SUMMER 2012

Since 1926!™

AMAZING STORIES

Round Table with the
Book View Cafe
Featuring
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Brenda W Clough
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Katharine Eliska Kimbriel
Sue Lange
Vonda N McIntyre
Linda Nagata
Pati Nagle
Phyllis Irene Radford
Deborah J Ross
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Introduction

Welcome To The New Amazing Stories

In this intro I shall explain that what you are viewing is not really the new Amazing Stories.

What you are actually looking at is the Relaunch Prelaunch of the new Amazing Stories.

To make a long story short and to simultaneously avoid having to give up too many secrets: there is a master plan behind the re-invention of Amazing Stories, a plan that encompasses more than just the revitalizing of an old pulp favorite. One that contemplates an entirely new approach to publishing.

Not unsurprisingly, introducing that concept full blown requires a fair amount of financing and not just for good content. An entire infrastructure needs to be built, staff needs to be hired and trained, practices and methodologies developed and perfected

The hunt for financing was not to begin until after the presidential election on the advice of those who should know.

Between the development of the plan and the current time, things have changed.

Later on in the month there will be an announcement made – initially at San Diego Comic Con on the west coast and at Readercon on the east coast *(Ed: - this has already taken place.)** . The content of that announcement has prompted the acceleration of plans for Amazing Stories and has caused me to offer up this relaunch prelaunch version on the blog to ensure that there is something active on the web that at least vaguely resembles an electronic magazine.

Why? Because we are expecting a large amount of attention as a result of the announcement.

The major, long range plan is still in effect and, while the pending big announcement will certainly help move things along in a positive direction, your participation is still needed. The more interest there is in Amazing Stories, the more support it has, the easier it will be to raise the hoped for funds.

I've been busily taking the whole grand plan and breaking it up into discrete parts – developmental stages for want of a phrase. The first of those will be offered as a Kickstarter (or perhaps an IndieGoGo) campaign, the success of which will once again rely on the interest and participation of Amazing Stories' current readership.

What Can You Do? Visit the site. Tell your friends about the site. Add comments to the site. Visit the blog. Spread the word. Help make this happen. And thank the many folks who have given of their time and their hard work to help me flesh out this relaunch prelaunch edition.

And Thanks!

**The announcement was the arrangement of a licensing deal with Nerd City to produce a series of graphic story anthologies under the title of Amazing Stories. Nerd City has made an arrangement with Image Comics to publish and distribute the title and we are all expecting to see the first book published starting in early 2013.*

EDITORIAL

The Future's So Bright – No Shades Needed Thanks to Nanotechnology•

Welcome, thank you for stopping by and please don't forget to tell your friends about us!

Back in 1926 Hugo Gernsback was a successful publisher, inventor and broadcaster with a passion for sharing his passions, which in his case was science in all its forms. In his day, radio was new, the light bulb wasn't all that old and Edison and Tesla were astonishing the world on nearly a daily basis.

For Hugo the future possibilities were endless. The only thing missing was a public that was equally as excited. Hugo believed that this wasn't because they didn't care about the wonderful technologies springing up all around them, it was because they simply weren't educated and knowledgeable enough to appreciate the fact that they were living in a golden age of technological advancement and creativity.

Gernsback believed that one sure way to create that excitement was through the written word and he set out to prove his theory by frequently offering prototypical or *scientifiction* stories in the pages of his Electrical Experimenter magazine (later to become Science & Invention magazine).

He even went so far as to publish two "All Scientifiction" issues of that magazine.

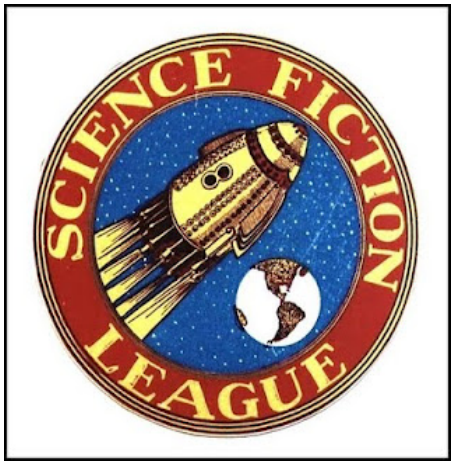
The results justified his hypothesis: those issues were well received and a significant portion of his readership wrote in requesting more of the same. After a few fits and starts, Hugo honored their requests and dropped the first issue of a magazine devoted to the "candy-coating of science" onto the world's head. The world would never be the same.

Science Fiction - however you define it - had been born. While not yet quite *science fiction* in 1926, the seeds were sown, the clones decanted, the homonculi re-invigorated.

Science Fiction would soon escape from the cage that Hugo had hoped to keep it in: he saw it largely as a vehicle for enticing an interest in the sciences rather than a new form of fantasy literature. The concept was far bigger than that. SF would find itself not only introducing the sciences and not only entertaining with the fantastic, it would go on to create an entirely new world view and would bring into being the concept that our species could actually shape the very future that it would go on to inhabit.

We live in that world today, a world in which every single one of the gosh-wow technologies that we (almost)

take for granted were first imagined within the pages of a science fiction story. Perhaps not in specific, working detail (though that has happened on a number of famous occasions), but sufficiently enough to make them seem real. Authors, stretching their minds in an effort to entertain inspired readers who wanted to inhabit those fantastical worlds they were being entertained by. Fictional worlds weren't enough for the readers of SF and many would go on to become the scientists, researchers and engineers who harnessed atomic energy, took us to the Moon, introduced cloning and genetic engineering, the integrated circuit, lasers, masers, ion drives, robots, nanotech and all the rest of it.



