helping the LA Amateur Press Club get organised, and got us acquainted, with Wesley Porter, a local advertising man who was at that time the publicity director of NAPA. Porter turned out to be a typical business man of the better class – a good egg and all that, but with a tendency towards being somewhat the bigshot executive type.

After so much piddling along, the LASFS finally held a meeting at which all local amateur journalists were asked to be present; we knocked ourselves out sending mimeographed letters to everyone who had belonged locally to NAPA, AAPA, or UAPA in the preceding decade – getting for our pains a turnout of six. The group seemed rather enthusiastic about organizing, and sharing our clubroom, but through some sort of singular coincidence the amateurs dropped the LASFS like a hot potato immediately following their second meeting, which was held at Clifton's and at which Walter J. Daugherty was present.

Perdue, Laney, and others of us were incensed, felt that Daugherty had sabotaged the club due to his known dislike of the administration. Still, there was nothing on which to accuse him. The upshot of it all was that I got Crane to look into the matter a little by letter, he did so and reported back that as far as he could learn Daugherty was innocent of any double-dealing. Crane's word was good enough for me – so I have written the matter off as a singular coincidence and nothing more, though one or two others are not as sure.

The eventual upshot was that the LAAPC quickly got on its feet as a growing organization, and that nothing came of the clubroom sharing idea, though a meeting was held at my house as late as September 1945 in which some last negotiations were made. Poor Porter; the conflagration was interrupted by the advent of the Ashleys and menage an hour after they hit Los Angeles for the first time – he strove manfully but I am afraid had rather a ruinous evening. But I'm getting ahead of myself.

Apart from the attempt at amalgamation with the amateurs, the only other constructive business attested during the first half of the year was to set up a series of planned programs, set up in 12-week series, and publicised through mimeographed letters. This attempt didn't do very well – too much apathy on the part of both the club and the scheduled attractions. Notable defaulters were Alva Rogers, who played hooky from his own talk on prozine illustrators, and Walter J. Daugherty who failed to show up for a lantern-slide lecture until after the meeting was adjourned and I had left the premises, explained that he had delayed so as to avoid having to show them to me, and then proceeded to show them, to the handful of people who were still at the club. I gave two or three talks, mostly of a Lovecraftian nature; Samuel D. Russell gave us a memorable series on witchcraft – but the star was none other than Ackerman. Always dependable, he proved able to give a good and interesting talk on a moment's notice and was the only factor that kept the whole program idea alive at all.

As spring wore along into the summer, word reached the society that E. Everett Evans was on his way, to join our giddy throng. This expected arrival left me with mixed feelings. In the first place, my very low opinion of Evans (due to the hypocrisy with which he disguised his penitentiary sentence as secret war service) had not been in the least enhanced by the detailed anti-Evans letters I had received from various Slan Shackers and other midwesterners, nor did I particularly care for the close liason reputed to exist between Evans and Walter J. Daugherty. (One of the most amusing things that happened during the Evans NFFF administration was the resignation of Walter J. Daugherty from the board of directors. Daugherty, as always, threatened to resign about something. Everett soft-soaped him into reconsidering, adding that he continued in office as president largely because of the fine support he was receiving from Daugherty and that if Daugherty resigned from the board he, EEE, would have to resign the presidency. So Daugherty reconsidered. Then later on something else came up, and Walter J. Daugherty resigned once more, thinking that Everett would do so too, or at least hinting in that direction in his conversation at the club and telling us what Everett had said before. So E. Everett Evans accepted Mr. Daugherty's resignation, and merrily continued to be president.) So, I reasoned, maybe this liason isn't as close as one might think. And, on the favorable side, it seemed to me that I was in a very minute minority in disliking Evans; practically all of fandom seemed to hold him in high esteem. Well, I thought;

maybe I am wrong. The man must have something on the credit side, or fewer people would like him. And, partly in support of this theory, I found myself enjoying a correspondence I'd gotten into with Everett.

I made up my mind that I should try to welcome Everett Evans to the LASFS just as though he were the best of friends, and that I should attempt to withhold judgement on him until I'd had an opportunity to know him personally. This led to my having to swim against the current; many of the club members, including several who fell all over Everett when he did arrive, regarding his advent in a rather dim way.

At about this time we were having a great deal of trouble with Daugherty, and one day to my amazement I found a letter from Daugherty to Evans put up on the club bulletin board, in which Everett was warned not to have much to do with the LASFS and to realise that he'd do better to have himself a two-man fandom with Daugherty, or words to that general effect. This irked me, and seizing on the opportunity to answer it as an open letter I knocked off a five or six pager to Evans in Battle Creek listing the latest half dozen things Daugherty had done to earn him our execration, and urging Evans to meet us himself rather than trying to judge the club through Daugherty's eyes.

When he finally arrived, it was maneuvered so that few of the members got to see him for a day or so, except for two or three of the Tendril Towers boys who crashed the welcoming party. I didn't see him for nearly a week. But he turned out to be a rather personable individual, tall, thin as a lath, close-cropped grizzled hair and moustache, and an odd froggy voice. He tends to be on the wishy-washy side as a conversationalist, seldom coming out straight from the shoulder and liable to believe too much of what he reads, but is by no means unenjoyable as a companion. If he'd just toss away that pose of saintly patience and relax into being one of the boys, he'd be a good egg; and as it is he's not such a bad one.

I was going to tell about the time that Everett and I went bookhunting and he erased the price of a book, marking it down from \$2.15 to \$1.15, but if I did people might think that he does not follow the teachings of Our Lord, Jesus Christ, in whom he believes, so I won't mention it. Since I was the only witness, and I have resolved to keep my mouth shut about it, this matter rests between Everett and his God.

It was at about this time (June or July 1945) that the club underwent a machiavellian coup d'etat, for which Daugherty apparently blamed me, but

which actually not only came as a complete surprise to me but deflated my office of director to a mere nothing.

My chief support was coming from the neutrals plus the Tendril Towers gang, and I fell out violently with these latter over the matter of communism. Brown, Saha, Rogers, and Kepner all went violently red – and while I did my best to hold my tongue, I'm afraid they learned my opinion of communism, and of American communists as dupes who have surrendered their right to intelligent analytical discrimination and choose instead to prate the ready-made credoes of the party line. As all newer communist converts, these boys had it like it was religion, and my failing to abandon my faintly left-of-center liberalism cooled our friendship considerably.

So one day the boys got together, and using the rent payers document as a pretext, tossed out the noisome governing body set-up for good, getting the governing body's consent to its own demise by promising Ackerman something about the Foundation, riding in a new constitution which reduced the director to a more gavel-wielding figurehead, and vested the real power in the chairman of the rent payers, Mel Brown. I was more amused than anything else, particularly when I discovered Daugherty thought I had engineered this deal.

The communists and their fellow travelers had at this time a rival club – the Futurian Society of Los Angeles. I can tell little about this group, since I was not invited to join. Burbee was invited, but laughed at them. Perdue, my only informant on the group, told me that it was no better than the LASFS, if indeed as good. It existed for only a very few months, and died quietly when the communists moved to New York in the fall of 1945.

V-J day found me drinking a bottle of liberated German champagne with Bob Hoffman, and laughing at the excited way all the fans were acting as though they themselves, through the reading of a minority group of cheap magazines and the participating in the dubious activities of a crackpot hobby group, had brought about this somewhat dubious scientific discovery.

The end of the war showed me a possible end to my efforts as director. (I had more or less vowed to try to hold the club together until the boys came back from the wars, and then step down to relative inactivity.) It also dropped in my lap the problem of the Pacificon, originally slated for Los Angeles in 1942, and put in cold storage due to the war.

The Pacificon was a knotty problem, and one which I found myself unable to solve. Originally, the chairman had been Walter J. Daugherty, but I

regarded his leadership with grave doubts, particularly in light of the fact that Yerke had told me in minute detail of how luckily Daugherty and the LASFS were rescued from the debacle of another Daugherty project by the outbreak of war. According to Yerke, Daugherty had done nothing except quarrel with his committee, put out some publicity, and talk as though the convention were in the bag. I would have liked very much to put the convention into someone else's hands, but was stymied in this both by the complete lack of any other prospective convention director and by the obvious difficulty of shunting Daugherty out of the picture if he still wanted the job, which, it developed shortly, he still did.

At the first LASFS meeting following V-J day, Daugherty got wound up on the subject, talked for something over an hour on how he had not gotten cooperation in 1942/42 [*sic*], and that he would not take the job except under his own terms, which chiefly meant that he was to have the say on everything (his famous veto power) and that the committee was to be advisory only. It all seemed silly, but the club gave it to him unanimously, except for Elmer Perdue. He then asked for volunteers to the committee, a group which seemed to change composition every time it met or Daugherty had a brainstorm. I do remember positively that I volunteered and was accepted, as were Ackerman and Andy Anderson. And since the first committee meeting was held in Everett's apartment, he must have been on it too. But this can just as well go in the next chapter.

Late August 1945 found me in a detestable rut. Jackie was working at the night club and I was staying home with the kids. The marriage had gone all to pieces, but I was sticking around chiefly for the sake of Sandy and Quiggie, but partly because I thought that since the situation was dissatisfactory to Jackie as well as myself there was a reasonably good chance that time might tend towards healing the breach. This is not a discourse on my marriage by any means, but it is germane to this account to point out that I had drifted into a situation where I had practically all the disadvantages of both marriage and bachelorhood, and mighty few of the advantages of either. Fandom being at hand, I naturally flung myself into it frenetically as an attempt to keep my evenings from being quite as bleak as they would have been otherwise. But it meant nothing to me in itself any more. I continued *Acolyte* partly from force of habit and partly because I hesitated to refund all those subscriptions (by then \$75 or \$80 worth) when I could put out another issue for scarcely more than the money coming in

between issues. Since Brown, Rogers, et al had gone communistic they didn't come around much any more; Burbee was in the army, and about my only regular visitors were Perdue and Andy Anderson. It was, frankly, a hell of an existence, and before long I was casting about trying to figure ways to stir up some excitement in fandom – anything to break the deadly monotony.

If any change had come in my domestic situation in the summer or early fall of 1945, I would have dropped fandom cold, overnight and without a particle of regret. Feeling that way about it, it is not difficult to see why I shortly became embroiled in a series of hectic squabbles.

But a turning point was at hand. Two not dissimilar characters, Jack Speer and Al Ashley, quite unwittingly shot my fan interest into an Indian summer, perhaps aided a little bit by Walt Liebscher. But that goes in the next chapter.



Forrest J. Ackerman. Photo from the Mike Rosenblum collection.

# Chapter X

## Indian Summer

My virtually waned interest in fandom was revived by two people, Jack Speer and Al Ashley. Al of course had been a correspondent of mine, and had also been a fellow conspirator in FAPA politics, so when he moved to Los Angeles it was just a question of carrying on a previously established friendship.

But Jack Speer was something else. I had first heard of him early in my fan career when I was unfavorably impressed by a letter of his in the first *VOM* I ever saw, in which he inveighed against women smoking and chewing gum. After I got into FAPA I of course saw more and more of his writings, but between their air of almost pontifical authority and Jack's tendency towards prudishness I came more and more to form a vague antipathy towards the Highly Magnified WB\*. This crystallised when I came to LA and met Mel Brown, who heartily despised Jack, probably because Speer cleans his fingernails once in a while. I was fertile ground for the planting of anti-Speer seed, and Mel did a thorough sowing. So I came to spat with Speer from time to time in FAPA, particularly over the matter of racial prejudices. Then when I discovered the awe with which Phil Bronson regarded Speer, it amused me to snipe at Speer, both verbally and in print, simply because it got Phil's goat for me to take potshots at Jack. In time, this had grown into an incipient feud, with Speer and me indulging in some rather acrimonious fencing in *VOM*, FAPA, and even *Shaggy*.

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\* *Highly Magnified Woggle-Bug: the giant insect who is annoying for his over-educated academic arrogance and conceit in L. Frank Baum's The Marvelous Land of Oz (1904). [Ed.]*

But in the meantime I had acquired vastly of back issue Speer publications, and one day commenced reading them. Speer sounded pontifical as ever, making his points with a ponderous finality which made then sound like the definitive summation of all knowledge. But on reading a sizeable chunk of Speer I also discovered that he is eminently readable – something that can be said for few fan writers – and also that he usually has something interesting to say. I'd been too busy picking out things to snipe at

to realise all this.

Along about this time, I received the first *Stefnews*, and was enormously well impressed by its neat succinctness, its journalistic style, and its hearty neutrality (which means that Speer always tends to make nasty cracks at the same kind of people I do). It made a lovely contrast to any of the other newszines. So I dropped Speer a note and some news, and shortly a rather wary correspondence sprang up.

Then, along in September 1945, Jack Speer paid a short visit to Los Angeles, and I was dumbfounded to find that I liked him as a person. He has a highly original sense of humor which scarcely shows in his writing – rather, which is far more prominent in his persona than in his written output. And my ideas about his pontifications faded into surprised mist when I listened to his rapid-fire whimsical natter, noted the faint suggestion of a stammer, and saw how undogmatic he actually is.

The customary vignette: Jack Speer is a little guy, slender and vivacious, with sandy hair and very fair complexion, and gives the impression of a small dynamo with the governor removed animating a widget consisting largely of piano wires and steel springs. I've met very few people who have the apparent energy, both physical and mental, possessed by Speer. Conversing with him is not unlike fencing without corks, but it's fun. The chief characteristic of his personality is a whimsical puckishness; he might, with justification, almost be referred, to as a puckhead. A staunch ally or a bitter enemy, he steers a pretty consistent course through both life and fandom, and can be expected to be one of the few really prominent fans who will make his mark in the macrocosmos.

His arrival coincided quite closely with that of the Slan Shackers, within 24 hours in fact. Al Ashley, who, I understand, was once expelled from the Los Angeles Science Fantasy Society for failing to pay his dues, had in his pre-Los Angeles incarnation set himself up as the chief factotum of a cross between a boarding house and a bedlam, filling a large house in Battle Creek Michigan with a number of other fans as permanent residents, and an even larger number of transients. Called Slan Shack, this venture probably was to bolster Ashley's atavistic ego with an illusion that he was the Old Man of some cave-dwelling tribe of prehistorics; the group had also, through heavy activity, made a most enviable mark in the fan world.

Ashley and his menage had spoken for a couple of years of moving out to Los Angeles, had induced Bob Tucker, at heavy expense to himself, to

give then an annual farewell party for some years, and had even gone so far as to set at least a dozen Definite Dates of Arrival. We in Los Angeles of course disregarded the date in September 1945 which was supposed to herald the arrival of these people, holding it to be just another aberration. Imagine our surprise when a carload of Michiganders actually pulled into town! It was loaded down with Al and Abby Lu Ashley, Abby's daughter Toople, Jack Wiedenbeck, Walt Liebscher, and Black Flame (a young cocker bitch).

Al Ashley is a person that cannot be described in a printable vignette if one is to get the true savor of the man who keeps Brazil prosperous. Physically he is minuscule – about 5' 3", but is well-muscled and husky – a balding brunette who intends to live to be 150 years old, and who probably will, since nothing any of us have ever seen him do is likely to burn up any great amount of energy. He is a nice, unscrupulous, tough-minded individual that I immediately liked enormously; he has managed to live a normal life; and he is the best bull-shooter in Los Angeles. It has been said of him that he has an IQ of 194 – simple justice makes me point out that he has never made this claim for himself. On the other hand, he has never denied it, and he certainly looks smug when someone mentions those three fascinating figures in his presence. Al is a man who found many possibilities in fandom, explored most of them to his heart's content, and is now drifting out of the field. It took but a very few weeks of the LASFS to lose for Al his illusions of fandom and make him just another trouble maker like myself. He is a master at intrigue, a gossip from way back, and can be depended on to know just who is queer and how and when. Widely read, and with an exploring trend of mind, he can usually be depended on for a stimulating evening of conversation.

His wife, Abby Lu, is an attractive red head who has little if any interest in fandom, but who is not unamused by some of the weirder antics indulged in by the Slans.

Jack Weidenbeck is one of the nicest guys I've ever known. Generous, kindhearted, stimulating, he has been an intimate buddy of Ashley's for many years. He's had no use for fandom for years, but still occasionally does a bit of artwork for someone. A draftsman by profession, he has done commercial sculpture, and is at present writing a novel. Jack is quiet and retiring, has never mixed much with the LASFS (for which he can scarcely be blamed), but is a most stimulating person to be around and is definitely one of the few people around the Bixelstrasse whose acquaintance is worth cultivating.

Walt Liebscher is a one-time fan big-shot, noted equally for Tuckeresque and Tuckerisque humor and for serious bibliographical doings – both in the fields of collecting and publishing. He still collects and reads book fantasy, I understand, but has otherwise dropped all fan activity; having discovered far greener pastures, which of course is not difficult to do. His rather marked inferiority complex is the least justified one I’ve ever seen, and it is to be hoped he will outgrow it. Walt is good-looking, bubbling over with wit; the life-of-the-party type, he can really go places if he just gets over the idea he doesn’t have what it takes. He has it to burn. This boy could very easily make himself a pot of money as an entertainer – contrary to some opinions he is not a very good musician, but he has facile fingers on the piano, his playing may tend towards frothiness but it is definitely the kind of 88 the general public likes, he has no singing voice but he knows how to put over a comic song, he has inventiveness and originality, and he has that touch that sells a crowd. As a bar-room entertainer he is just the sort of guy that could make a pile of money as a featured act at the Florentine Gardens or some such place, and I doubt if he’d have to play in cheap joints like the Hangover Club very long before he made the big time. Why he wastes his talent on his friends, Lord knows.

Anyway, the simultaneous arrival of all these people coinciding with the weekend on which I met Speer for the first time brought me out of it with a snap. Very shortly I was going bookhunting with the Slan Shackers, making political plans with Speer and Ashley, reviving my interest in FAPA, and going to work on *The Acolyte* with the first real enthusiasm I had given that magazine since early 1944. Here, for a change, were people. I don’t mean to say that Speer or the Slan Shackers are faultless, or that they are necessarily the best integrated people in the world – certainly all of them have their faults and failings and minor maladjustments. But these are people, honest-to-god normal people, and to find that there actually were some fans besides Baldwin and Rimel and one or two others who were not neurotic impossibles was wonderful. Here, at long last, were the kind of people I had once in my naive enthusiasm thought all fans to be.

The chief club activity of the late summer and fall of 1945 was the Pacificon. And it was nothing but a peck of trouble. At the first committee meeting, a good deal was decided – the date was tentatively set for the week of July 4, 1946, and it was decided to invite A.E. van Vogt to be the guest-of-honor. Daugherty outlined many of his plans for 1942, indicating what of the

previous work he thought could be salvaged, discussed publicity, and announced to his committee that he would have a *Pacificon News* in the mail within two weeks. He asked that no leak of plans be made, since he wanted to have first scoop in *Pacificon News* – but I was sending news to Speer in a day or so, was naturally rather enthusiastic about the convention, and so told Speer all about the meeting. It just didn't occur to me to tell him not to print it – in the first place I knew that all he would do would be to give it a bare, interest-whetting outline, secondly I felt that the *Pacificon* could not be given enough publicity anyway, and third, though I should have known Daugherty better, he was so plausible in his enthusiasm that I actually thought he would get the *Pacificon News* out right away. As it turned out, Speer's bare paragraph was the only publicity the *Pacificon* received for a good many weeks.

What a furious turmoil this innocuous paragraph in *Stefnews* created! The next club meeting after the release appeared, Daugherty, his face as grave as though his mother had died, called me away from the clubroom and told me to come to a committee meeting in Everett's apartment. Andy Anderson and I went over only to find Evans sitting there with that same death-in-the-family expression, and Ackerman just sitting there. I was handed the issue of *Stefnews* and told to read it. I could see nothing wrong, but acting instinctively to avoid a row said something to the effect that Speer must have violated a confidence, and that I'd bring the carbon of my letter the next time I came. I've regretted having said this, but at the time I figured Daugherty would have cooled off enough to listen to reason. But the fellow commenced to rave and rave – the publicity for the *Pacificon* was wrecked, forever and beyond repair, there would be no sunrise effect, there would be no news after this one release because repetition would be avoided in order to make a successful advertising campaign... and other equally stupid rantings. (Avoid of repetition in advertising is no doubt responsible for the wide public knowledge of such things as: "It Floats" "LSMFT", "Ask the Man who Owns One", etc.!) Everett, wearing his best stuffed owl expression, agreed solemnly with all this just as if it meant something.

But this one little episode completely ruined the publicity for the *Pacificon*, just as Daugherty said that it would. Walter J. Daugherty did not produce or allow to be produced an issue of *Pacificonews* for at least six months, and then just the single issue. Walter J. Daugherty refused to give *Pacificon* publicity to the #1 and #2 fanzines of 1946, *Acolyte* and *Shangri-*

*L’Affaires*. (There was a blurb in *Acolyte* but I made it up myself, largely out of whole cloth, since even I a member of the committee, knew little or nothing about the Pacificon until the month before the convention.) To my knowledge, the only publicity given the Pacificon until far too late to do the convention any good was the one issue of *Pacificonews*, one rather meaningless lithographed poster produced by Goldstone, a certain amount of haphazard and unappealing coverage in *Fanews*, and what bootlegged information could be given Jack Speer for *Stefnews*. In short, Walter J. Daugherty got his back up over nothing, and used a premature news release seen by 50 people as a pretext to send out no real Pacificon publicity. It is small wonder that only a handful of non-Californians attended this wouldbe World Convention.

I shall refrain from calling Daugherty’s actions in this matter juvenile. I doubt that any seven year old would refuse for long to play with his new electric train just because someone else played with it first.

A fellow traveler of Daugherty’s, Walter Dunkelberger of Fargo, North Dakota, shortly cooperated to make this utterly picayune issue of the premature news release into a cause celebre. Dunkelberger was at the time having himself a feud with Jack Speer, and it was not long before this matter of Pacificon news was getting a terrific play in Dunkelberger’s news magazine, *The Fanews*. Material printed by Dunkelberger at that time was controversial, and, I felt, showed me not only in an unfavorable but in an untrue light. Since Dunkelberger had been one of my earliest fan correspondents and I had always been on friendly terms with the fellow, it never occurred to me that he would not print my side of the story. But he didn’t. And as issue after issue of *Fanews* took my name in vain more and more, with no trace of anything from my side of the story, I became increasingly exasperated, ending up with a half-formed notion of loading for bear. All this helped the Pacificon a lot.

In the meantime, the LASFS seemed to be taking on signs of life, as new faces and returned veterans appeared to be on the premises. One of the first arrivals was Edythe Eide of Palo Alto, a rather handsome young lady who through her *VOM*-publicised romance with Ackerman received more notoriety and less fame than she deserved. Tigrina, as she preferred to be called, took a genuine interest in weird fiction and cinema, was a not incompetent poet, and, in a pedantic sort of long-winded way, a pretty good fan writer. She was rather short, neatly built and pretty, and with a whooping

laugh which sometimes embarrassed her a little. Everyone around the club seemed to like Tigrina, and she managed to stay around for close to two years without becoming embroiled in any fusses, apart from one memorable occasion when E. Everett Evans unadvisedly patted Tigrina's little posterior one night after the meeting, and came within a hairsbreadth of having his face slapped as T told him off in a way that I hugely loved. Right there in the clubroom, too.

Sometime during the spring or summer of 1945, Andy Anderson, who has previously been described, moved to Los Angeles in order to attend USC. He has pretty much dropped both fandom and the club, but was moderately active as one of the more desirable LASFS members for around a year.

One of the first returning veterans was Russell J. Hodgkins, an old-time member of the club who had been director back in 1937 and 1938, had pretty much dropped out for a year or so, and had then gone in the army in 1942. Russ is tall, pallid, bespectacled, and quiet – reserved enough so that I still don't know him very well even after a year and a half or more. His chief interest is in book collecting he is now rumored to be branching out into book publishing; but all in all, I doubt if fantasy or fandom take up any sizeable share of this gentleman's time.

Another was Norman Willmorth – a squat but hulking 200 pounder who had spent two years in England at the Army's expense while he rode high in British fandom and accumulated an unbelievable collection of fantasy books. (He also finally got around to performing some military service.) Gus is jovial and hail-fellow-well-met, sports a beard much of the time, is a mighty guzzler of beer and pincher of barmaids' bottoms, and is the one major publisher left in the LASFS. (Burbee doesn't count, because he has more or less turned dilettante.) Gus takes fandom much more seriously than it deserves, and has a touchy streak of idealism which crops out from time to time – on the whole, though, he is a good egg. Prospective friends of Willmorth's are warned not to go drinking beer with him unless they have ten-gallon stomachs, two tin ears, and are capable of outshouting the bull of Bashan. Gus, ordinarily quiet and tractable, gets noisy at such times. He goes to USC once in a while when he can find time between beer busts and issues of *Fantasy Advertiser*.

One non-veteran came to Los Angeles in late 1945, a former fan from San Francisco named Louis Goldstone. Lou, back in 1940 or thereabouts, published the first fanzine to sport a truly artistic and handsome format,

setting a mark at which many subsequent publishers have aimed. Long out of fandom, Lou came to LA to try garret dwelling and commercial art for a while; somehow he ended up doing a fabulous amount of work for the Pacificon, taking an active part in the LASFS, and so on. I don't know him very well, so will attempt no description, other than mentioning that he is tall, slender, and frail looking; and that he has his full share of artistic temperament. On the whole, however, he seems like a good joe. He vanished from our ken shortly after the Pacificon.

And there were others who appeared on the scene for a greater or lesser length of time during the last half of 1945, but somehow I don't at the moment recall any names. It must be remembered that although I was director and thus presided over each meeting, I was scarcely ever around the club otherwise. In the get-togethers after the meetings, I tended to go coffeewards with assorted Slan Shackers, Perdue, Burbee, Anderson, Tigrina, Ackerman, and van Vogt. It was not snobbishness, simply that I had so much fun with the individuals named that I failed to branch out as much as I should have.

And my tendency towards a sort of provincialism in the club was augmented by the gradual building up of a traditional "Saturday Night at Laney's". I was still going through the motions of being married, sticking close at home with the kids and hoping that for their sake maybe things would get better, and spending my time playing records and monkeying around with fandom. Saturday nights gradually got so that from two to ten of the bunch would come over and stay until Jackie came from work at 2:00 AM. We had some mighty good times – sometimes a jazz-minded bunch giving my records a going over, but more often some of the great minds waxing eloquent as they put the world to rights. And there also was a considerable amount of stefnistic political intrigue – particularly by Ashley, Anderson, and myself.

The Slan Shackers had been in Los Angeles for less than a month when they commenced getting fed up with the LASFS. Wiedenbeck and Liebscher practically quit the Society, after three or four meetings, and Ashley very shortly got to the point where he was actively anti-club, though he still came around regularly. Since all the Slan Shackers are outspoken when pressed a little, it was not long before the LASFS came to hear more and more of their discontent with the group. As a result, an investigating committee consisting of the three Michiganders named and perhaps one or two others was set up to

analyse the LASFS and make recommendations as to what might be done to make a worthwhile organisation out of it.

Each member and former member of the club that could be induced to hold still long enough was quite thoroughly interviewed. After a couple of months of investigation, the committee submitted a rather startling report in which they unanimously recommended that the LASFS be given back to the Indians, that there was nothing that could be done with the club, and that if it ceased to exist it would be absolutely no loss. The chief obstacle in the way of having a worthwhile organisation, it was found, is that there is absolutely no common focus held by all the members or even by a sizeable group of them. Each member, on the other hand, has very strong preferences and tastes coupled with a minimum of toleration for the tastes of the other fellow. The various interests and motivations of the various members are so diametrically different from one another, often indeed being at direct variance (as for example Ackerman who affects to be interested in NOTHING but fantasy-stf-fandom and Joquel who is totally without interest in these). This situation and analogous conflicts of interest are so widespread that it is a complete impossibility to present a meeting of ANY sort which will interest ALL the members. When this handicap is coupled with the extreme prevalence of pathological neurotic symptoms, with a good sized proportion of the members being so utterly unprepossessing and undesirable as personal associates, and with a widespread tendency towards boredom with the club coupled with lack of get-up-and-git to move to greener pastures; it is small wonder that the LASFS is so worthless.

At the time the committee was deliberating, Ashley and I worked up quite elaborate political plans for the January 1946 LASFS elections. I did not wish to serve any longer as director, Ashley at the time thought he wanted the job, and so we laid plans to elect Al to the highest gift in the power of the LASFS to bestow. He was to appoint me secretary, in which capacity I'd be the #2 man of the administration, and would also have a chance to write barbed minutes. But as he saw more and more of the club, his interest in it waned to such an extent that he was unwilling to take any active part in its affairs.

Another factor which affected both the LASFS as a whole and the connivings of the politicians was the removal of the communists from our midst. Alva Rogers, piddling along indolently with commercial art and attempts thereat, decided to go to New York City, where he felt that he'd

have a better chance of getting commissions. For some weird reason, Brown, Kepner, and Saha – the other three active communists – decided that they too must go to New York – chiefly, it seemed from trying to get from them logical reasons for the move, because Rogers was going. So all four of them laid plans to move East, selling their possessions, and quitting their jobs. Along about October, 1945, Kepner, Brown, and Saha actually went to New York – Rogers going to San Diego to visit his folks before taking off cross-country. Rogers never did get there, and the other three left just in time to have the blowup in the ranks of the Futurians happen while they were en route, so that when they arrived the strong Futurian group they had expected to join had dwindled to Wollheim et ux, and Michel. The situation amused those of us who either disliked the Futurians for one cause or another, or who were out of sympathy with communism. The departure of these four from the local scene also made a drastic upheaval in politics in the club. These four had been steady supporters of mine – not because they particularly liked me, but simply because they hated Daugherty and know that I would stand up to him and refuse to allow him to intimidate me. As Mel Brown actually told me once in so many words, I was in their minds the lesser of two evils.

But the newer club member, the guy who had been in service and had built up all sorts of unfounded illusions about fandom while he was in the army, wanted no part of any quarrelling. Anything anyone said or did was all right with him, provided it was not antagonistic. And for someone to rise up in his might over some wrong or fancied wrong – as I did when Daugherty pulled that deal on the mimeograph spring which I mentioned a few pages ago – or to attempt to prick the balloon of some one's illusions was to those people an act of antagonism.

So the club lost the one strong common focal point which had held it together for a year and a half almost – a violent dislike of Walter J. Daugherty.

For what after the passage of time seem like very insufficient reasons, I commenced to interest myself in the affairs of the NFFF. Part of it was due to a desire to push along certain radically un-Evans-ish ideas broached to me in personal letters from Harry Warner and Jack Speer. Part of it was a hangover from my old idea that as long as I allowed *Acolyte* to go to so many worthwhile people, I should do my utmost to keep at a minimum the assinity so prevalent in the fandom of which I was a part. Part of it was because I had so often stuck my neck out in criticisms of the group that I was more or less

being backed onto a spot where I had to put up or shut up. And, I fear, a big reason was that I saw a chance to have some fun working out political maneuvers. Politics, in other words, as an end in themselves.

So I let my name go on the ballot as candidate for the board of directors in the election for 1946 officers. This was the election which was virtually uncontested – there being seven candidates for the five board of directors posts, and one candidate each for the other offices. Warner had seriously entertained the idea of running for president, as my files attest, but according to a letter from Warner he was persuaded not to run by presidential candidate Dunkelberger and his Father Superior, E. Everett Evans. This gave Dunkelberger the presidency by default.

Despite the fact that Dunkelberger was running unopposed, the election gave him a priceless opportunity for ego-boo, and he didn't miss – not only putting out a special issue of *Fanews* with his picture as candidate but even going so far as to distribute printed postal cards, again with his picture, just before the election.

And it was in the early stages of the campaign that my growing distaste for Dunkelberger grew into a violent antipathy. When I had first filed, he had endorsed me – listing me in *Fanews* as one of the five he wished elected to serve with him – but in a very short while he put out another list of recommended candidates in which he had replaced my name with that of Joe Fortier.

This piqued me, so I asked Lard Walter how come. It developed that he switched, deciding not to back me for the directorate, simply because I entertained Jack Speer as a guest in my home on the weekend the Slan Shacklers arrived in LA. Since every active fan in Los Angeles except Evans and Daugherty attended this party, and since the whole affair was strictly impromptu and they could have come if they'd wanted to (no one being invited or uninvited) it was difficult for me to see how I could have refused my hospitality to Speer even if I'd wanted to.