Gernsback lost Amazing Stories to bankruptcy shortly after getting it started (it would continue in publication until 1995, nearly 70 years in continuous publication; it would be revived several times from 1998 thru 2005), and shortly after beginning to create the other wonderful gift he gave us – science fiction fandom.

Certainly his efforts were born from commercial and business interests – he realized that he could use the letter column of his magazine to put together clubs of like-minded individuals and that he could then use the clubs to support and increase circulation – but fandom had a mind of its own just like the new genre did. Both seem to have a major issue with boundaries.

In many respects, Gernsback was a man well before his time; substitute the internet for the letter columns of his magazines and you'll be looking at nothing less than the world's first social network. It is now some 86 years since the world we live in was given birth and over seven years since the magazine ceased publication. The world of this latest version is far different from the world of 1926, but not all that different from the worlds that were created within its pages.

Hugo charted the path; authors and artists, editors and fans populated and embellished it, readers turned it into reality. Now that we are all truly living in a *science fiction world* it is time for a magazine that celebrates and illuminates that world in ways that no other publication can.

Welcome to the new Amazing Stories!

**(In the future there is no doubt in my mind that we'll all have polarizing lenses in our eyes thanks to nanotech.)*

WHO DO I REVIEW FOR?

By Daniel M. Kimmel

*(This essay was originally published on the author's blog - **Behind the Scenes** - on GoodReads, May 6, 2012 and is reprinted here by permission of the author.)*

My friend MaryAnn Johanson is the Flick Filospher, and her website contains news, views, and reviews and is well worth following. However as two highly opinionated people we sometimes disagree. (In fact our mutual friends worry if we start agreeing too much.)

She recently posted a link that led to an exchange of views on Facebook where we had to agree to disagree. Here's the short version of the story.

New York Times critic A. O. Scott gave "The Avengers" a negative review. Actor Samuel L. Jackson, who plays Nick Fury in the film, made a snarky reply suggesting Scott is in the wrong line of work. Brian Lowry did a column on the incident, suggesting that perhaps Jackson had a point (although not about Scott needing to change careers) and MaryAnn argued that Lowry was out of line. In her view he was suggesting that critics had to pander to the audience for the film, in this case the fanboys and fangirls of the Marvel comic book characters. (If MaryAnn feels that needs clarification she is welcome to do so. Her website http://www.flickfilosopher.com/blog/2... has her initial post and a link to the Variety article.)

So I read Lowry's article and I didn't see that at all. What he seems to be arguing is that if a film critic is simply going to trash all comic book action movies he a.)ought to take a larger perspective and b.)is going to be very unhappy this summer. He contrasted that with a review by L.A. Times critic Kenneth Turan who -- as I did in

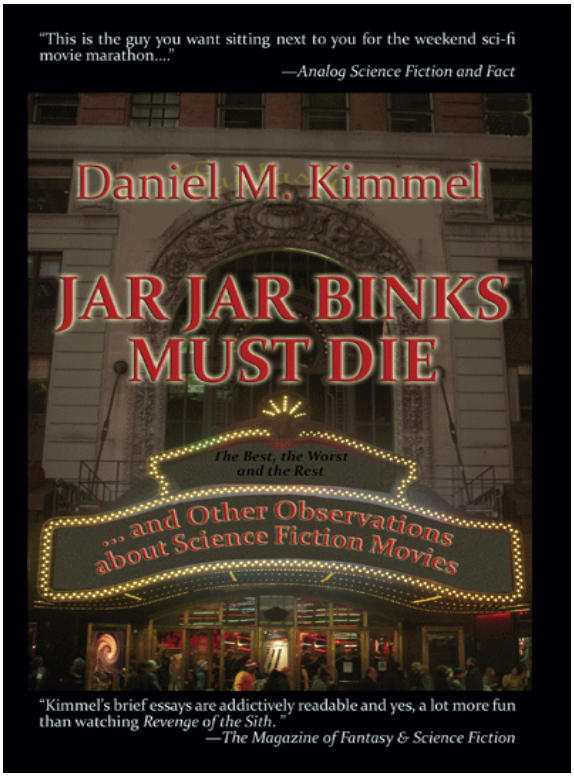
my own review -- expressed some misgivings about the film but noted that it worked as what I've called an "amusement park ride" movie: it provides entertainment if you go for this sort of thing, and does a decent job at it. (In my own review I said it was like "Transformers" but with better dialogue.)

And this gets to my point. When I write film reviews I'm addressing an audience that wants to know if a movie is worth seeing and what they might expect. I have taken as my philosophy the notion that you should be able to read my review, disagree with it, and yet get sufficient information to know if YOU would like the movie. A successful review is not one that convinces you I'm right, but that conveys useful information. By contrast when I am doing film criticism (as in Jar Jar Binks Must Die... and Other Observations about Science Fiction Movies) I am writing for people who have either seen the movie, or are at least willing to grapple with an essay about it without worrying about "spoilers."