Keeping my temper for once, I attempted to draw Dunkelberger out a little – saying that there must be something dreadful about Speer if Dunk were to react so to my letting him come into my home and suggesting that if he could advance factual and logical reasons for his violent anti-Speer feeling it “might” lead to improved relations between Fargo and 1005 W. 35th Place. He wrote a typically incoherent letter, and I made up my mind that Lard Walter needed to be set down a peg.

By the time that the election was over I had fairly concrete plans laid for the term of office. Speer, Warner, and I – all candidates for the board of directors – had gotten together with multiplicate letters and worked out quite comprehensive plans for the year: a new constitution, service features of one sort and another, publications – much the same sort of program as was later announced by the Fantasy Foundation. After Speer turned out to be an unsuccessful candidate, we of course no longer held a voting majority of the five man board, but as it turned out it would have made no difference anyway, since Dunkelberger proved himself so totally unfit for office as to waste the entire first half of the year with personalities, impossible appointments, and the mere routine of keeping the organization functioning meaninglessly.

I inaugurated a scheme of sending my letters in response to NFFF presidential messages to all members of the board of directors, using onion-skin and carbons for the purpose, and received enthusiastic cooperation in this from Warner and Hevelin. Tarr was spasmodic. This scheme proved eminently workable; it came the nearest to an actual in-the-flesh meeting as anything that could be devised, and the opportunity it gave us for discussion made it possible to work out ideas somewhat before springing them half-cocked.

With growing disgust, I waited nearly six weeks for president Dunkelberger to present a program for the year. Finally, in mid-February, I presented one myself, but little ever came of it, due chiefly to the fact that by the time anyone could have done anything about any of it the administration was plunged in the internecine wrangling which culminated in the wild talk of treason from Dunk, and in the wasting of an entire year. So far as I know, Dunkelberger never did present a program for the year. But nevertheless, his administration was a success, since he got to send his picture around to all fandom a couple of times, and got other ego boo of one sort and another.

My willingness to continue *The Acolyte* had dropped to nothing by early 1946. I still enjoyed seeing the magazine come out; wonderful material kept rolling in unabated; and the magazine was showing a slight profit on each issue, not enough to do me any good financially but enough to pay for both *Acolyte* and *Fan-Dango*. But I was absolutely black in the face from the seemingly endless ordeal of typing and mimeographing and assembling and mailing; the mechanical details had not only grown so burdensome as to destroy my interest in the magazine but were by association, I suppose,

killing my liking for fantasy and science-fiction. Co-editor Russell helped with the assembling and mailing (without him the magazine would have folded a year and a half before it did) but even so it would seem that I'd just get off the chain gang from one issue and I'd have to start another one. It had ceased being a hobby and had become an incubus.

So I tried to ring in some help. Several of the Saturday night sessions were devoted to mulling over a scheme aimed at putting each department under the complete control of an assistant editor, who would be responsible both for selection of material and for any needed mechanical details, leaving Russell and myself to function in the true sense as editors, arranging for material, helping with revisions when needed, and in general acting as co-ordinators. We got some most interesting figures on photolithography, and saw that ten co-editors, each of whom contributed \$5.00 per issue, would be able to finance an *Acolyte* to end all *Acolytes*. An edition of at least 500, circulation in various book stores (through McComas and his connections), and eventually (maybe) the dream of all fan-editors since the beginning of fan-editing – a real, died-in-the-wool semi-pro, aimed at fans and collectors.

Some of the co-editors who accepted: Russell and I were of course to continue – Russell as editor-in-chief and Laney as managing editor; Tigrina, poetry editor; Andy Anderson, make-up editor; Al Ashley, art editor; Forrest J Ackerman, film editor; Bob Hoffman, editor without portfolio.

Plans for the new magazine were well under way when the editorial for the last *Acolyte* was written.

But then, quite in the manner of a sudden stroke of lightning, we were bitten by the Foundation bug, and promptly decided to turn *The Acolyte* over to the new organisation.

The Fantasy Foundation has had a most peculiar career. When Ackerman went away to war in the fall of 1942, it seemed like the end of the world to him, and he wrote a long letter to fandom in *Fantasy Fiction Field*, in which he told of willing his collection to fandom and setting up a \$1000 insurance policy to help fandom maintain it. Though the idea as Ackerman broached it was impractical and rather lacking in utility, there was the germ of an idea there, one which worked on me all through my fan career. In some of the maneuverings around the LASFS, I offered to help Ackerman implement the Foundation right here and now (instead of waiting for his death as the original proposal had envisioned) in exchange for his voting support. The support was forthcoming, so as a starter on my part of the

bargain, I jotted down a proposed program for the Foundation in mid-1945, gave it to Ackerman, and heard nothing more of it.

One Saturday in early April 1945, Andy Anderson, Elmer Perdue, Al Ashley, Sam Russell, and one or two others were at my house. We had gotten sick of discussing the NFFF and the futility to which its curvaceous president insisted on committing it, and, half-seriously half as a joke, I dragged out the carbon of my rough draft of the Foundation, remarking that “Here is the blueprint for a real fan organization.”

And the gang went overboard for it.

Ackerman and I had diametrically opposite notions as to what the Foundation should be. He wants it to be a museum, kept directly under fan control and financing. This means a Foundation such as we now have – a secondary Ackerman collection housed in a small frame garage opening into a Hollywood alley, poorly arranged and almost impossible for anyone to derive good from. I wanted a dynamic organization which would attempt to be of such service to any student or lover of fantasy and stf that it would grow into a necessity.

I’ll copy from my files the original program for the Fantasy Foundation, as it stood after the gang had worked it out and revised it:

IMMEDIATE. Publish checklist of fantasy and stf-zines in time to distribute it at the Pacificon.

IMMEDIATE. Institute circulating library in time to make an announcement at the Pacificon of the first volumes. (One of my most important facets of the Foundation was to be bound volumes of magazines and excerpts and copies of the scarcer books, not to be mildewing in a shed somewhere but in active use as part of a mail-order circulating library. The three or four pages of details which were actually worked out to implement this scheme are too unwieldy to publish here.)

IMMEDIATE to SEMI-IMMEDIATE. Send publicity material to every person who is at all likely to subscribe to the group, or to donate material either now or later. This sending should include a mimeographed blank of a will which would leave all suitable material to the Foundation. This form should be drawn up by a lawyer in such way as to be enforceable at law.

IMMEDIATE TO SEMI-IMMEDIATE. Set up a system of double-entry books of account, and a system of permanent

inventory. Arrange for insurance covering fire and theft of all foundation material not in the possession of a public institution. (This refers to a plan of attempting to induce some Los Angeles library, either the Public Library or the one at one of the Universities, to take the main part of our Foundation collection as a permanent special exhibit. This would not only furnish some excellent publicity, but would save our having to provide our own fire-proof quarters.)

IMMEDIATE TO SEMI-IMMEDIATE. Set up an ambitious publishing program of major items, and commence work on them.

SEMI-IMMEDIATE. Catalog and inventory anything belonging to the Foundation, and set up the first and main collection.

SEMI-IMMEDIATE. Commence the actual writing and compilation of items to be published so as to assure ourselves of a steady flow of publications. This is to include a general investigation of the field of fantasy bibliography in order to ascertain what assistance, financial and otherwise, we may be able to give bibliographical work.

SEMI-IMMEDIATE. Attempt to mobilise national fanpower, so as to put it to work on our various projects.

LONG-RANGE. Out of Foundation duplicates attempt to set up duplicate collections in other major cities of the United States.

LONG-RANGE. Work out a permanent program for the expenditure of Foundation funds. Much of this money will be used for freight on stuff shipped to us for the Foundation. Much of it should be used binding fanzines and prozines. Some might be used to purchase rare items for the main collection. Some of it will be required for operational expenses, publication of reports of business and the like. A definite percentage of our income must be set aside for future projects.

LONG-RANGE. Investigate the possibilities of the Foundation going into business as a fantasy dealer, selling surplus duplicates to private collectors in order to add further to the Foundation funds.

End of quote.

In other words, the Foundation was designed by the original group at my

house as a business proposition, relatively free from personal idiosyncrasies, and aimed much less at fandom than at scholars, students of literature generally, and serious fantasy collectors.

The actualities that have grown out of this concept are little more than laughable.

Right off the bat, we got into a terrific local row when Walter J. Daugherty heard about it. He had not been consulted, not because some of us don't like him, but simply because he wasn't around. Everett Evans and Gus Willmorth also felt deeply hurt that they had not been personally asked to take part in the deliberations. (Since it was well-known that my Saturday night sessions were open to anyone, and since the idea just grew up spontaneously, I don't see their angle except in terms of a craving for ego-boo.)

Anyway, with Daugherty spearheading them, the malcontents raised so much hell with the anxious-to-please-everybody Ackerman that he held a meeting to discuss the matter with all localites who wished to attend. It started very tensely, particularly as I counted noses and saw that Daugherty had a clear voting majority in the event he wanted to force the thing to a vote. As a starter, Ackerman read the material I have just quoted. When he finished reading, Daugherty stunned us all by getting up and stalking out of the room without saying a word, followed by his wife. It was amazing the way everyone that was left turned pro-Foundation instantly, and Daugherty sealed his doom by calling up a few minutes later, apparently expecting Ackerman to invite him back, (He didn't.) Daugherty's walking out on his own majority killed the overt local opposition to the Foundation.

But I, in an unguarded moment, made a reference to the Foundation in a multiplicate letter to the NFFF board; Dunk leaped to the conclusion that the NFFF was being betrayed, and declared his state of emergency over this and other matters. This finished the NFFF so far as I was concerned, showing the group up for a bunch of childish nitwits.

But a combination of circumstances in April and May 1946 knocked me out of fandom.



Jack Speer. Photo from the Mike Rosenblum collection.

# Chapter XI

## Death of a Fan

Two things knocked me out of fandom, a change in my job status and my final realisation that there was no chance of salvaging my marriage to Jackie.

The change in job came in early April 1946. I was still working in the same shop I had entered when arriving in Los Angeles in the fall of 1943. I had of course had a number of raises, but I was still just a machine operator, running an engine lathe for the most part. A sudden outbreak of unrest – demands for higher wages plus talk of a strike – came to a head when my immediate supervisor, who had been chosen to act as spokesman for the shop employees, lost his temper and quit his job. And I was it; the foreman came to me and asked me to take over the department temporarily, that if I made good I could have the job permanently.

Actually this put me on quite a spot. The department consists of nine punch presses and five lathes plus miscellaneous supporting equipment. But the way that shop is set up, at least one member of the department has to be able to do anything in the shop, since we carry department jobs all the way from start to finish ourselves. (For example, a circular drilled part, classified as a lathe department job because it has to be turned, will also require sawing and drilling – but this will not be done by the saw or drill press departments but by us.) And here I was, with gobs of punch press experience, but a veritable neophyte on the lathe, and no actual production experience to speak of on anything else except saws. To top it off, the department consisted largely of green help, and I found myself on the spot of teaching work which I did not know how to do. (Needless to say, I learned!)

Since we were doing very heavy business anyway, it may well be imagined that I had my hands full. Not only did I have to work beyond anything I had ever imagined during the days, but we were so short-handed that I quickly commenced working from 8 to 12 hours overtime per week after supper. (Anyone who has not tried to keep punch presses set up for four operators while trying to break in one lathe man and still trying to do production work himself is advised to try it as an antidote for inertia.) Well, I was tired out for a couple of months – dog-tired. I had just finished

stencilling the last *Acolyte* before this change of jobs hit me, and somehow I managed to get the magazine mimeographed and mailed out. And I kept trying, all through the latter part of April and the first part of May, to answer some of my fannish mail; but I was simply too tired to write coherently, throwing away at least twenty letters as being too Dunkish to send out.

Finally I said "To hell with it."

By the time I had gotten acclimated to the new job, and had some spare-time oomph once more, I had collided with a most painful fact: that my chief interest in fandom was ego-boo, a compensation for the fact that I had never been especially successful in any other way. Particularly in light of some of the things I had said about ego-boo seekers, this was a tough morsel to digest. But somehow this lead-man's job, with its almost negligible authority and its slight amount of executive work, gave me the self-confidence I'd always lacked. Fandom seemed a good enough stop-gap until I got onto a job I really liked; now the job was more interesting and rewarding than fandom.

Then came the blow-off on the marriage. Sometime in the latter part of May, a slight incident took place which was the straw that broke the camel's back, which showed me that there was no use trying to patch up the marriage, kids or no kids. So for several months I tried a marriage-in-name-only, with the idea of providing some sort of home for Sandy and Quiggie while their parents went separate ways though living under the same roof. (This didn't work either, a final separation in October leading to a divorce in February 1947.)

My marital affairs of course do not belong in these memoirs, but it is obvious that with the motivation which kept me leading the life of a fannish recluse shattered for good, I very quickly got out of fandom.

Quit fandom. Sounds easy, doesn't it? But I was shortly to learn that it was a tough job. In the first place, the four years of plugging away on *The Acolyte* had built it up into a rather worthwhile going concern, and I hated to throw all that hard work away and let it bubble away into nothing. For this reason, I tried the various schemes of joint editorship that I mentioned in the last chapter. They were abandoned for one reason and one alone; I found that despite all fans might say about the desirability of keeping *The Acolyte* going, none of them were willing to do enough work collectively or individually to amount to a hill of beans. If *Acolyte* were to continue, I, and I alone, would have to do the hours and hours of hard routine drudgery that each issue required. And this I refused to do. If the local fans cared enough for the

magazine and for the fantasy field it tried to portray to get in and do the bulk of the typing and other mechanical work (or pay for its being done) I was quite willing to devote a lot of time to keeping up the contacts which were bringing in so much fine material, and to writing serious material for it myself. But if these people cared so little for it as they obviously did (that idea of a jointly prepared magazine professionally published still enthuses me somewhat, even after a year of non-fandom) I was through, completely and irrevocably through.

At the time The Foundation's plans for *Acolyte* gradually waned away into nothingness, an implemented guarantee of 60 hours per month work would have saved the magazine. Since the LASFS at that time had over 20 active members, this simply means that if each member had been willing to devote one evening a month to *Acolyte*, the fantasy field would boast today a 48 to 60 page lithographed magazine combining the better features of *Acolyte* and *Fantasy Commentator*. And, regardless of other commitments and interests, one Francis T. Laney would have been doing his full share and more. But when those people, who profess to be interested in fantasy and/or scientifiction, care so little for the field as the LASFS has shown itself to care – caput!

There were around \$90.00 in outstanding subscriptions to *Acolyte*, owed in dribbets of 12½¢ and 25¢ and 37½¢ to nearly 200 people. Until divorce stripped me of assets, I was well able to pay this off. But it seemed like too much of a job to prepare individual refunds, so I went to work trying to get rid of the magazine as a whole. And do you know, I was unable to find a competent fan publisher who was willing to take over *Acolyte*'s fine backlog of material together with an itemised subscription list and *cash* to cover every cent of it? Not one! Here was the #1 fanzine, plus material for 2½ to 3 more issues, plus all the contacts, plus 200 readers, plus around \$90.00 in cash money – and it went begging! Liebscher, Willmorth, and Walter Gillings of England are among the ones who turned it down.

The lack of interest displayed by active publishers was the last straw. I let Helen Wesson have the backlog, when she stopped through Los Angeles on her way to Tokyo, but as for the money... phooey. As I cast back over those months and months and months of work that resulted in *The Acolyte*, I feel I've earned it many times over. If some late subscriber raises enough hell, or hits me up for it personally, I'll give him back his 12½¢. Otherwise, once again, caput!

This defalcation is not without precedent in fandom; in fact, most quitting fan editors just hold onto the money without a qualm. Like Phil Bronson or Al Ashley.

The second thing, an active fan accumulates more obligations than he is aware of. I found myself with certain commitments, many of which I fluffed off, but most of which I fulfilled after a fashion. After my demise was clear in my own mind, I stencilled the Foundation's check list of stf/fantasy prozines, stencilled and mimeographed a FAPazine for Mike Fern, wrote several letters to the NFFF board of directors, and made contributions to several fanzines. One thing I definitely did fluff off was my correspondence, and finally feeling myself free of this constant typing of letters, letters letters, was the most wonderful sensation I ever had in fandom. (These memoirs have been written in about one-quarter the typing time I would have spent keeping up my correspondence during the period they've been written in.)