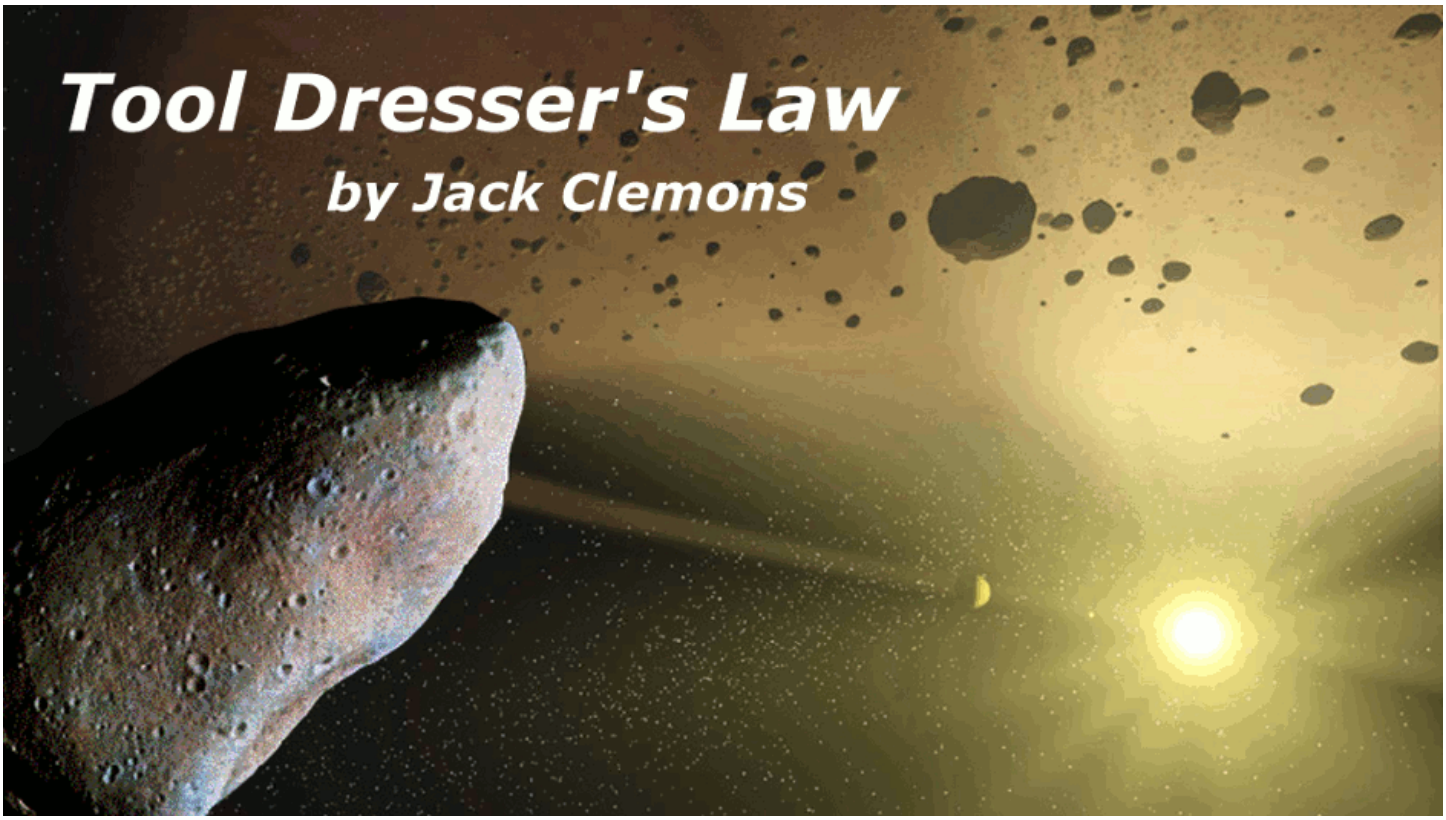
When writing about classic movies I'm often taking the position that this is a movie you need to see and here's why.

I agree with Lowry. A good film reviewer should judge the quality of the film but should also consider how it will play to its intended audience even if the reviewer is not part of it. When I review children's films I try to think if kids will like it. If it's a lowbrow comedy I may detest the movie but you'll at least get the information you need to know to make your own determination.

That still won't please everybody. I'm still getting emails about my negative review of "Bridesmaids." However that's been my approach for as long as I've been a professional critic. It may not work for all my colleagues, but then if we all wrote the same way, it would be a duller world for it.



*Daniel M. Kimmel's collection of essays on science fiction film - **Jar Jar Binks Must Die ...And Other Observations About Science Fiction Film** - is a Hugo Award Finalist at this year's Chicon 7 World Science Fiction Convention in the "Best Related Work" category that includes non-fiction works related to the fields of science fiction and fantasy.*



Wildcatter dropped onto Hawking a month ahead of perihelion. We slammed in after losing a brutal tug of war with the singularity that started when we closed to 60 klicks. I was in the cockpit running a spectrometry survey through the assayer ay-eye during our final approach. I've flown a lot of A.U.'s with McRae; he's a damn fine pilot. I looked up from the display when I heard him curse.

"Geezus!" he hissed. His face was rigid.

"What is it, Curt?" I heard panic in his voice and it made me edgy.

"We're dropping down one heluva' g-cliff," he said. "This baby could suck the numbers off a coin!"

I twisted around in my seat to glance at the forward screen. Hawking didn't *look* very formidable, just another hunk of grey-brown rock. I turned back to look at McRae.

"We in any trouble?" I asked.

No answer.

"Curt ...?"

No answer. He was staring holes in the readout panel; he'd completely dismissed me.

I don't think he took three breaths in the entire fifteen minutes it took him to keep from auguring in. I remember his face checker-boarded with colored light from the crazy flickering panel of displays. His hand was gripping the stick so tightly that his fingers were bone white from knuckles to nails. We collided, hard, and Hawking swiped once at us and missed. We bounced about 100 meters before the landing struts slapped the dustless rock again -- and this time dug in.

McRae later liked to brag that he'd had it under control all the way. But I was there. McRae blew it. He'd underestimated the muscle of that sucker, and I guess the rest of us can be glad he was a better pilot than judge of character.