And worst of all, I had contracted such a habit of going to the LASFS every Thursday that it was almost like a compulsion. It took six months to break it, but I did. I now go to the LASFS about once every two or three months, and then merely to pick up some money from Ackerman, who has been doing a whale of a job in peddling my collection for me.

Once the scales had completely fallen from my eyes, I saw the club, as a collective entity, with a revulsion amounting to loathing. Faggots, pansies, dykes, queers of every sort and description; bums, loafers, dead-beats, moochers and parasites on society; pathologically neurotic incompetents imagining themselves as fine minds and cultured individuals; pretentiousness, hypocrisy, dishonesty with each other and with themselves running rampant.

I had wanted to see the club at its best and I had. There were and are a modicum of decent, normal, worthwhile people who pass through the portals of the sacred styne from time to time; and I seized on them as samples of the whole, ignoring the questionable aspects of the questionables, unless I practically had my nose rubbed in it. There are people I met around the LASFS that I hope to number among my lifelong friends, but there are damned few of them.

I have at the present time (June 27, 1947) no interest in either fantasy or fandom, with the exception that I do like a very limited bit of science-fiction and intend to keep it in my permanent books. Old fanzines no longer attract me very much, though I still like them enough so that I intend to keep the files of the better ones. I am still interested in FAPA, and will continue to

belong on a semi-active basis as long as there are men like Jack Speer, Milty Rothman, Harry Warner, Norm Stanley, and one or two others represented regularly in the mailings. I still feel the need for a bit of occasional written self-expression, I guess.

Why don't *you* quit fandom? If you face the truth about fans and their microcosm, face it fairly and squarely as I have done or tried to do, it looks to me like the only alternative.

---ooOoo---

Until I get nauseated beyond control, which may occur anywhere during the next eight or ten pages, I'm going to give you a punch line to end all punch lines – fandom as it is. These, gentle reader, are actual happenings in the LASFS, happenings to which I was either an eye-witness or was told about by one of the participants. For the sake of libel, I name no names, give no dates. But these are not obscure people who dropped into the club once or twice and then vanished. These are name fans. The prime actor in every one of these cases was at the time of the happening in question one or more of the following: an officer in the LASFS, a fanzine editor, a member of FAPA, an officer in the NFFF, or a member of some other local club of repute (MFS, Strangers, PSFS) who had transferred to the LASFS. The dates are between 1943 and 1947.

First I might name the homosexual wolf, the boy who caused at least three sissyfied but unhomosexual LASFS members to toss their hats over the windmill and become out-and-out overt homosexuals. What a harem he built up among our boys!

Of a less sexual nature was a character who came to LA having run out on his minor offspring and owing so many bills that he dared not post his address at the club for fear he might be caught up with.

An interesting character to have been caught with during a police raid was the gentleman who had such a gigantic collection of nude female photographs. These pictures are of course classifiable as art, but how shall we classify the fact that he also had an enlargement of a certain portion of each picture – about an 8x10 of this particular woman's genitals?

At least two individuals I personally know of – minors who were supposed to be attending high school – habitually used the club as a hideout during protracted spells of truancy lasting as long as two months at a stretch.

And there is one interesting lad who, practically in the same breath, described the intricate and ingenious mechanical contrivance he has built to

aid him in his masturbation, and then went on to explain quite seriously that he is a superman mutant. (Poor superman, unable to bend the females (or maybe males!) of this inferior race to his desires!) (NB. This was NOT Degler!)

Another boy may have been perfectly normal in all ways, I'll let you be the judge. In a moment of lowered reticence he confided in a roomful of people that his bitterest regret in life is that he is physiologically incapable of being a lesbian, (I don't believe Krafft-Ebing mentions that one!)

A very nice boy indeed is the one who spent a half hour or so in a Bixel Street living room, letting the assembled company hear his soliloquy on whether or not to marry the girl. It seems that if he married her he couldn't be queer any more, but that was an awful lot to ask – even so, he was getting a little tired of just having other men, and maybe he should branch out. Perhaps he should have an affair with —— who is such a revolting old man that it might give him the needed boost into heterosexuality; on the other hand, —— has been at it so long that he's probably so good that he'd make queerdom more attractive than ever – and so on, ad nauseam. (Just nice conventional small-talk!)

Or how about the boy who got drunk and showed up under a lady's bed, stark naked and passed out like a light one New Year's eve. (He did not have a date with the lady, just wanted to.)

And of course there was the manly and versatile fellow who within a few hours tried to make both a woman and her half-grown son. The objects of his affections were non-fans, but he's in the top ten.



Abby Lu and Al Ashley. Photo from the Mike Rosenblum collection.

# Epilogue

## July 23, 1948.

One page of anecdota horrida was all I got around to when I stopped writing these memoirs over a year ago. I was going to fill it on out for a few more pages, but, I dunno, I can't quite get in the mood. I'm not enough of a fan any more to treat of some of these more typical stefnistic acts without unsettling my stomach a little.

One of the incidents indeed is of such nature that no one has been able to tell me how to word it so it would go through the mail. Imagine the most revolting thing, I might say the most far-fetched revolting thing you can imagine one queer doing to another, and *maybe* you will have guessed something almost as bad as what one of our former directors admitted he had allowed one of the "boys" to do to him. Words fail me!

And of course there was a 100% homosexual group of fans and ex-fans holding forth in a Southern California city. I'd like to tell you about them and what one of them did to a LASFS member, but I won't.

I could tell you how one fan took charge of another's record collection while the owner was in the army; of how he sold me a number of the records; and of how angry the original owner was when he came through here and found them in my collection. Well, after all, I got them in good faith.

Or on the subject of honesty, you might ask Ackerman how many sets of *Fantasy Magazine* and *VOM* he has given to the LASFS. You might ask him what happened to the club copy of *Beyond the Wall of Sleep*. You might ask him where the club *Weird Tales* went. You might get him to tell of the stfzines with club stickers in them which show up from time to time in second hand magazine stores, of the books that are forever vanishing from around the place. I don't know if he's started covering this up, now that the LASFS is under public attack, but I do know that this used to be Forry's favorite gripe back in the days when I was active as director – the way stuff seemed to melt out of the club library. You may call this a charming foible; I call it sneak-thieving.

Oh there is one tale I must tell. It seems that there was a LASFS member who believed fans should be above sex, that sex was not worthy of fandom.

His girl friend didn't feel this way about it, so he told her she could lay anyone she wanted to, "as long as the fellow is a sincere fan".

---ooOoo---

On that inspiring note I shall leave you. I hope you've enjoyed this little opus of mine, and that you set it down with a resolve to make it a false picture insofar as your own participation in the field is concerned. If we ran the misfits out of fandom, we might end up with a hobby we could claim proudly as our own.

Also I hear that Ackerman thinks my recollection is faulty or something like that. I hereby challenge him to write his own memoirs. The same challenge goes to Daugherty, Hodgkins, Willmorth, or any other LASFSian who thinks I've done the club wrong. Personally, I think I've painted too alluring a picture – one that will draw the LASFS more good will than it deserve-s. (Snearyistic word split used by permission of the originator!)

*Francis T. Laney*



Left to right: Francis T. Laney, Mike Fern, Phil Bronson, unidentified, Sam D. Russell, Jack Rhodes. Photo from the LASFS Album (1943), scanned for Fanac.org.

# **FTL and *ASI***

## **A Critique of the Man and the Book by Alva Rogers**

Gentlemen:

As the chief targets of Laney's spleen in *Ah! Sweet Idiocy!*, you've probably suffered more damage, and certainly more pangs, than anybody else in consequence of the fact that F.T.L.'s work has stood so long as the uncontradicted, and thus by default official, history of Los Angeles fandom in the mid-forties.

So it's only fair, I think, that you should benefit a little now that a West Coaster has finally had the gumption to try and set the records straight. This, then, is dedicated to you:

**FORREST J ACKERMAN**

**WALTER J DAUGHERTY**



Walter J. Daugherty. Photo from the  
Mike Rosenblum collection.

# Preface

## I.

I don't know if this is exactly what Dick Eney wanted or expected from me, but this is the way it came out. It really was a difficult thing to do, believe me. Few fans today have any idea just how close friends Fran and I were there for a couple of years or so. Reading *ASI* several times and then writing this was a painful experience, believe me. I know that many fans will undoubtedly take issue with my assessment of *ASI* and of Laney, and wonder how I can say what I do and still claim to have been his friend. Well, Laney wrote *ASI* two years after our relationship ended and I wasn't even aware of its existence until about 1959; so when I did read it – read what he had to say about events with which I was thoroughly familiar and what he had to say about certain people who also were my good friends – it was a little unsettling. I still remember Fran as a good and wonderful friend, but I think he was way off base with *ASI*. As to whatever I say about Fran personally, one can still love a person and be fully aware of his faults and weaknesses.

*Alva Rogers*

## II.

Fifteen years ago Fran Laney published *Ah! Sweet Idiocy!*, his bitter memoirs of half a decade in fandom. Both for the savage, circumstantial eloquence of its indictment of our microcosm and the immediate response of agreement it brought, it then deserved and still merits the praise it's been tagged with: the most important single fan publication ever written.

Considering that it appraised fandom as a fool's paradise for escapists, defectives, & maladjusted nitwits, it was rather surprising that the Laney Memoirs should be embraced as a gospel by so large a fraction of fanzine fandom. The glories – for glorious they were a while – of the Insurgent Movement, and the opposition to any seriousness in fandom which is still vigorously flourishing, are traceable in large part to Laney; and Laney's influence rests in large part on *Ah! Sweet Idiocy!* In addition, the tradition of plain speaking on previously tabu subjects *ASI* brought into fashion made it

possible to awaken some younger fans to a sharp realization of their conduct and drive a few unsavory characters back into the woodwork.

But even when accepted as *a* gospel, the Memoirs need not be Gospel. This distinction is important because, in addition to their general doctrine (which probably had healthy effects, all in all) the Memoirs have a specific content of attacks on the LASFS as the citadel of all Unclean Influences in fandom. Alva comments on the way in which “Just Like A Daugherty Project” has gained proverbial force; almost as much could be said for any of the personal attacks with which *Ah! Sweet Idiocy!* is filled – the memories that exist are memories as given by Laney. The LASFS in general retains an even more damning reputation. I need only cite the LassGrass episode in Terry Carr’s “The BNF of Iz” – written ten years after Laney – and the response of a Prominent New York Fan to a warning that the Discon would not tolerate the presence of a homosexual wolf: “I had never known that the streak of Laneyism was this strong in fandom!” – to point up that Laney’s Memoirs established the association of the LASFS directly, or of the Memoirs and thus the LASFS indirectly, with one of the more repulsive perversions, and that to a degree that still amounts almost to reflex conditioning. Despite the existence of earlier and later references, the Memoirs were almost entirely responsible for this, thanks to their minutely detailed accounts of the LASFS’ adventures with such fauna.

With regard to all these *specific* indictments, naturally, the question rises whether, in addition to being detailed and circumstantial and like that, *Ah! Sweet Idiocy!* has also the felicity to be true.

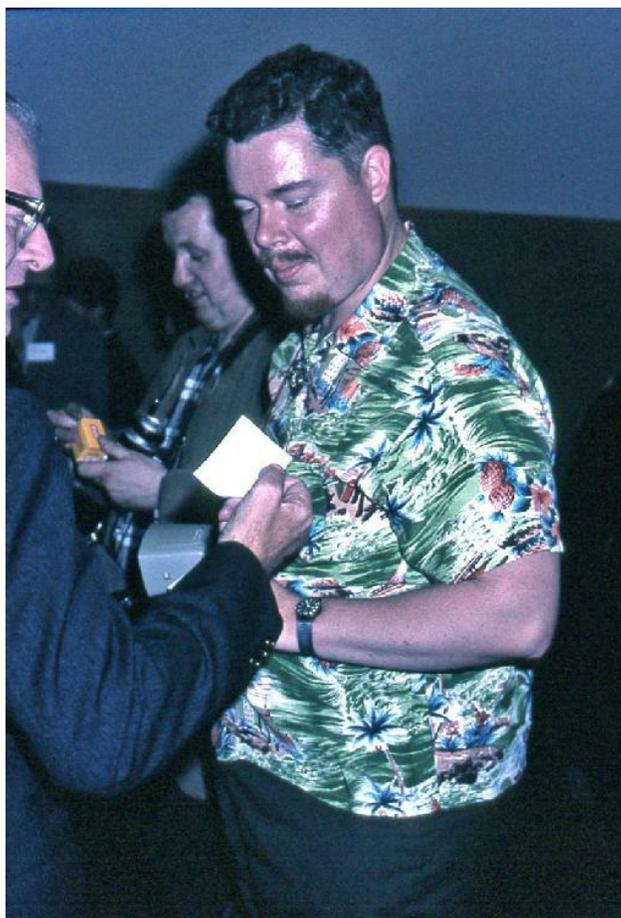
That it has long been accepted as perfect truth is in large part the responsibility of Los Angeles fandom. When repeated inquiry by dozens of different fans, for purposes ranging from friendly curiosity to the collection of data for historical publications, produced no accounts disputing Laney’s – and mighty few unsupported denials – it was not unfair for fandom as a whole to conclude that Laney’s account was in fact beyond dispute. I’m quite unable to guess what aberration led the different members of LASFS – who are neither stupid nor wanting in pugnacity – to unanimously display so fantastic an attitude as their silence implies. The idea of a club-wide Conspiracy of Silence is beyond belief, unless we assume that the quod deus vult perdere principle was getting in its licks; yet how could so many individuals just chance to react in such a peculiar way?

Whatever the explanation may be, it wasn’t until the fourth inquiry I

made for facts, or even memories, to reinforce the LASFS' members' bare claims that Laney made many errors that I finally contacted Alva Rogers – the only person mentioned with any prominence in *Ah! Sweet Idiocy!* who seemed to be still active in fandom, barring Burbee himself. And that did the trick; Alva, ghod be praised, had something to say and was willing to put it down.

The result is presented herewith. This publication will be kept permanently in print, for the benefit of latecomers to fandom; that's the least I can do in view of the fact that I've also redistributed *Ah! Sweet Idiocy!* as a part of my anthology, *A Sense of FAPA*, and used Laney's Memoirs as a source for the historical data in *Fancyyclopedia II*. Guilt feelings afflict me not at all; a major collection from FAPA could never justify the omission of the Laney Memoirs, and – as I said – an historian may fairly conclude that an undisputed account is substantially valid. It's just a manifestation of my own drive for self-justification: I want to make sure those objectors Alva mentions know I wasn't faking it when I offered space and full credence for the victim's-eye view of *Ah! Sweet Idiocy!*

*Dick Eney*



Dick Eney in 1965. Photo by Peter Mabey.

## Prologue 2

# Historical Note On the LASFS: Classical Version

*Ah! Sweet Idiocy!* is rightly considered one of the great contributions to the literature of fandom. But its fame should rest on its merits as a polemical document, not as a history.

Since its publication and distribution through FAPA in 1948 *Ah! Sweet Idiocy!* has come to be regarded as the definitive account of certain tumultuous events that occurred in Los Angeles fandom from late 1943 to about the middle of 1946; a true and accurate analysis of the characters who were in and around the Los Angeles Science Fantasy Society (LASFS) during those years; and an effective demolisher of the myth that Los Angeles was Shangri-La. All this is true, to some extent; but to one who knew Francis T. Laney, in those years, as well as or better than most, who knew well most of the *dramatis personae* of his little drama, and who was in fact a sometime participant and always an interested observer of the dramatic events that took place, it is not entirely true.

*Ah! Sweet Idiocy!* was written in 1947 – when the events it encompassed, and the bitterness, disgust, and disillusionment those events engendered, were still fresh in Laney’s mind. Much of it was composed directly on stencil, thus precluding any temporizing revision that transferring from first draft to stencil might have allowed. I say “might have” because I seriously doubt that it would have made any difference to Fran. Regardless, what is written is written, and it is with the published work that we are concerned.

*ASI* is an intensely personal document written by a man with a strong puritanical streak in his makeup, who involved himself to the point of mental and emotional exhaustion in fan activities, at which point he felt compelled to unload his disgust for all things fannish as a warning to others not to follow the yellow brick road to the land where Fandom is a Way of Life. The republication and wide distribution of the memoirs has been disapproved of in some quarters\*; some feeling that it merely exacerbates old wounds or stirs the ashes of long dead fires, others feeling that it might tend to tarnish the

god-like image of Laney that has been firmly built up in the minds of fans of a later generation by showing him to be a disputatious, self-centered character assassin.