Not to say that Hawking was easy to judge. Nothing with axes that short should have packed that many gees. We had all read the reports filed by IGA several months earlier, just after the singularity was discovered wandering through solar system real estate. Star occultations, apparent albedo, etc., etc., all put Hawking at about the size ofCuba. Large for an asteroid (which is what it looked like) but tiny by planetary standards.

Then the early reports came in from the Chinese fly-by and the Korean drone lander, followed by extensive data supplied by the Japanese survey party made while Hawking was out beyond the Belt. All of them confirmed the same finding -- this baby was *not* what it seemed to be.

Hawking had played a mean game of billiards with Sol's family jewels as it screamed sunward. The goddam planets *rocked* when Hawking slid by them. Mars lost Phobos and Deimos permanently. They're out there now, trying to solve the N-body problem by trial and error.

The Moon got nudged pretty hard when the singularity intersected Earth's orbit. I heard that it played hell with the Terries: weather, agriculture, tides, even the length of the day. Several million killed;Paristurned into a beachfront city. Earth was damn lucky to be as far away from Hawking as it was when it passed.

Konstantine Station got tossed like a jackstraw -- luckily, I wasn't home at the time. Lots of injuries and a couple of deaths and several months of correcting burns to get back to L5.

Yeah the crew of *Wildcatter* had heard all about Hawking, long before we had caught up with it inside Venus' orbit. All of that info was in our *heads* during that final approach, but we were staring at something that our *intuition* told us was no big deal. Then Hawking cast its vote and we were suddenly on a slip-sliding trajectory *down* at over 0.8 gees. Son of a bitch, that landing was scary.

I don't know how well a full-auto system would have handled the landing. We all spent a lot of time kicking that one around during lounge time afterward.

"This is bullshit!" was Cal Bartley's summary then. "Goddam Snyder and his goddam credit pinching nearly bought it for us." Calhad an irritating habit of being loudmouthed when he was skittish.

Chan Singh shook his head. "And that's *your* bullshit, Bartley," he said. "Full-autos are out of the question on

spec ships and you know it."

"Flock ass, Singh!" Calhandled language like a bouncer.

"Old Man Snyder has more money than God. He could outfit this tub like the *Constitution* if he cared more for his crew than what lines his pockets."

"Hey, I'm no cheerleader for Snyder," Chan said. "But if he did things the way you say he should, we'd all be working for table scraps. He got rich because he *understands* this business, and you'll get rich working for him for the same reason."

"That's easy for you, Singh,"Calshot back. "You've made yours."

"And I did it working the Old Man's way."

"You were always a boot licker for Snyder, Chan," Lou Williams threw in. "The Old Man's a goddam horse's ass and this trip proves it. We're each paying a month's expenses, and we'll probably all wind up dead to boot -- and for what? So that egomaniac can get his name in the books trying to bronco bust this worthless rock."

"Goddam right," Cal added. "We've got a fortune waiting for us on Titan and Snyder's got us out here mucking around like *scientists*, for God's sake."

None of the crew, me included, was very happy about prospecting on Hawking.

But Chan was right. Wildcatting had always been a wing and a prayer proposition, whether in space or in the early oil days inTexas. Speculator's profits were narrow and that meant cutting corners, taking risks. The industrials had all of the fancy equipment and plush living quarters -- and the full-autos.

And they were the ones that went after the big strikes: mining the large asteroids, drilling the huge oil reserves on Ganymede (or whatever that stuff was they found there). If you wanted to be comfortable, join the industrials. If you wanted adventure, sign onto a spec ship: rotten hours, primitive equipment, spitting in the Reaper's eye every day and hoping he didn't spit back. Everyone, including Cal Bartley, knew that when they signed on. I couldn't side with Calon that account.

I knew that Cal, like most of the rest of us, was intimidated by Snyder, and this was just his way of puffing up. Calhad already been with the drilling crew for more than two years when I joined on, and he was a full-timer too. I had heard that the Old Man had jettisoned him at least twice in the past for being insubordinate, but he hired him back both times. Calwas the best tool dresser to be had.

Snyder had this thing about his employees. He seemed to think that we had joined the Marines when we signed on. Of course once you got on ship there wasn't a hell of a lot you could do about that. Snyder *was* commander-in-chief there, and emperor and Christ-almighty-god too.

There was a story going around when I first signed on that the Old Man had *really* spaced a driller once who

had pushed him too hard. No one knew for sure if the story was true or just an invention of Snyder's to keep us in line. In any case, it worked. None of us doubted that Snyder was capable of doing just that.

It was because of the Old Man's ways that I never became a full-timer on the *Wildcatter*. You had to be a hard case, or desperate, to put up with his crap, and I was neither. But Snyder paid well -- a lot better than any of the other spec ship owners. And I have to admit that his single-mindedness had made him the most successful independent in the business.

Snyder did have a few good points. His vessels were all spaceworthy. The crew quarters were warm and the life systems were doubly redundant. Even he understood that hungry, cold, or dead people don't work very hard.

Why did we do it? For most it was the money. A contract on the *Wildcatter* paid a 3% share of discovery, less expenses, to every man and woman in a crew of twenty. And it didn't matter if you were a pilot or a scrub-downer. That was better by tenths than the other independents offered. And like I said, the *Wildcatter* had a good record.

Hell, there were a handful of people around living damn fine after just one tour on board her. I'm talking about the crew who discovered that two ton nugget of molybdenum hiding in the Belt, of course. That was before I joined. In fact, it was during one ofCal's forced absences. I don't thinkCalever forgave Snyder for doing that to him.

Old Man Snyder could have cashed it all in then and been set for life. But he used the credits to outfit five more *Wildcatters* and went straight back out again. The stylized wildcat symbol on the hulls of Wildcatter Corporation ships were recognized throughout the System. I don't know if it was greed or escape that kept him out there. Generally, no one got a chance to ask him about it. He pretty much stayed to himself in his private module when we weren't on a work site.

Anyway, if landing on Hawking was your idea of lucky, *Wildcatter* earned her reputation for being at the right place at the right time this time out. Just a month earlier we'd come home dry after nearly a year of prospecting around Saturn. But I was convinced, and I had convinced Snyder, that the ay-eye had discovered a liquid biomass lurking beneath the sludge on Titan. He was determined to go back and have another look. The Ganymedean "oil" uncovered by the crew of the I.S. Exxon the year before had turned out to be a previously unknown hydrosilicon, and Exxon's labbies back at L5 were feverishly analyzing the implications.

The Old Man had guarded his own claim like a hungry mongrel. He ordered *Wildcatter IV* outfitted with armament and sent her out to stand guard. We had to station-keep out there for four months before she showed up to relieve us. All of us were bone tired and just plain sick of free-fall when we finally got home. But to a person, everyone signed on to ship back out as soon as *Wildcatter* could be refitted for drilling. None of us wanted to lose our stake on *that* find. So there we were, scrubbed, dry, and smiling, and about to set sail

from Konstantine for the Big Belted Beauty, when the Japanese survey data on Hawking came in.

Extra-solar in origin.
Anomalous lack of axial rotation.
Unusual heavy metal composition. Bore samples indicate hot central core surrounded by multiple accretion layers built up over extremely long interval.
Age between 10 and 13 billion years.
Tectonics of significant proportions, likely driven by extremely dense object at center surrounded by liquid mantle.
Probable candidate: Hawking singularity.
Hypothesis consistent with mass, size, gravitational and tidal effects, temperature, age, and interstellar origin.
Hypothesis inconsistent with stability of solid material surrounding object, and with apparent slow accumulation of accreted material.
No resolution at present.

There it was, a quantum black hole! A tiny -- and damn heavy -- cinder of nothing left over from the Original Fireworks. It was that Japanese survey report that gave Hawking its name.

The Old Man was on the bridge reviewing the prelaunch checklist when the news came in. McRae told us that he just stood there, eyes flicking back and forth across the infoscreen absorbing the report. His jowls were set; the cigar smoldered in his mouth; nothing showed on his face. He removed the cigar and stared at the ashes for a couple of seconds. Then he turned to McRae and said, "File a flight plan for Hawking," and left the bridge.

We all got pissed when we heard the news. A lot of ships and lots of crew-hours have been wasted nosing around the asteroid belt, hoping to find one of these microscopic buggers hiding there. No one knew for sure that they even *existed*, though the theorists had predicted them over seventy years ago. It wasn't just scientific curiosity that sent all those people on a snipe hunt though. If a quantum hole could be dragged back to earth orbit the Terries would have a power source that would allow them to air-condition the African Continent. There were even rumors that several countries were trying to *synthesize* one of the damn things.

But wasn't it just like Mama Nature to confirm the theories by grandstanding. Nothing for seventy years and then the Big Muthah of quantum holes comes by to say "hello" at 170 decibels. The problem was there was no way to slow down Hawking let alone to cart it off to Earth. The singularity itself, hiding in the middle of its spaceborne haystack, was probably only a centimeter or so in diameter. But it massed in at several billion trillion tons -- it weighed more than Mars -- and with the amount of momentum it packed, it could have dragged the Earth off into the wild void with it.

Still, I suppose something that old, that massive, and that had spent its lifetime wandering around the universe, might have picked up some interesting lint in its coat. None of the survey probes had been equipped for more than shallow surface samples. My belief then and now is that Snyder got obsessed with being the first one to find out if anything was hidden in its pockets. It's the only reason I can come up with to explain why he abandoned a certain gold mine for this risky, dangerous, and low-probability venture. Maybe he was a visionary, though we mostly thought he was just crazy. He certainly didn't make any points with the crew -- and he didn't start out with many in the bank.

So we got there. Not just the first ones but the only ones. None of the industrials could be redirected so quickly. None of the other spec ships were prepared. And no one had much time to act. Frankly, I'm not sure any other commercial rigs even gave a damn -- Hawking had been regarded pretty much as a scientific curiosity from the start.

Hawking had shown enough good manners to arrive more or less in-plane, so rendezvous was possible for a ship of our class. But the singularity wasn't staying around for long. It was hustling toward Sol on a hyperbolic, gathering speed as it fell, and there'd only be a few weeks at the outside when the surface temperature would be within *Wildcatter's* limits. We'd have just enough time to jump aboard, take a long sip with our straw, and get the hell out again.

Maybe someone could have caught up with it on the downhill side after perihelion, but apparently no one tried. The colony of Rockheads out in the Belt nearly took a direct hit on the outbound pass, but I figured most of them went scrambling for cover. A body of that mass, nudging the planets around like it did, made predicting its orbit a little dicey. I don't know of any other outfit but ours who had the combination of speed, maneuverability, tools, and just plain rotten luck of being in position to reach her. I was just hoping that Hawking wasn't filled with Confederate dollar bills.

We had the drilling site set up within six hours.

On the day of the accident, we'd been over the drill site for about a hundred hours. We had two teams working twelve hour shifts around the clock and the strain was just beginning to get to us. The tidal shear was making everyone dizzy, and the damned asteroid was earthquaking every few minutes. Not only were we stumbling around and bumping into one another, but *Wildcatter's* hull screeched and moaned constantly. We had a hell of a time concentrating.