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*\* None of which, apparently, felt enough disapproval to voice it to the re-printer. Ironically, the complaints I got about A Sense of FAPA concerned, not Laney's misstatements, but two incidents whose truth is not in doubt. – RE*

It was not in Laney's nature to pull punches, even if they happened (as was frequently the case) to be wild ones. Laney refused to equivocate in his opinions of others – right or wrong they were his opinions, and he believed in expressing them regardless of the consequences. As far as his image is concerned, I can't see where the re-publication of *ASI* is going to materially alter it. Laney is still a giant among fans (whether admired or hated); a prodigiously active writer in his heyday; and one of the most articulate members fandom has ever had. It's true, he was disputatious, he was self-centered, and he did indulge in character assassination (no matter what you prefer to call it, that's what it amounted to) – but does that make him entirely unique in fandom? I doubt it.

In spite of its flaws I consider *Ah! Sweet Idiocy!* to be an invaluable book. In spite of its flaws it does give a quite good picture – in general – of Los Angeles Fandom in the early forties, and provides, in lieu of anything better, a “historical” reference to an important and fascinating period of fannish history. Its republication should be welcomed by anyone having any interest at all in the fannish past.

# Chapter One

## Sketch of a Fan (I)

It has been just twenty years, as of this writing, since I first laid eyes on Francis Towner Laney. What there was about this tall, gangling, opinionated character from the hinterlands that appealed to me on first acquaintance I can't say; but appeal to me he did, and from the very beginning we became close and good friends. In appearance Laney was tall and lanky, slightly stoop-shouldered, and walked with a sort of lurching lope – if you can visualize a lurching lope, that's the way he invariably walked. He had slightly cadaverous cheeks, a sallow complexion, a generous mouth with full lips, rather nondescript brown hair combed straight back in a no-nonsense manner, wore thick glasses that kept sliding down his nose, and had a laugh that had to be heard to be believed. He was also, probably, the least phlegmatic person I have ever known. Fran was twenty-nine and I was on the eve of twenty-one when we first met, but the difference in age was no barrier to our friendship. That was always on a firm basis of liking, respect, and trust. We had our disagreements in the months that followed, but no matter how we might have disagreed on things fannish or political it never affected our friendship.

At the time, the area of disagreement between us on matters pertaining to the lasfs and fandom was much narrower than it is today. Or I should say, rather, that today I disagree more with what he wrote in his Testament, with his views and analyses of people and events, than I did at the time; Time has given me a perspective that Laney lacked.

Not everyone found Laney as likeable as I did. It was easy enough to see how he might antagonize others. He was frank, at times to the point of cruelty; recognized no sacred cows; had a wicked sense of humor that turned many people off; and liked to be a leader rather than one of the led. It is obvious to anyone reading *ASI* that Fran had a mercurial temper – at one moment hating a certain fan's guts, the next claiming a great liking for him. This tended to make a few of the LA fans a little skittish around him, wondering which it would be today.

Regardless of how much I liked Fran, or how much admiration and respect I felt then (and still feel, for that matter) for his mind and talents, and

fully recognizing the brilliant accomplishment that *Ah! Sweet Idiocy!* is, I feel that there are several points therein on which demurrer must be entered. In the past no one else seems to have been willing to do this, not even some of those most personally concerned; so (as Dick Eney puts it), “as the only known fan surviving from those remote times covered by *ASI*”, it has devolved upon me to make these demurrers. In doing so it will be necessary to make some observations on the character of Laney, in an attempt to understand more fully why he reacted to certain things the way he did, and to present a somewhat different picture of the man than that the average fan today gets of him from the myths that have built up around him. What I say should not be regarded as invidious; I’m sadly aware that Fran is not around to defend himself or to offer any rebuttals, but what I have to say about him in no way affects the memory I cherish of a beloved friend, or is anything I wouldn’t say were he alive today.

Reading *ASI* for the first time, fifteen or so years after the period it chronicles, left me with mixed reactions, a combination of excitement and disappointment. Excitement, because while reading it the intervening years were swept away and I could see all the friends and characters I had known then parading before me, marvelously brought to life by Laney’s brilliant character sketches in Chapter Five; see the old LASFS clubroom at 637½ South Bixel in all its tawdry glory, bursting at its seams with countless fans involved with some form of fanac twenty-four hours a day; see the pyrotechnics that occurred when Laney and Daugherty clashed over some issue at a club meeting; and in general recall all the sights and sounds that made up the LASFS in those days. Disappointment, because of the dominant theme of bitterness and disillusionment that pervaded the book; the emphasis placed on the Feud; and the attendant annihilation of the characters of Forrest J. Ackerman and Walter J. Daugherty, who hardly deserved the treatment they got from Laney.

Laney, almost from the beginning of his fannish career, was noted for the brilliance of his prose when attacking someone or something he didn’t like, his fine use of pungent words and phrases, the unmistakable meaning of his words, and his refusal to hedge. As Eney has correctly pointed out in his introduction to *ASI*, Laney’s mastery of “plain speech and direct reporting” was an invaluable contribution to fan writing and most of the time was a delight to read, causing howls of outrage in some quarters and appreciative laughter in others. But this style of writing requires a certain judiciousness in

handling to keep it from getting out of hand, as Laney found out a couple of times to his dismay. For instance, in his editorial for *Acolyte* #9, Winter 1945, titled “The Dog in the Manger”, Laney – undoubtedly with just cause for complaint – criticized A. Langley Searles for his method of publishing a bibliography of fantastic book titles and for his threat to sue *Acolyte*’s editors for copyright infringement if they proceeded with their plans for publishing a bibliography of their own; and reluctantly stated that he and Samuel D. Russell were withdrawing their plans for a bibliography. The matter would have ended there except for the fact that Laney’s penchant for a pungent phrase or two led him into further difficulties with Searles, who took umbrage at his choice of words and threatened a libel suit if a retraction were not forthcoming in the next *Acolyte*. A retraction was printed in *Acolyte* #10. Searles’ threat of a libel suit against Laney was, of course, disapproved of by most fans and regarded as highly unfannish.

The point I’m trying to make is that Laney could just as forcefully and convincingly have presented his opinion of Searles’ copyright ban, gotten his point across, and made Searles appear ridiculous, by the use of less inflammatory words and phrases than he used, while depriving him of the ammunition he needed for the continued harassment of *Acolyte*.

Laney’s slashing-attack style of writing most often led him into difficulties or untenable positions when used in attacking or criticizing someone whose words or actions directly concerned him, personally; as in the above instance and (in a somewhat different sense) in his involvement with Ackerman and Daugherty. In dealing with less personal issues, however, he was superb, as witness most of his comments concerning Claude Degler – not only in *ASI*, but elsewhere.

In *Fan-Dango*, his FAPAazine, he teed off on both Degler and FAPA in the Summer 1944 issue, in an article called “Gutless Wonders – A Discussion of Fan Ethics”:

“The appalling amount of Shilly-shallying in the case of Clod Degler is enough to gag a maggot. Are fans so weak-minded, so spineless, so completely lacking in intestinal fortitude, that they cannot even expel an undesirable from their midst? I had hoped devoutly that it would not be necessary to waste further space on Degler, but the infuriating vacillations of cowardly pollyannas – both in the LASFS and in FAPA – make it imperative for someone to speak plainly.”

He goes on to give his reasons why Degler should have been forcibly expelled from the LASFS instead of merely being informed that he was dropped, and why FAPA should also take positive action. The concluding paragraph in this section of the article is the purest distillation of the Laney spirit:

“It has been said by several that Degler has done nothing in violation of the FAPA constitution. This may very well be so, but I fail to see what bearing this has on the question. If FAPA is to be a general fan organization (which Cthulhu forbid!), a group to which any person may belong regardless of merit, perhaps this view of the constitutionalists is valid. If, however, FAPA is to make any attempt at being a worthwhile group, it seems to me its membership should be limited to the elite of fandom, that a person should not only prove himself worthy of admittance but should also continue to demonstrate this worthiness by his actions after he becomes a member. If these criteria are to be applied in judging Degler, there is no question but that he should be expelled. Despite the contentions of the sob-sisters and Pollyannas, all healthy organisms find it necessary to defecate occasionally. I suggest we defecate Degler at once.”

Here, in one pithy paragraph. Fran sums up: his view of what FAPA should be, his opinion of a certain faction in FAPA, his judgement of Claude Degler’s qualifications for remaining in FAPA, and his suggestion as to what FAPA should do with Degler... and doesn’t it all have a familiar ring to it, today?

Delightful though such bits of Laneyana are, they don’t have much to do with *ASI* except as they demonstrate in capsule form the typical Laney style of attack. In *ASI* he is seldom this brutally direct, but the cumulative effect is the same.

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Laney, in presenting his case against the LASFS, naturally emphasized those points which he felt bolstered his case and proceeded to ignore anything that tended to weaken it. Consequently – as far as I’m concerned, and as far as other Angelenoes of the period are concerned – the LASFS of *ASI* is a weirdly distorted picture of the LASFS we remember; even though we might recognize many of the details related by Laney, and accept the fact of them,

these individual instances, contrary to Laney's insistence, did not go to make the totality of the organization or of Los Angeles fandom. In Chapter Five, "Utopia In Shangri-La", he makes his first charge against the LASFS. He tells of meeting Albert de Pina (through Ronald Clyne) and of how impressed he was by him and his idea of turning the LASFS into a retreat for Hollywood characters who were science fiction readers.

I was always somewhat bemused by the gosh-wow attitude Fran displayed toward professional writers in the flesh. Laney had an acutely developed critical sense of values when it came to the printed word, but this sense of values took a nose dive, occasionally, when he came in direct contact with a writer. Not always ... but this was one of the times it did, and it led to one of the first major explosions between him and the club. I met dePina for the first time a short while before Laney arrived in LA (in fact, I also met him through Ron Clyne) and remember quite well one evening spent visiting him in his home. DePina was pleasant enough and an interesting conversationalist, but impressed me as a rather egoistical, vaguely effete man who fussily brewed syrupy Turkish coffee (it had to be just so!) and talked interminably about himself. He had published a few stories in *Planet* and was at the time doing some screen work – although I must confess that I never saw any evidence of the latter, and I was an inveterate movie goer in those days. I was not as impressed by dePina as Fran was.

If Daugherty had championed dePina's idea of turning the LASFS into a retreat for Hollywood stars (and mind you, dePina never at any time produced one star to give any credibility to the idea), Laney would have been the first to hit the ceiling and say something caustic about another "Daugherty Project". But as it was, Laney presented the idea for discussion to the club and the club rejected it out of hand. The whole idea was so sophomorically unrealistic that it's small wonder we were not receptive to the idea and didn't treat it seriously. Laney draws the conclusion, from the club's rejection of the idea, that the members were unwilling to broaden their horizons, that they were using the LASFS to escape reality, themselves, and their own woeful shortcomings – the recurrent *leitmotif* of *Ah! Sweet Idiocy!* I like to think, however, that we were just being realistic and trying not to make fools of ourselves.

Fran took this first rebuff more-or-less in stride, but the fit hit the shan a short time later when he brought dePina around to the clubroom one Sunday afternoon, when a number of fans were there working on fanzines or

otherwise puttering around. The reception accorded dePina was not at all what a visiting celebrity should have received, Fran insists; in fact, many of the members were downright rude, he claims.

DePina's reception actually was no more nor less than that received by most strangers walking into the club – writers or no. The fact that dePina was a writer was of small consequence to most of the members present. After all, better known and more generously talented writers were not unknown to the LASFS – Heinlein, Kuttner, Bradbury, Brackett, Hamilton, Cartmill, Rocklynn, Williamson, and others had all been either members or frequent visitors to the club. Writers were not novelties around the LASFS. Laney makes much of Ackerman's lack of warmth toward dePina, but Ackerman's reaction was quite understandable if one knew Ackerman in those days. Forry was the Number One Fan Face, the Compleat Activist, and probably knew as many science fiction writers on a first name basis as anyone then in fandom. He was the last person in the world to knock himself out over a second-rate *Planet* hack. Forry was polite, but unenthusiastic. Laney blasted Forry for using the excuse of working on *VOM* as his reason for not devoting more attention to dePina, and accuses him of attaching more cosmic importance to *VOM* than the magazine warranted. Laney seems to have forgotten the degree of importance he placed on getting his own *Acolyte* out on time. Forry was limited to working on *VOM* during a few brief hours on weekends, and would naturally feel that under the circumstances *VOM* was more important than making small talk with dePina.

Laney got disgusted with the fans over this episode because in his mind they were so inwardly directed, insecure, and insular that they refused to accept the presence of an outsider with anything more than grudging acknowledgement. From my experience in the LASFS, and later the Little Men and the Golden Gate Futurians, I have noticed that almost invariably a stranger who walks in cold, or even with another member, is in somewhat the position of a person going through quarantine or probation until *he* passes muster and is accepted into the group – it is up to the individual to prove himself to the club, not for the club to prove itself to the individual. In this case, Laney expected the club to prove itself worthy of Albert dePina, not the other way around; and in Laney's opinion the club fell flat on its face and convinced him it was composed of ingroupish, insecure adolescents.

It has always seemed to me that he made too much of this whole sorry scene, exaggerated its importance, and reacted in a petty manner to the rebuff

by the club of his grandiose scheme. He refused to accept the fact that others might not be as enthusiastic as he about an individual, and excoriated everyone for their lack of ardor.

Silly as this whole thing was it did have a greater significance, because, as Fran says, it crystallized his discontent with the club as it was constituted and decided him to enter into its politics seriously. Up to this point he was just another member of the club (and a very new one, at that, even if unusually vocal and dynamic); but after this he decided the club was travelling in a “revolting groove” and he was determined to change its course if at all possible. It was from this point that the political complexion of the club took on a hue entirely different from what it had been.

The LASFS didn't know what it was in for.

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This episode was also an unconscious confession on Laney's part of the goshwow attitude he had towards professional writers – a trait, God knows, no true fan is entirely without; but one which is not in keeping with the image of Laney the Insurgent, the Laney who abhors the fannish way of life. This was further amplified in the accounts of the Craig Rice soirees, the Healy and McComas collaboration, and the arrival of A.E. van Vogt in Los Angeles. In each of these instances the impression is given that the pros concerned dwell on some Olympian Height and are a breed apart from common fans, when nothing could be further from fact. I missed out on the Craig Rice soirees, but I knew her a number of years later, under slightly different and less elegant circumstances, and found her a fascinating, earthy woman who preferred to talk about things more basic than literature. I don't question Fran's description of the soirees, which were undoubtedly as pictured; but would like to point out that this was an obvious effort to draw a parallel between the Lipton salon and the LASFS “stye” with the LASFS, of course, getting the short end of the comparison. Fran was always at his best in the kind of gathering that went on at the Liptons', and they constituted his ideal of what he'd like the LASFS to be; that the LASFS failed to come up to this ideal was a source of never-ending despair to him.

Laney's involvement with Healy and McComas (incidentally, for some inexplicable reason Fran persisted in spelling Healy's name with two l's – an unusual bit of carelessness) had less syco-fannish overtones than the dePina or Rice incidents. He had every right to get excited about the opportunity to help with their anthology, and when I got rung in on it I felt the same way.

My first contact with Healy and McComas took place in the summer of 1945 when one Sunday afternoon I accompanied Fran to McComas's place in Santa Monica to discuss science fiction and the anthology. The enthusiasm generated by Ray and Mick as they outlined their plans (and plied us with Scotch the likes of which Fran and I had seen very little in those war blighted years) was enormously infectious. This was to be an anthology drawn mostly from the pulps – with an emphasis on *Astounding* – and I had been recruited because Fran insisted that I had a greater knowledge of magazine science fiction than anyone else in the area, a bit of praise from which I modestly dissented. The high point of this whole business, for me, was a crash session held at Laney's attended by, as nearly as I can recall, Healy and McComas, Fran, van Vogt, and me. The final composition of the proposed contents was pretty well decided that night and everyone felt that something really great had been accomplished. The night was made complete for me when, as Healy and McComas were driving me back to Tendril Towers in the predawn hours of the morning, they asked if I would be interested in doing the dust jacket for the book. I naturally said yes and Mick said he would take it up with Random House. Due to a number of unforeseen circumstances, I'm sorry to say, this fell through.

Laney exhibited all of his better characteristics during these sessions – spontaneous enthusiasm, erudition, generosity, and a willingness to subordinate his ego to others without demeaning himself.

I've already written at some length in an earlier article about the party Laney held in 1944 which marked the van Vogts' debut into LASFS society, so I won't take up any space with it here. There is one sentence in this account, however, that tends to corroborate my contention that Fran was incurably sycofannish. On [page 101](#) of Chapter Nine, "Ebb-Tide", Fran refers to the van Vogts as "respectable people" and worries about their reaction to fans in the mass at a party. The van Vogts are indeed eminently respectable people; but one gets the impression that they are respectable by virtue of being pros and not for any innate qualities, whereas fans are, by definition, slobs. This is interesting in another context because it also shows that Fran was constantly concerned about the image of fandom, a concern that he never entirely purged himself of. Fran was afraid, of course, that if the van Vogts went away from the party with a bad taste in their mouths he himself would be lumped with the other fans who had contributed to that bad taste and his image would be flawed in their eyes.

All this is not meant to be in criticism, but merely to emphasize the fact that Laney was possessed of the same weaknesses as other fans; was not quite as cynical as he liked to make out. In connection with this matter of Fran's concern for the image of fandom, an article by him, "A Critical History of VOM", in issue #43, June 1945, of that magazine, constantly dwells on the subject of images – the individual fan's image to fandom and fandom's image to the world as it comes through in the letters to Ackerman's great letterzine. This article, incidentally, had many glowing things to say about Forrest J Ackerman and his invaluable contribution to fandom.

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As a sometime resident of the rooming house at 628 South Bixel, known also as Tendril Towers, I have naturally objected for years to the common belief in fandom that that house was the focal point of homosexuality in the LASFS, that everyone who lived there was a sexual deviant. I knew that Laney was the major contributor to this canard, but it was only after reading *ASI* that I found one of the specific origins of the lie. The last paragraph on [page 101](#) relates an incident, in a superficially humorous vein, which undoubtedly served to perpetuate this distorted image of Tendril Towers and its inhabitants. Laney tells how he – on being informed by Art Saha that he, Saha, had moved into Tendril Towers – told him that

“all the fans in TT were fruits, and that of course he'd have to pass a novitiate of promiscuity with all of them before being allowed to settle on any one or two of the boys, that they made all the new tenants kick through to them in all sorts of fascinating ways....”

So far this was just a crude put-on, but then Fran added the kicker parenthetically: “(So far as I know, this was just a gag – the place has had some heterosexual inmates!)” This was a stupid and unfair thing to say in the first place, and it was doubly stupid – a tasteless and totally uncorroborated piece of scandalmongering – when printed in *ASI*.

Now is as good a time as any to dispose of and bury this whole question of homosexuality in the LASFS of the early forties. Up until the winter of 1945 there was in the LASFS, and resident in Tendril Towers, *one* admitted practicing homosexual, *to my certain knowledge*. No one in the club ever made much of the fact that this well known fan was homosexual (and the fact of his homosexuality was generally known, and generally disregarded, throughout fandom), except for Laney and, to a lesser degree, Mel Brown. It

was unfortunately true that occasionally a “fruity” character would attach himself to this BNF and hang around the fringes of the club for a short time, but he would always be sent packing as soon as his distasteful personality began to show. Such characters were few and extremely far between, and to cite them as evidence that the LASFS was crawling with queers is to strain at gnats.

On [page 51](#) Laney makes the incorrect charge that the homosexual issue was a major one with a number of members – that the issue was threatening the very foundations of the club because

“...It must be remembered that the club had from two to four active homosexuals in its membership at all times, that one of the most active members of the club was also its most vocal homosexual, and that he was continually bringing other fags around the club.”

The kindest thing that can be said is that this is an exaggeration. It may have been an issue with Laney and one or two others, but to say that most of the club was overly concerned with this problem is just not true. And if there were at all times two to four active homosexuals in the club I must have been awfully naive at that time, because I sure as hell didn't know *that* many were there.

In order to better understand Laney's attitude toward homosexuals, and sex in general, it is important to realize that Fran was essentially quite provincial and not nearly the sophisticated cosmopolite he enjoyed imagining himself. Until moving to Los Angeles he had spent most of his life in small to medium-sized towns in Idaho and Washington. He reflected the typical semi-rural attitude toward sex, with the concomitant contempt for and lack of basic understanding of the sexual deviant. Manhood, in Fran's mind, was equated with sexual prowess, and anyone who didn't take the same aggressive attitude towards sexual gratification as he did was not a whole man, no matter what his other attributes. And a man who preferred sexual associations with other men, no matter what compensating qualities of character, talent, or personality he might have, was deserving of nothing but contempt – not pity, not understanding, but raw contempt. Laney gave every indication of being incapable of understanding the complexities and subtleties of sex – of lacking the sensitivity to appreciate all its nuances, or to empathize with those who favored other nuances of sex than he. All of which made him a very poor authority on sex, hetero or homo.

## Chapter Two

# Red Sabres Against the Green Star

The feud occupies the major portion of *ASI* and is dealt with in great detail. Thus it should, I suppose, occupy the major portion of this essay. Unfortunately (for my present purposes only) I wasn't as involved in the feud as some of the others and can't speak as a principal participant. I can, however, offer some observations of a general nature and attempt to illuminate some of the causes and effects of the feud, with a comment or two here and there about the political picture in the LASFS. What this will essentially involve will be a discussion of the prime characters in the feud; Francis T. Laney, Forrest J Ackerman, Walter J. Daugherty, and, to a lesser extent, Theodor Bruce Yerke.

The feud all happened so long ago that to attempt to cope with its torturous permutations in and out and through the club would be an almost impossible task, and to question the chronology of events as related in *ASI* would be silly. This is not important, anyway; what is important is the characters involved in the feud, their relationships with each other, their differences, their personalities. Laney gave the feud weight far beyond its real issues by the manner in which he dealt with Forry Ackerman and Walt Daugherty in the pages of *ASI*; by his unconscionable efforts to demolish their characters, to destroy their good names in fandom, to hold them up to ridicule and contempt – to build his case against the LASFS by character assassination. Fortunately, neither Forry nor Walt suffered any permanent damage from Laney's assaults; but Laney's charges and innuendoes still survive and there will always be an unthinking element in fandom who will accept Laney's words as gospel despite any evidence to the contrary, or extenuating explanations. It is my hope that whatever I have to say about Ackerman and Daugherty will help, in a small way, to neutralize some of the poison spewed out by Laney concerning these two fine – and much maligned – men.

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The first serious rumblings in the club came about with the resignation of

Director Paul Freehafer in late November or early December, 1943, and the election of Jimmy Kepner to fill out his unexpired term. This prompted the Knaves – Arden (Buns) Benson, T. Bruce Yerke, Phil Bronson, Eddie Chamberlain, and one or two others – to rise in a body and leave the clubroom. This was shortly followed by mass resignations of the Knaves, the publication of issue one of *The Knave*, charges and counter-charges between the Knaves and the LASFS, Forry's writing of "Knave is a Louse", the bitter words that arose over this between Laney and Ackerman, and Bruce Yerke's petition to be made an Honorary Member of the LASFS. At this stage of the game the issue was drawn between Ackerman and Yerke, with Laney still somewhere on the sidelines, but getting ready to charge in at a moment's notice.

Yerke was the physical and intellectual leader of the Knaves and one of the few members of the LASFS who had joined the club in its old Los Angeles Science Fiction League (LASFL) days. By the time of the Knave blowup Bruce was hovering on the fringes of gafia, but it would still be some time before he took that final step. Phil Bronson was a pale echo of Yerke; Buns Benson was a nonentity; Eddie Chamberlain was a young kid who looked up to Yerke as his intellectual mentor. These three followed wherever Yerke led, were his ever present claque.

The Knaves soon found their self-imposed exile to be something less than the paradise they expected it to be, and began to extend feelers to the LASFS for readmission. Bruce, however, held out for an Honorary Membership, and to this Forry was adamantly opposed. The controversy concerning this in the LASFS was one of the contributing factors to the growing antagonism between Ackerman and Laney, and would eventually lead to the full flowering of the feud. Yerke himself was not a principal in the feud, but served more or less as a catalyst in bringing it about.

Laney's portrait of Yerke in *ASI* ([page 35](#)) is quite good – so good, in fact, that I can see Bruce just as he was then every time I read it. Personally, I think Fran was a little more fulsome in his praise of Yerke's intellectual ability, and expressed a higher regard for his maturity than the facts warranted. Bruce was intelligent, even brilliant, in some respects, but no more so than several other members of the club. He was typical of the precociously intelligent young fan one finds in any given period in fandom. He was reasonably well educated, read omnivorously on many subjects without fully digesting any of it, and made a great point of displaying his vast

wisdom in an arrogant and “I dare anyone to dispute me” manner. He did have a fine mind, though, and one which – if properly disciplined – could have been put to use as a constructive force in the LASFS rather than a disruptive one.

The walkout of the Knanves and Laney’s election to his first term as Director occurred at almost the same time, so one of Laney’s first orders of business was to attempt to heal the breach between the Knanves and the LASFS. A tentative agreement was soon reached and most of the Knanves returned on a semi-probationary basis to the club. Bruce, however, still held out for his Honorary Membership and Forry remained dead-set against it. Events kept snowballing at this point with the issue between Yerke and Ackerman becoming more and more bitter, culminating, finally, in the brouhaha over the article “Knanve is a Louse”, The Knanves’ insistence that the article be withdrawn from *Shangri-L’Affaires*, and Forry’s agreement to this, goaded Laney into confronting Ackerman about the whole thing, and ended up with Laney calling Forry a “lying *and* cowardly son of a bitch”. And, as Laney said, the feud was on. Directly on the heels of this scene Fran proposed to his executive committee that they discipline Ackerman by suspending his Honorary Membership for thirty or sixty days to try to force him into a re-evaluation of his relationship with the club, so he would “see for himself how his actions were alienating so many of the members, and mend his ways somewhat”.

There is something almost pathetic in this progression of events, with both sides grimly pursuing their course without attempting to understand or compromise with the other. If Fran had made any effort at all to understand Forry’s feelings toward Fandom, and particularly the club – his hurt and bewilderment at what must have seemed to him the rapid disintegration of what was at that time the most important thing in his life – then I’m sure he would have thought twice before making the confrontation he did. If Ackerman had been less stubborn and self-righteous about his stand – had been willing to explain his position to Laney as Fran requested, giving him at least a reasonable justification – then Fran probably wouldn’t have said what he did, and the feud *might* have been headed off – at least for a time.

But events transpired as they did, and Fran delivered the coup de grace by suggesting the suspension of Ackerman’s Honorary Membership, which would have been an extraordinarily cruel act if it had gone through. Even though periodic truces were called in the feud over the next couple of years,

and all was apparently sweetness and light, Forry never forgave Fran this effort to divest him of his Honorary Membership.

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At this same time the rupture between Fran and Walter J. Daugherty became complete when Fran made the half-facetious, half-serious suggestion that if any purging were to be done it might be well to start with Walter J. Daugherty. Walt's reaction to this is understandable. Superficially Fran had some justification for criticizing Daugherty, but none for the savage attacks he made on him. Laney vastly over-exaggerated Walt's faults and withheld much credit that was due him. As a matter of fact it has always seemed to me that FTL merely echoed the stale, smart-alecky things Yerke used to say about Daugherty in the minutes of the LASFS when he was secretary. There was friction, of course, between Walt and Fran, and it became greater as time went on, but it still seems to me that he took his cue from Yerke in his initial assessment of Daugherty. Laney let piddling differences between himself and Daugherty stand in the way of a better understanding and appreciation of a man who had many outstanding qualities that far overshadowed his faults.

The greatest injustice done Daugherty by Laney was in the perpetuation of the myth of the "Daugherty Project". Almost everything else Laney had to say about Walt can be dismissed as personal animus, and is mostly forgotten today. But – regardless of the unfairness of its basis – the term "Daugherty Project" is firmly entrenched in the lexicon of fandom and its meaning is clear to any fan having any knowledge of fanspeak. On what basis does Laney constantly deride Walt about "Daugherty Projects"? It was simply that Walt was irrepressibly enthusiastic; an individual who would constantly come up with a brainstorm of an idea, talk it up big in the club trying to instill some of his enthusiasm in others, and then maybe drop it – or, more often than not, follow it through. The first LASFS Fanquet\* in 1944 was a "Daugherty Project" that has become a continuing and revered tradition in the LASFS. Perhaps many of Daugherty's "Projects", when completed, failed to come up to the original prospectus, but most of us, alas, have gone through the same thing. Ironically. Laney was as guilty as Walt of "Daugherty Projectitis" at times: his espousal of de Pina's plan to turn the LASFS into a movie stars' retreat, his plan for the Fantasy Foundation, Project M and his whole concept of the role of the Outsiders in LA random, and his dream of developing *Acolyte* into a semi-prozine, could all be regarded as "Daugherty Projects".

\* An annual LASFS banquet for those who have crashed the proz during the year – RE

But what is so odious about enthusiasm? What is the harm in having big dreams, big ideas, and then not being able to fully realize them?

Walter J. Daugherty is one of the most abused and misunderstood fans in the LA fan scene ... largely due to Laney. For years Walt devoted time and energy in over-generous amounts to the LASFS and sparked many of its activities, in the pre-Laney days as well as later. Many times Walt prodded the club into doing things that wouldn't ordinarily have been done by the sheer force of his energy and enthusiasm. Walt took on jobs that others were either too lazy or too disdainful to be bothered with, and always tried to keep the club a dynamic element in fandom. Walt had a great deal of personal magnetism which, in spite of his flaws, and despite Laney's almost constant campaign to make him a pariah in the club, made him a generally well liked individual. He was a good natured character, always fun to be with, urbane and sophisticated in mundane circles, and generous to a fault. I can personally testify to his generosity many times over, but I won't embarrass him by going into detail.

Although the "cosmic" issues of the feud involved Laney's conflict with Ackerman's concept of life, the club, its activities, and fandom generally, Laney's impatience with Daugherty and his refusal or inability to get along with him on an operational level within the club contributed to the almost constant friction and tension that existed during most of the business meetings of this period and guaranteed the continuing of the feud. I'm sure that if it hadn't been for the personal animosity that persisted between these two the feud would have lost a lot of its steam and would eventually have sputtered out. Constantly throughout *ASI* Laney recounts incidents where he and Walt met head-on over some relatively minor issue on which neither party seemed able to reach accord. The way Fran presents these one would get the idea that Walt was invariably a fugghead and Laney almost invariably correct in his position. It would also seem apparent that all the meetings were nothing but political circuses with Laney and Daugherty providing all the entertainment. To a certain extent the latter impression would be true, too; but there *were* meetings which were free of political discord and presented programs of interest to the general membership.

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The fundamental differences between Laney and Daugherty rested almost

entirely on personal grounds – the inability of these two men to tolerate each other’s personality, and, consequently an honest and sincere dislike (and, sometimes, hatred) of each for the other. The essence of the disagreement between Laney and Ackerman, on the other hand, was not so much personal antipathy as their antipodal views of Life and Fandom. On a purely personal, non-fannish level Fran, I’m convinced, genuinely liked and in many ways admired Ackerman. Ackerman also liked Fran (with reservations) and respected his intellect. Any liking Forry may have had for Laney, however, was gradually replaced by a dislike so intense that not even the death of Laney could change it, because of Fran’s unbending criticism of Ackerman’s *modus vivendi*, and his frequent holding up of the Ackerman image to ridicule in *ASI*. It must have been particularly galling to Ackerman to find himself characterized as an unhappy man because of his abiding interest in fandom; to read such a presumptuous bit of judgement as this on [page 37](#):

“I do think Ackerman would be, once he was over the hump of making such a drastic change, a far happier man if he quit fandom to quite an extent and lived a more mundane life.”

Probably even more than with Daugherty the picture of Ackerman that emerges from the pages of *ASI* is a distorted one. As with any distortion not wilfully false, there is some basis on which to build; in this case, Laney took relatively minor personal idiosyncrasies and character quirks and transmogrified them into something monumental and significant. On the subject of drinking, for instance, Laney makes quite an issue of Ackerman’s teetotalism, his disapproval of others’ drinking, and his efforts to keep the clubroom off limits for drinking. Elsewhere in *ASI* he imputes that Ackerman’s interest in women is less than his interest in fandom and fans and therefore his masculinity is open to question. These two specifics were cited frequently by Laney to illustrate the dire consequences of eschewing a more mundane life for the fannish.