The site was set up directly beneath the ship itself. We had the shield walls down to keep the sun out and the atmosphere in, which added claustrophobia to the rest of our problems. But at least that way we only wore insul-skin while we worked, which was a lot more pliable than the vacuum suits. I know it sounds like I'm rationalizing, but it wasn't the easiest assignment we had ever pulled.

The accident was Pat Talbot's fault, no question about that. I have to give her credit though; she never made

any excuses. She knew what she was doing, and she should have known better. Cal, McRae, Singh and all the rest had a dozen theories later to explain Pat's mistake. I have a few ideas of my own.

This was Pat's first tour on the *Wildcatter*. She had signed on with us at Konstantine Station, just after the news of Hawking came in. She had the credentials of an experienced tool dresser; Bartley had checked her out himself before he hired her on as his assistant. The Old Man had insisted on a second dresser on this crew because of the amount of drilling we would likely be facing.

No one else on board had ever met her before, though that was not especially unusual. She was reasonably good looking, in an unglamorous sort of way. None of us were much to look at, not while on tour. I guessed her age to be around forty. Her hair was mostly the color of ground coffee, though she had tipped the ends white in sort of a keyboard pattern. She wore it thick on top and cut close to her neck, like most spacer women did. Long hair tended to get in the way of things in freefall, and couldn't be kept neat anyway. Her looks were standard issue Anglo and no imbedded cosmetics.

I could tell that she had a nice body under her jump suit, and that became more important to me as we coasted sunward on our intercept ellipse. This was the first time we had shipped with only one female crew member in as long as I could remember. Space tours, like long business trips spent in hotel rooms, produced horniness exponentially. I've always believed it was something they put in the air conditioning.

Shipboard sexism died a hasty death when commercial space ops started, even if it is still breathing on Terra and her children. But body chemistry isn't suspended in space. I was hoping that Pat's air conditioning was having the same effect on her as mine was on me.

Pat seemed to be a pleasant person. She was friendly enough on duty and during lounge time, though I don't remember her talking about herself much. She spoke well. Although many of the crew had advanced degrees, education had been grafted onto her and had flourished. I relished having an intelligent conversation after listening to Bartley body-slam the language all day.

I hadn't had a chance to talk with her before we collided with Hawking and we had been busy as hell since. It wasn't until the night before the accident that I happened on her alone and not on duty. I'd come down to the galley several hours after the end of my shift to scrounge up some caffeine and carbohydrates. The galley was usually deserted at that hour; I liked having one meal a day in privacy.

Pat was sitting by herself at one of the tables, intently sorting through some stuff she had dumped out of a large plastic box; she didn't hear me come in. It was hard to hear anything over the constant grinding and screeching of *Wildcatter's* hull being assaulted by solar wind and tidal sheer. I spoke to her as I crossed over to the coffee dispenser.

"Hello," I said, trying not to startle her.

She turned toward me in sort of a twisting motion, shoulders first, head reluctantly following, and eyes finally dragged along. It looked like the upper body motion in a golf swing, and for exactly the same reason.

"Oh, hi," she said. "You're Clarence, um, Stroemann?"

She was being polite, though she clearly was preoccupied with what she had been doing.

"Mowboata," I said, "Clarence Mowboata. You're thinking of Nick Stroemann, the drill suction operator. I only do surveys."

She smiled at me and shifted the rest of the way around in my direction. I was encouraged.

"Glad to meet you -- again -- Clarence Mowboata." She got the pronunciation *and* the inflection exactly right, not many do that. I smiled appreciatively. Her eyes widened a little in acceptance. I came over to her table and leaned against the edge, facing her. I wanted to be close enough to detect any pupil dilation; it's important to read the signs early in this dance.

She offered her hand. "I'm Pat ..."

"Talbot," I finished. I shook her hand gently. "It was easier for me to keep you straight. What is it that keeps you so fascinated?" I gestured toward the odd assortment of rocks that were scattered on the table.

They were a jumble of shapes and sizes, all dull grey. Several were split in two or sheared at angles, and the exposed facets had an oily luster. A geologist's mallet and chisel lay nearby. Pat looked back at them, almost exactly reversing her earlier motion.

"Well ... I'm not sure exactly what these are. Hawking's nail clippings, I suppose."

"Hawking's ...?" My focus shifted to the rocks. I reached over and picked up one the size of a walnut. It was deceptively heavy.

"You picked these up here?"

She nodded and reached for one of the larger ones that had been cut.

"We drilled them out yesterday, actually. I found them in the effluent filter. They are each peculiar in their own way. I thought we might get some clues that the assay ay-eye missed."

I put down the first rock and she handed the second one to me. I turned it over and studied the cleft face. It was a deep steel grey and was sealed with a natural transparent glaze. It felt dry and smooth like the inside surface of a shell. There were some imperfections in the underlying grayness; small yellow beads of what looked like fused glass were imbedded at random. They were multifaceted little fullerenes, spheres made up of flat hexagonal planes -- like miniature soccer balls. Their color shifted in hue as I stared at them. There appeared to be some natural luminescence in the impurities. Crystalline sulfur compounds fused in

muscovite, most likely, with a few phosphors stirred in. An unusual specimen, but probably not very interesting if the ay-eye had ignored it. I said so and handed it back to her.

"Mmm," was her reply, then she said, "What do you know about quantum holes, naked singularities -- that sort of stuff?"

"Things my mother never told me," I said.

She didn't react.

"Sorry," I said. "I don't know much. We covered that in Cosmology 101, I think. But there was this cute undergrad named Phyllis who sat next to me in that class -- I was into the two body problem that semester. I saw the stuff that was on the vidpress just after Hawking was discovered."