Laney set great store by the word “mundane”: a mundane life was preferable to a fannish one; a fan whose mundane interests equalled or exceeded his fannish interests was, apparently for that reason alone, a better person. There are numerous examples scattered throughout *ASI* which indicate that this ambivalent view of fandom and the mundane amounted almost to an obsession. The example relating to Ackerman cited above is one; on [page 39](#) he characterizes me as *much more mundane* (my emphasis) than

most fans he'd met, and (because of this, it seems to be implied) by and large his favorite associate; and on [page 38](#) he admits that Daugherty is definitely fun on a *mundane* party tho not a club party. (Laney's emphasis.) I can recall many conversations with Fran – both drunken and sober – which concerned nothing but this object of the ideal life. At the time Fran was going through a somewhat trying period attempting to adjust his domestic life and his fannish life: he was pretty well convinced that fandom was the wedge driven into his life that was forcing him and Jackie further and further apart, and the only thing that could resolve his difficulties would be the abandonment of fandom and embracement of a more mundane existence. Even so, he was reluctant to give up fandom completely – the friends he'd made therein, his publishing, his writing, the exchange of ideas and opinions within the microcosm which he found so exhilarating. He was convinced that anyone who devoted as much time and energy to fandom as did he at this time (1944-45), who made of it *A Way of Life*, was actually retreating from life, was building a safe, comforting womb in which to bury himself; and that the only way to save one's self from this schizoid fate was to take a greater interest in the mundane things of life. Fran was a little vague about what constituted his ideal of a mundane life, and a reading of *ASI* would lead one to believe that his interest in the mundane centered around drinking and fornication. This, of course, would be a great oversimplification.

However, the fact remains that much of his criticism of Ackerman, and others in the club, boiled down to nothing more than the charge that they would, if given the choice, choose fanac over drinking or wenching. As I said, Laney was never explicit in his explanations of the differences between a mundane and a fannish life, or why the one was intrinsically better than the other. Regardless, he *knew* that the fannish life as lived by Ackerman was unhealthy and fraught with unhappiness – he *knew* that Ackerman was an unhappy man, Ackerman's protests to the contrary notwithstanding.

Ackerman was (and still is) a shy and introverted individual around other people, though he enjoys having friends with him. Early in his life Forry found a compensation for this innate shyness in writing letters to *Amazing Stories* and *Wonder Stories* in their young days, in the correspondence with other readers that developed out of this, and eventually in the fandom that evolved in the early thirties.

In fandom, microcosm though it be, Ackerman achieved identity, status, a sense of participation and achievement, and a personal satisfaction that he

couldn't obtain in a wider milieu. In the early forties Ackerman was the BNF, and in the opinion of most of his contemporaries (regardless of what they thought of him personally) he was the personification of the Science Fiction Fan in all its ramifications. Laney insisted that if Forry were to give up all this for the anonymity of a more mundane life he would be a happier man. This has always struck me as being one of the more awe-inspiring bits of assininity, or sidewalk analysis, ever to come from Laney.

Laney's greatest fault was his inability – perhaps unwillingness would be a better word – to respect another's convictions, beliefs, way of life, or what have you. Ackerman found great personal satisfaction in submerging almost his entire being in, and devoting all his free time to, fandom, and saw nothing intrinsically wrong in so doing; but Laney believed that such devotion to a hobby, to the exclusion of nearly every other interest, bordered on the psychopathic. Fandom As A Way of Life proved to be a disastrous influence in his own life, Laney felt, and was making a shambles of his marriage; therefore, he reasoned, because fandom was the cause of so much unhappiness in his own life, others as involved in fandom as was he must also be unhappy. What applied to him *must* apply to others – Ackerman, for instance. Laney, of course, was entitled to his opinion of fandom's importance in one's life and had every right to sound off about it; he had a lot of good arguments to support his opinion and was not alone in his attitude. But where he *was* out of line was in arrogating to himself the role of final authority on this subject. And in this role he was arrogant and totally intolerant of any contradictory opinions. In declaring that Ackerman was, *a priori*, miserably unhappy because he was a total fan. Laney blithely ignored the fact that Ackerman just might not feel that he was unhappy; that, on the contrary, fandom had given meaning to his life, and in giving it meaning had made of that life a happy one. In the final analysis it was Ackerman's life; and if it was harmful, it was harmful only to Ackerman and to no one else – and no one, least of all Laney, was qualified to pass judgement on Ackerman lived his life.

In all fairness it must be pointed out that Ackerman was frequently critical of other fans who strayed once in a while from the straight and narrow fannish path. But this criticism usually took the form of personal notes expressing surprise and disapproval that one would rather do something mundane than fannish. Contrary to what Laney might have said or implied in *ASI*, Ackerman never forcefully attempted to impose his fannish will on other

members of the club. Forry might disapprove of someone participating in some mundane activity when he could be doing something fannish, but he was resigned to the fact that his attitude toward the fannish life was shared by very few others. He did feel, though, that the LASFS clubroom was sacrosanct and any activity taking place there should be confined to, or primarily concerned with, science fiction or fanac; that it should be used as a bordello or a drinking pad violated his sense of the fitting.

Laney at times got carried away over the issue of smoking and drinking, accusing Ackerman of all sorts of prohibitory acts. Forry neither smoked nor drank, and at no time did he do anything so ridiculous as to attempt to force others to follow his example. The only exception to this was in the case of Morojo (Myrtle R. Douglas). As long as Myrtle was associated with him as she was Forry felt she should (at least, publicly) observe the same abstemious habits as he. But as far as others were concerned he couldn't care less, as long as we did our drinking elsewhere than in the clubroom.

Although Laney professed to like Ackerman, by and large he never really got to know him on a genuinely personal level, never fully accepted him as he was with his foibles and idiosyncrasies, never found what a good friend he could be when given half a chance. For, almost from the moment he joined the LASFS, Laney felt compelled to take over its leadership – either actually or in title, and preferably both – for (he believed) its own good. Ackerman, sensing that Fran represented a new force in the club, a force that would undoubtedly lead to radical changes in the *raison d'être* of the club and in the direction it would follow in the future, resisted Fran and tried to neutralize his influence on the other members, Fran couldn't tolerate this, of course, and so Ackerman was pegged as his number one opponent in his power struggle for domination over the LASFS. Because of this growing compulsion to dominate LA fandom and to supersede Ackerman's influence on the club, Fran could never fully lower his guard around Forry, could never allow himself to completely like him – for if he did it would be tantamount to surrender to the Ackerman charm and influence. Even during the long periods of comparative peace that marked 1945 when he reigned supreme as director for four terms and the Ackerman influence was at its nadir, Laney still regarded him as a potential threat.

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Fran generally found it hard to take people as they were. Even his closest friends were sooner or later found wanting in one respect or another. At any

event, his attitude towards an individual, whether close friend or fannish acquaintance, would frequently be dictated by his mood of the moment. It was not unusual to see him take some demonstration of minor fuggheadedness on the part of someone, or a real or imagined insult, or even just an innocent remark, and work himself up into a real sweat over it – and in the process almost invariably get others involved. As I said earlier, Fran had to be a leader, not a follower; and the one thing he could never be was a lone wolf – even in a personal fight or argument he had to have the moral or actual support of others.

When one examines closely the political picture in the LASFS, particularly during the two most turbulent years, 1944 and 1945, one invariably finds Laney in the center of the political whirlwind. Fran presents an almost inexhaustible list of reasons for the various political upheavals, and particularly for the formation of the Outsiders. But the primary reason in almost every instance was simply either Laney jockeying for power, or Laney going off in a huff because he couldn't get his own way.

When Fran couldn't get the club to act in concert (as if anyone could ever get the LASFS to act in complete concert on anything!), when it seemed stubbornly determined to flounder along in its own stupidly happy fashion, resisting his every effort to shape it into something it could never be, Fran, like some Old Testament prophet, blessed it with his curses, and taking a few of the faithful departed into the wilderness to form a new and ideal society, the Outsiders.

# Chapter Three

## Historical Note on the LASFS: Revised Version

The optimistically idealistic precepts on which the Outsiders were founded were laudable, but just as impractical when applied to the Outsiders as they would have been if applied to the LASFS. The fact that the Outsiders were supposedly the intellectual elite of the LASFS made not a particle of difference in the final analysis, because they were each in their own way strong minded, opinionated individualists who were as incapable of prolonged united activity, or passive following of the leader, as they had been when they were part of the LASFS.

Fran frequently remarks, in *ASI*, that one of the most serious problems besetting the LASFS was the absence of any one interest held by all members which would act as a unifying force in the club, and that this same problem plagued the Outsiders. This is, I think, one of the keys to most of Fran's political troubles with LA fandom. There was, of course, one interest held in varying degrees by all members of the LASFS and of the Outsiders – science fiction! The LASFS was, after all, by definition a science fiction fan club; but Fran, though he paid lip service to this fact, nevertheless tried to make of the LASFS an intellectual society which would be on a more rarefied level than than of simply a science fiction fan club; something on the nature of the present-day Elves', Gnomes', and Little Men's Science Fiction, Chowder, and Marching Society, I think, which once had a dynamic and dominant interest in science fiction, but which has since become so enchanted with intellectualism that science fiction has almost become a dirty word.

Fran was beating his head against a brick wall in attempting to unify the LASFS and get it to behave in any sort of orderly manner; it was just too clique ridden, too full of prima donnas, too torn by conflicting jealousies to really be anything more than a loosely organized fan club. The worst thing that ever happened to the LASFS was the writing of its constitution, and its continued rewriting, *ad nauseam*. But the most immediate problem confronting the Director of the LASFS in those days, the thing that made of it a real nightmare as far as any organizational control was concerned, was the

number of cliques within LA fandom, and their constant proliferation and changing. This was the thing that eventually beat Laney, is something he doesn't deal with too explicitly in *ASI*, and is something I would now like to take up in some detail.

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In August 1943 Los Angeles fandom was composed of one formal organization, the LASFS. Paul Freehafer was Director and the secondary leader in the club was Daugherty. Outside the LASFS there was Morrie Dollens off by himself, and the Hasses, Henry and Dorothy, who had recently resigned in high dudgeon. On the way out but still in the club was Claude Degler – all by his noisome lonesome – and George Barr and Eddie Chamberlain. There were two major cliques at this time; one composed of Freehafer, Sam Russell, Phil Bronson, Bruce Yerke, Buns Benson, and Eddie Chamberlain; the other of Ackerman, Morojo, and Daugherty, with Arthur Louis Joquel, Charlie Dye, and Rustibar (Rusty Barren) hovering on their fringe. Jimmy Kepner, Mel Brown, and Mike Fern formed a smaller clique that enjoyed a somewhat ambiguous identification with both of the others.

By November 1943 the LASFS had been fragmented by the disgruntled withdrawal of the Knaves. The club was led first by Kepner and then by Laney at this time. Degler and George Barr were now completely out of the club and Dollens was still out of the LASFS but partially in the Knaves, being second only to Yerke in influence in that group. The Knaves, Yerke (the leader). Bronson. Chamberlain. Samuel D. Russell, and Freehafer, were the biggest clique at this time, and Russell and Freehafer were a secondary clique within the LASFS from which they never resigned as did the other Knaves. Walt Daugherty was the leader of the second, largest clique which was made up of Daugherty, Jules Lazar, and myself and was closely aligned with the Ackerman-Morojo clique which had the sometime support of Joquel. For a brief time here Laney and Kepner formed a clique which also included Pogo; and Brown and Fern were off somewhere by themselves, but somewhat sympathetic to the Knaves. All by himself with no clique to claim him as their own was one Charles Burbee.

By March 1944 things get a little complicated and confusing, for we now have the LASFS and the Outsiders. There is, of course, an overlapping of the two groups, and cliques within cliques. Surprisingly enough, the Outsiders were more clique-ridden than the LASFS. Laney and Mike Fern formed one clique, due mainly to the fact that Fern lived close enough to Fran

Shack to be a fairly constant visitor there, and Laney could generally count on Mike to back him in any dispute with the others. Yerke, Bronson, and Russell formed another clique which revolved around a strong mutual interest in classical music and frequent attendances of concerts at the Philharmonic and the Hollywood Bowl; and Kepner and Brown were yet another clique, with Dal Coger and Glenn Daniels partial hangers on. The LASFS was essentially one clique – Ackerman, Morojo and Daugherty formed its nucleus, with Laura Crozetti more sympathetic to them than to the others, and Charles Burbee stubbornly maintaining his independence. Joquel, who usually was identified with the Ackerman-Morojo clique, was more-or-less with the Outsiders and well on his way out of active involvement with LA fandom. At this time I was bouncing back and forth between Los Angeles and San Diego and wasn't bound to any particular clique.

One year later, March 1945, the picture had changed considerably. The Outsiders had dissolved and Yerke and Bronson had gafiated, but were spending a good deal of time at Dollens' studio in Culver City, constituting a strong clique which still exercised a fair degree of influence in the fluid LA fan scene. Russell, although still in the LASFS, retained strong ties with Yerke and Bronson and spent a good portion of his free time at Dollens'. Laney was director of the LASFS and was the leader of a strong clique composed primarily of Kepner, Saha, Elmer Perdue, Brown, and – to a certain extent – Nieson Himmel and myself. In turn, Nieson and I were pretty much of a two man clique-within-a-clique. And to further confuse things Himmel and I could at times be considered part of the clique made up of Ackerman, Morojo, Daugherty, and Roscoe Wright – with Laura Crozetti somewhere off in left field. Joquel was out of it altogether, and Burbee was still all things to all men.

Two months later, May 1945, things had taken a turn for the worse with the formation of the Los Angeles Futurian Society, a quasi-formal organization founded by Jimmy Kepner, Mel Brown, Art Saha and myself. This was not separate from the LASFS but within it, with all the members retaining membership in the mother club. The Futurians would continue to be the biggest and strongest clique in the LASFS until dissolution in September. In addition to the four hard core members the Futurians could generally claim support or sympathy from Elmer Perdue, Sam Russell, Nieson Himmel, Myrtle Douglas, and Art Joquel who, although out of the LASFS, showed a modicum of interest in the Futurians. I'll return in a moment to a fuller

discussion of the Futurians. The LASFS *per se* was surprisingly free of strong cliques during this period due mainly to the breakup between Ackerman and Morojo. Ackerman and Daugherty could be considered a clique, although not a strong one; and Laney and Russell another because of their editorial association with *Acolyte*.

Toward the end of the year the arrival of E. Everett Evans in Los Angeles gave birth to a strong Evans-Daugherty clique, to be followed soon after by the invasion of the Slan Shack gang from Battle Creek, Michigan, who comprised a close-knit clique all their own – Al and Abby Lou Ashley, Walt Liebscher, and Jack Wiedenbeck.

As this outline of the various cliques to be found during certain time periods in the history of the LASFS makes clear, LA fandom was an extremely fluid society, and one which was never at any time really split down the middle into two camps. The emphasis that Laney gives to his personal feud in *ASI* has tended to perpetuate the myth that the feud was of overwhelming significance to not only himself and Ackerman and Daugherty, but to all the other members as well. Actually, a comprehensive reading of LA fanzines, FAPAazines, etc, published during the period of the feud will show that most of Fran’s contemporaries regarded the feud as pretty much of a tempest in a tea pot, and of no lasting significance. It became significant almost entirely through the herculean efforts of Laney himself.

By the time Laney got around to spilling his guts all over fandom, he’d magnified many things all out of proportion, put undue emphasis on relatively picayune issues, and reported some supposed facts out of total context and, at times, with insufficient first hand knowledge. Like the Futurians, for instance.

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Laney dismisses this group in one glib paragraph:

“The communists and their fellow travellers had at this time a rival club – the Futurian Society of Los Angeles... it was no better than the LASFS, if as good. It existed for only a very few months, and died quietly when the communists moved to New York in the fall of 1945.”

It may be a small point to make, but the Communists didn’t found the Futurian Society of Los Angeles; Kepner, Saha, Brown and I did. Aha! But Laney said you guys were Communists, someone says. True – but not when

we founded the Futurian Society. That was to come later. Fran further says that his only informant on us was Perdue, who said we were no better than the LASFS, if as good. Whether or not we were any better than the LASFS had absolutely no meaning. We didn't set ourselves up as a rival club or try to compete with it in interest. In contrast to the Outsiders we made a point of having our meetings on Sunday night in order not to conflict with the LASFS or general fanac. As to Perdue being Fran's only informant on our activity, this seems hard to believe because Samuel Davenport Russell was very much a part of the Futurians – more so than Elmer – and was still associated with Fran on *Acolyte*, and certainly must have talked about us to him.

In many respects the Futurians successfully realized some of the aims of the Outsiders in that we – while remaining in the LASFS – constituted a homogeneous and separate group avowedly interested in the arts and, particularly, politics. At the same time we retained our interest in science fiction and fandom and the four of us were among the early joiners of the Vanguard APA. Our meetings ran smoothly, we had guest speakers from without fandom, and there was a gratifying lack of discord in the group as a whole. I firmly believe that in terms of relative significance to LA fandom the Futurians had importance equal to that of the Outsiders, if not greater. We had as many active fans, as much brain power, indulged in as much if not more activity, had by far less friction than they did, and had considerable political influence in the LASFS. But we didn't have a Laney to furnish propaganda for our group.

As to equating the Futurians with Communism this, in fairness to less involved individuals, deserves some clarification. At the time we founded the Futurians, we – that is, Kepner, Brown, Saha and myself – were in strong sympathy with the political left wing statements and activities of the New York Futurians, Wollheim, Lowndes, *et al*, and in fairly close communication with them. Because of this identification with the Futurians we proposed to form a somewhat comparable group on the West Coast; and, because the four of us all lived in Tendril Towers, we tended to visualize it as a counterpart to Futurian House in which most of the eastern Futurians lived.

At this time our interest in politics was pretty academic, although decidedly leftward leaning. Because of our interest in politics we set up a long range program schedule for our Sunday meetings in which we would attempt to get spokesmen from all sorts of political and socio-political movements to speak before us and present an outline of their respective

ideologies. We hoped to get communists, socialists, Trotskyites, fascists (if possible: remember this was during World War II), etc. Surprisingly, we were quite successful. And in one respect, too much so for our own future good.

I'll never forget the night that Marxism and the CPA (Communist Political Association, the form the American Communist Party assumed during World War II) was so eloquently presented to us by a lady organizer from the party. At the conclusion of her talk she announced that she had applications for membership with her and would be more than happy to sign up any of us who happened to be swayed by her convincing arguments. We four nincompoops looked at each other, nodded, and trooped up like sacrificial lambs to the slaughter. After signing up we looked at Sam Russell and one of us said, "Come on, Sam, why don't you join too? We know you think like we do," Sam looked at us, smiled in what I can only think of as an enigmatic way, and softly announced, "I don't need to; I joined the Party a couple of weeks ago."

We were amazed and delighted because Sam's already joining seemed to give intellectual sanction to our precipitous action. Little did we know, nor were we to know for some years to come, that Sam was in actual fact an undercover agent for the government, and would, henceforth be reporting our every word and act to the FBI – but this is another and sadder story.

We five, then, were the actual Communists in the Los Angeles Futurian Society – no others. And none of the remaining Futurians could by any stretch of the imagination be regarded as Communist fellow travellers, as Laney implies. I might point out here that Rogers, Kepner, Saha, and Brown have long since seen the error of their ways and dutifully recanted. And speaking for myself I might add that my interest in the party was very short lived and disillusioned. I am now by conviction a moderately liberal democrat.

I wasn't too upset, on first reading *ASI*, to find myself identified as a Communist; after all, it had never been a secret. What did distress me, though, was that in this book which purported to be a fearless document which would leave nothing unsaid for fear of hurt feelings or repercussions; in which Rogers, Kepner, Saha, and Brown are called Communists regardless of past friendships; in which Kepner is identified as a homosexual; in which Daugherty and Ackerman are ridiculed and calumniated – not one word was said about Samuel Davenport Russell being also (apparently) a Communist.

God knows, it was known to everyone in the LASFS.

Perhaps it is a small point by itself, but it serves to illustrate what I contended at the beginning of this essay: that *ASI* is factually inaccurate in many instances and invalidated as a completely reliable historical document. If I had the time and the documents to refer to and the opportunity to interview as many as possible of those involved I could come up with countless other verifiable examples of omissions, distortions, and inaccuracies; but I have neither the time nor the inclination.

Regardless of the bias and nonobjectivity of *ASI* it still serves a useful function in that it provides a reasonably accurate chronology of events during the period it concentrates on and gives us some good profiles of many of the principals involved.

And it is a hell of a good piece of writing.

# Afterword

## Sketch of a Fan (II)

I can't help feeling, after several readings of *ASI*, that as hard and unfair as Laney was with Daugherty and Ackerman (and others) he was even harder and more unfair with himself. I'm not speaking of the self criticism and analysis which is supposed to prove that he was being mercilessly honest in his dismemberment of virtually everyone in the LASFS, himself included – an argument which crumbles to nothing when fully examined – but of the unconsciously distorted and unreal Laney that emerges from the book.

Perhaps the incredibly egoistical character that Laney depicts as himself is the true Laney; I'm not sure anymore. I do know, however, that Laney as I knew him was somewhat less than the ogre he is believed to be by some, and certainly a long way from being the fannish demi-god the Laney cultists have made him out to be. He was, believe it or not, a man like you or me with the usual complement of faults and virtues, strengths and weaknesses. Fran did have a strong ego, it's true, but it wasn't as apparent in a day-to-day relationship as it was in his writings – particularly in *ASI*. When I knew him as a close personal friend there was never any thought in either of our minds that twenty years later he would be the subject of as much controversy as he is today; that people who knew him personally and people who knew him only through his writings would argue and debate as to his real character; that to some he would be the very model of a model Insurgent, to others the very model of a Grade A-1 son of a bitch; that in some quarters he would be regarded almost in awe as a Priapean deity with a gargantuan sexual appetite; and that in other quarters it would be argued that his obsession with sex was merely a continuing effort to quiet his fears of latent homosexuality.

To me Fran Laney was a good friend and we had a lot of damn fine times together. We had our differences of opinion about various people in the LASFS, and about the LASFS itself. We didn't see entirely eye-to-eye on *Life and Its Greater Meaning*, or even on fandom. We had our differences on politics, particularly when I became a Communist. But in spite of all this we remained good friends and enjoyed each other's company. I had a high regard for him all the time I knew him and after, and like to think that most of the

time he held a high regard for me. And it was precisely because I had such a high regard for Fran and such warm memories of our friendship that I was so disturbed by *ASI*. Not because of anything personal he said about me in it, but because I felt it was unworthy of him. So much of it was small and petty; so much talent and effort was wasted on justifying his personal war against Walt Daugherty and Forry Ackerman – so much unjustified savagery.

Although it is distasteful to me to do so I suppose I must make some mention of [the last two pages](#) of *ASI*. To me it seems obviously the product of a sick mind. When I first read it I was appalled – not with its contents, but with the evidence it seemed to give of the deterioration of a once fine mentality. It seemed as if Fran had worked himself almost into a frenzy during the writing of the major portions of the book in an effort to demolish the LASFS and all who resided therein, and then, feeling that perhaps his object had not been reached, tried to make sure that his point was not lost by printing as many repugnant illustrations of the general depravity of the LASFS as he could cram into the remaining pages. I think it is worthy of note that of fourteen examples he cites ten of them have to do with sex in some degree of abnormality – I'll let the Freudians debate the significance of this. The impression given, due to the compression of all these items on two pages, is that this was the way it was all the time, that this was representative of the characters and activities of the majority of the members. Most of what he says, I can testify from personal knowledge, is either greatly exaggerated or related out of context. In a couple of instances Fran himself, at the time, either thought nothing much of it or else thought it was hilarious – like the drunken stark naked lad under the lady's bed. Hoo haw, you should have heard Laney laugh over *that* one when he heard about it! In these last two pages Fran seems to have flipped on the subject of sexual abnormality, to have taken a handful of unrelated and isolated instances over a four year span – several of which he knew only by hearsay – and put them down on two pages, saying: Look everyone! Look at what an iniquitous hotbed of perverts the LASFS is! It's really rather sad.

I hate to think that so much of Laney's reputation rests on *Ah! Sweet Idiocy!* Great as the book is as an example of a particular style of writing, it is – like a distorting carnival mirror – a misleading reflection of the real Laney. As time goes on, as the Now becomes further and further removed from the Then, the complex individual that was Francis Towner Laney will become increasingly reduced to the one dimensional image that is projected from *ASI*.

*ASI* was the product of a sour and embittered man who pulled out all the stops, lost all sense of balance and restraint, and forgot that he ever had a sense of humor by the time he got around to writing it. It is not the true measure of the man. I prefer to remember the Laney I knew as a friend before he ever dreamed of writing *ASI*. And for those who didn't know him personally I would rather his reputation could have rested on *Acolyte*, on his FAPAzine *Fan-Dango*, and on his always entertaining and frequently thought provoking writings in other journals, than on *ASI*.

But in-as-much as so great a part of his present day reputation is derived from *ASI* I can only hope that this examination of the man and the book will help others to a better understanding of Francis Towner Laney and to a more realistic evaluation of his controversial *magnum opus*.

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FTL and *ASI*, by Alva Rogers, is published as Operation Crifanac CCXL By Dick Eney, 417 Fort Hunt Rd., Alexandria, Virginia, USA. 25¢ a copy. Permanently in print.

# About This Ebook



Clark Ashton Smith, Francis T. Laney and Bob (“Rah”) Hoffman. Photo from the Mike Rosenblum collection.

# Terminology

Francis T. Laney assumes a fair amount of background knowledge in his readers, for example mentioning LASFS in his second paragraph but not explaining until Chapter Five that these initials stand for Los Angeles Science Fantasy Society. A few such abbreviated terms are defined below. Anyone even remotely interested in *Ah! Sweet Idiocy!* will presumably know some fan language (“ego boo”, more usually written “egoboo”, is still in use though “crifanac” – intense, high-speed, “critical” fan activity – is rarely heard). Alva Rogers is kinder to readers, spelling out LASFS and even LASFL, the old Los Angeles Science Fiction League; but he sees no need to explain such familiar terms as “gafia” for Getting Away From It All – leaving or taking a break from fandom. For further items of fanspeak, see *Fancylopedia 3* at <http://fancylopedia.org>.

- AAPA – American Amateur Press Association, a non-fan APA (see below).
- ajay or ayjay – amateur journalism shared through non-fan APAs or Amateur Press Associations.
- FAPA – Fantasy Amateur Press Association, the leading fan APA.
- FFF – Julius Unger’s fanzine *Fantasy Fiction Field*.
- FFM – *Famous Fantastic Mysteries*.
- FN – *Fantastic Novels Magazine*.
- FTL – Francis Towner Laney.
- LASFL – Los Angeles Science Fiction League
- LASFS – Los Angeles Science Fantasy Society
- MFS – Minneapolis Fantasy Society.
- NAPA – National Amateur Press Association, the leading non-fan APA, of which many fans have been members.
- NFFF – National Fantasy Fan Federation. (Also N3F.)
- PSFS – Philadelphia Science Fiction Society.
- *Shaggy* – pet name for the LASFS organ *Shangri L’Affaires*.
- Stranger Club – Boston sf fan club.
- TWS – *Thrilling Wonder Stories*.
- UAPA – United Amateur Press Association, another non-fan APA.

- *VOM* – Forrest J. Ackerman’s fanzine *Voice of the Imagi-Nation*.
- *UNK* – *Unknown*.
- *WT* – *Weird Tales*.

*David Langford, 2019*

## General Notes

Frances Towner Laney was born in 1914, was highly active in fandom from 1942 (when *The Acolyte* was launched) to 1948 when he published *Ah! Sweet Idiocy!*, remained a member of the Fantasy Amateur Press Association (FAPA) until August 1953, and died on 8 June 1958. I believe this is the first ebook of his best remembered work *Ah! Sweet Idiocy!*, a memoir and polemic with a chequered history. To quote its *Fancylopedia 3* entry:

Canadian fanned Beak Taylor reportedly quit fandom after reading it. Laney himself would not allow it to be reprinted during his lifetime, evidently fearing lawsuits.

Harry Warner Jr, historian of fandom, suggests in the ebook [Introduction](#) – originally published as an instalment of his “All Our Yesterdays” column for *Void* #26 (August 1961) edited by Greg Benford, Pete Graham, Terry Carr and Ted White – that a reprint should leave out all the libellous parts and also the fannish political machinations. Others thought differently. Robert Lichtman takes up the tale:

Dick Eney reprinted the whole of *Ah! Sweet Idiocy!* from the original stencils, which were provided to him by Charles Burbee (who’d mimeographed the original 1948 edition), as a part of *A Sense of FAPA*, a 388-page collection anthologizing his selection of the best writing in FAPA’s first quarter century, which was distributed as part of the 100th FAPA mailing in August 1962. Laney was safely dead by then. Alva Rogers wrote a 28-page commentary on Laney’s memoir in 1963, which he entitled “FTL & ASI.” It was distributed by Eney in two forms. The first was as a portion of his combozine *Alexandria Trio*, which also included an issue of Eney’s FAPAzine, *Target: FAPA* (mailing comments, mostly) and his *An Open Letter to Lee Hoffman* (the latter being Eney’s account of the 1963 worldcon held in Washington DC). Eney wrote a 3-page introduction to Rogers’s essay. *Alexandria Trio* appeared in the November 1963 FAPA mailing. Eney also distributed “FTL & ASI” in the December 1963 OMPA mailing under the title *Bixeltype*. Although I haven’t seen a copy of the

latter, I would venture a guess that Eney included the same introduction there that he did in *Alexandria Trio*. (Email, March 2019)

Rob Hansen adds that “it appears that in the early 1960s Eney serialized *ASI* in *Phenotype*, his OMPAazine.” This, which would have provided members of OMPA (the UK Off-trail Magazine Publishers’ Association) with the context for *Bixeltype*, presumably consisted of more copies of the above-mentioned reprint from the original stencils.

In 1978, Joe Siclari began to serialize *Ah! Sweet Idiocy!* in his history-oriented *Fanhistorica*, publishing four instalments in issues #2 to #5 (1978-1996) before the fanzine ceased publication: this serial reprint stopped at the end of Chapter Eight with “Concluded next issue”. In the twenty-first century Joe Siclari posted page scans online at Fanac.org of the full 134-page original (129 numbered pages plus the title page and Preamble i-iv), from which this digital text was derived. Taral Wayne MacDonald has long had plans for a new edition to be published as a real paperback book with an introduction by Arnie Katz, but this project’s fate is uncertain.

In the text much use is made of quasi-quotes, economically indicating that dialogue within such special quote marks is a paraphrase from memory rather than necessarily the exact words spoken. The traditional quasi-quote created with a typewriter was a double quote overprinted with a hyphen: this ebook uses double quotes with ~~strikeout~~, as in Laney’s final self-quoted speech: “To hell with it.”

Obvious unintended typos have been fixed, though not (I hope) any intended ones such as the name of the LASFS breakaway group the Knaves and their fanzine *The Knavve* – a mistyping of “knave” which like other typos in the history of fandom was officially adopted. Also uncorrected is the repeated Laneyism “assinity”, which he perhaps cherished for having a stronger feel than the “asininity” he so often saw or thought he saw around him. Actual bad language is mentioned but avoided: *Ah! Sweet Idiocy!* was written for distribution through FAPA, the Fantasy Amateur Press Association, where “obscenity” was frowned upon as noted in [Chapter Eight](#). In the tenth chapter, “loading for bear” was originally typed as the less conventional “loading for boar”. Various lapses, such where our hero opened a parenthesis and never closed it (or closed one that he’d never opened), have been corrected on a basis of what makes most sense in the current context.

Further fanwriting by Francis T. Laney is collected in *Ah! Sweet Laney!*

*The Writings of a Great Big Man: Selected Writings of Francis Towner  
Laney* (2007), edited by Robert Lichtman for Corflu Quire.

*David Langford, 2019*

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- Ted White (as a surviving editor of *Void*) for giving his blessing to the reprint of Harry Warner Jr's "All Our Yesterdays" column as the [Introduction](#).

# Picture Index

Pictures are placed at the ends of chapters or other sections in order not to break up the flow of text. All photographs were supplied by Rob Hansen from fan archives in his keeping, with two exceptions found by him at Fanac.org. See the individual picture captions for source credits.

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## **The End**

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