She turned the stone over in her hand and stared at the face with the little yellow soccer balls.

"There's been a lot of speculation about them," she said. "Physical laws inside of one are totally different."

"Yeah, so I've heard," I replied. I was getting a little bored with this subject and there were only five hours left in my off-shift.

"Listen," I said, "I've been hoping I'd get a chance to meet you like this." I've always had success with the direct approach.

"And things can get out too," she said. She hadn't been listening.

"Out too, hum?" I said half-heartedly.

"Yes," she said. "A lot of people think stuff only falls *into* black holes -- like the rabbit hole in Alice in Wonderland. But with micro-holes like Hawking, the Mad Hatter can pack up his tea party and pay *us* a visit. Anything can come popping out of one -- our laws don't even make sense in there."

This wasn't going well. I tried another approach.

"Naked singularities, big bangs, black holes: cosmology uses a lot of sexual symbolism, doesn't it?"

At least she smiled a little when she answered. "I think you're pushing it a bit," she said.

"Come on, encourage me," I said. "Can't we find something friendlier to talk about than a wind of improbability that comes whistling up a rabbit hole?"

"*Very* impressive," she said. She paused a long time, and then she gave me this little impish look and said, "I suppose you've earned a change of topics -- in return for being so poetic."

This was going better. If only I hadn't said what I did next. I never did know when to quit.

"Besides, I think if those rocks were the keys to fantasyland, the ay-eye would have been the first to know."

Her pupils contracted.

"You keep bowing to that ay-eye," she said. "Which one has the artificial intelligence, you or that program?"

Shit! I thought. I knew I'd blown it and should try to recover. But that crack had pissed me off.

"That program is my *too*l," I said. "I underestimated it several times early on and it cost me dearly. Believe me, it knows what it is doing."

"It infers from its knowledge base," she said. "How can it be qualified to judge the unknowable? That's one of the few remaining conceits of human beings."

"It has *very* extensive knowledge. There is probably no human expert that could match its abilities in this field. I suppose that in the interest of being human I should ignore it and go back to my calculator."

"You aren't using it, you're *deferring* to it."

"I'll bet you're one of those 'no computers in grade school' fanatics, too," I said.

"As a matter of fact I *am*. I happen to think it's important for people to learn the *why* of things first, before they learn just *how* -- like automatons."

"If we all thought like you," I said, "we'd still be sharpening wooden sticks so we could hunt down dinner."

"Don't resort to outrageous statements," she snapped. "It makes you sound like you're grasping at straws."

She was right, I was, but I felt outraged.

"And what makes *you* an expert on geology, quantum holes and artificial intelligence?" I shot at her. "Aren't those hobbies a bit unusual for a tool dresser?"

"They're *not* hobbies," was all she said. She turned her eyes back toward those damn rocks and fell silent.

I realized what I had done and I felt foolish.

"Pat," I said, trying to sound apologetic.

Nothing.

"Uh, I was thinking of queuing up a movie in the lounge. Would you like to join me for Bogie, Bacall and buttered popcorn?"

She waved her hand a little in my direction. "No thanks," she said. She didn't look up. She started chiseling away at another of the stones.

I stood there for probably two minutes but she never seemed to notice me again. I had to hand it to her, the woman had concentration. I gave up and left.

An hour later, after I'd climbed into my bunk to get what sleep I could, I was still mentally replaying my

blunder.

Not hobbies?

Pat was dressing the drill casing as I slid down from the crew quarters next morning at change of shift. I called out a "Good Morning" to her but she couldn't hear me over the racket. Four solid days of boring with white-hot plasma had not made much of a dent in Hawking's coat. But it was beating the crap out of the drill.

In the early Wildcatting days on Earth, a steel drill was raised by winch up a tall wooden tower erected over the hole, and then released to let gravity slam it into the dirt. The crew just raised and dropped it, raised and dropped it, slowly digging a well to the oil. The process was time consuming and tedious, and drill bits wore out quickly. The tool dresser was the person who stood by with a sledge hammer when the drill was withdrawn from the bore hole. He'd examine the bit, and hammer the cutting edge back into shape when it got dull.

In space 'catting, a plasma gun had replaced the drill bit. The working end of the gun was surrounded by a double shelled foreskin made of a ceramic alloy. The inner shell provided a magnetic focal ring for the plasma stream, and the slag was carried away by suction between the inner and outer shells. The stuff we drilled through, and the energies we pumped, could distort the hell out of that foreskin.

The really expensive rigs had self-correcting nozzles. But like I said, this was a speculation ship, so we still carried our own tool dressers. On *Wildcatter* they were Cal and Pat, though they, like the rest of us, had several jobs on board. Their "sledge hammer" was a laser dressing tool -- sort of a miniature version of the plasma gun -- that they used to keep the nozzle trimmed and open. And in Texas or on Hawking, the tool dresser's first commandment was the same: never do any work over the hole. A gee is a gee, as they say, and the only thing that must go into a well is a drill.

Anyway, as I came down through the access port into the work area, I saw Pat break that commandment. Proper dressing of the gun required that it be partially disassembled so that it could be swung out and away from the hole. It's a lot of work, and a pain in the ass. I've seen a couple of dressers in my time take a shortcut and just slide the dressing tool out over the hole and underneath the plasma gun instead. That way they could get at the nozzle without taking the gun apart first. This is the first time I saw one not get away with it.

The dressing tool cart was balanced on its rear wheels at the edge of the four foot diameter drill hole. She had the rest of the cart suspended over the hole, front wheels dangling over a thousand feet of nothing. Pat had managed to partially cover the opposite edge of the hole with a slab of some heavy metal -- it looked like a short section of shield wall material -- and that provided just enough ledge to support the front lip of the cart. Pat stood on the slab like a shapely Atlas, legs spread wide straddling the hoses and lines, and was lasing the nozzle tip suspended directly over her head.

Calcame sliding down right behind me and when he saw what she was doing he was immediately pissed. He shouted at her in that booming voice he'd developed from years of working around noise. I saw her jerk her head down to look at him, and then she lost her balance. Instinctively she kicked off of the slab to keep from falling into the hole. The slab shifted, the cart tumbled, and *Wildcatter* lost an essential and irreplaceable tool down a 300 meter throat of rock.

All of us froze. Even Bartley was speechless. We stood there, not knowing what to say, staring like morons at that black, earthy mouth in the floor. Williams and Chan and several other members of the B-shift crew came on duty and as soon as they took in what had happened, they stopped their early morning chatter. All of us had been around rigs long enough to understand what this meant.

Finally the Old Man slid down to start his change of shift inspection. It took him only seconds to understand and he was the first one to break the silence.

"Get it out," he grunted. That was all. He didn't even glance at Pat. No frowns, no recriminations. Just that short command directed to all of us and then he turned and disappeared back up the ladder.

We all jumped as if we'd been goosed. We knew we were in trouble. McRae had computed that we had a week, maybe two at the outside, before Hawking's velocity carried us too close to the sun for us to stay. After our first day of drilling we'd known it was going to be tight, since whatever Hawking was made of was not intimidated by our plasma drill.

The boring of the hole had been going very slowly, and we had to dress the tool much more frequently than usual. Our chances of tapping into Hawking's veins before the sun turned us into prune juice weren't very good. Now we had two new problems: a plugged well and an unreachable tool. There was no time to start a new well and no way to get very far without a dressing tool. We had to retrieve it, and in working order, or we might just as well lift off right then -- which seemed like a better choice to most of us.

Everyone pitched in. Both crews stayed on the rest of the shift and more members of second shift came on early as word of what had happened reached them. We spent the first hour or so puzzling about ways to get at the cart. Of course, the first thing we tried was pulling it back up by its long power cable that trailed up from the well and tied into the primary power source in the ship. But a little tugging there and we knew that was hopeless. The cart had managed to wedge itself tight in the rough throat of the well andCalinsisted we leave the power cord alone. He was worried that we'd damage the tool beyond repair if the cable ripped out its guts, so we dropped that idea.

We spent most of the first day lowering hooks on long chains but couldn't get them to engage anything that gave us much support. We hooked the cart handle first and immediately yanked it off of the cart. Murphy had been working overtime against us. Not only had the cart lodged upside down, wheel and flat base upward, but when Pat jumped off, the metal slab had shifted and fallen down there as well. It had wedged itself obliquely

over the cart and there just wasn't much exposed that we could get a hook around. We wasted a lot of hours with those damned hooks before we finally realized they just weren't going to work.

The Old Man came down again at the end of the shift. He didn't say a word to us after that first time. He just walked past us to the hole, cigar smoldering in his mouth, and shaded his eyes to look down past the flood lights we'd rigged over it. He saw we weren't getting anywhere so he turned away and went back up to his cabin.

We went at it like that for three days: experimenting, huddling in twos and threes for ideas, sketching out and discarding all sorts of Rube Goldberg contraptions. Every member of the crew was giving it their full attention -- Pat most of all. I'm sure she must have gotten some sleep but she was down there every time I came onto the site, and she was always there after I left. And I put in a *lot* of hours.

Somewhere along the way, the mood of the crew shifted too. Getting at that friggin' dressing tool became a team goal now and you could sense the feeling of shared responsibility and participation growing every hour that we worked at it. Everyone chipped in an idea and I don't recall that anyone's opinion was dismissed out of hand by the rest of us. Someone would suggest an approach and we'd all stand around sounding it out, weighing its chances, and sometimes giving it a try. Then, as each attempt failed, we all regrouped and brainstormed some more.

Many times now when I think back on that week I spent on Hawking I feel that, in some ways, it was the most enjoyable tour I've served. Some close relationships were cemented there; people who before had been no more than co-workers have become friends I still value, and attend to, to this day. Several other members of that crew have expressed the same feelings to me since.

In the end though it was Pat who came up with the answer. Early on that fourth day someone, it may have been Nick Stroemann, the suction operator from Crew One, had rigged up a makeshift electromagnet. We all got excited about this idea, and worked like hell getting it suspended from a pulley and lowered into the well. It worked great too, except it couldn't budge the damn slab, and we couldn't angle it around the slab to slap it onto the tool housing. We fished all over that well with the magnet, guiding it remotely using the fiber optics monitor that we'd lowered down there the third day, but it just wasn't going to work.

Everyone was feeling pretty low by then. It was like being stopped on the five yard line with time running out.

Then Pat shouted, "I've got an idea!", and all of us dropped dead silent and looked at her. It was the most animated I had seen her since the accident. I'll always remember that glow on her face as she beamed back at us.

"Pull the magnet back out of there," she said, "and let's turn on the dresser."

We just looked at one another, not understanding what she meant to do. But she turned off the magnet's

power switch that Stroemann had rigged, and that dangled from a cantilever near the nozzle of plasma drill. Stroemann grabbed the chain that snaked over the pulley and pulled the magnet out of the pit. Pat saw it come clear and then turned toward the monitor screen. She slowly returned power to the dresser tool. As soon as the orange pencil of pure energy appeared, I understood what she was doing. The tool's barrel was pointed generally up the well in the direction of the metal slab. The beam flecked over one corner of the plate and we saw it shift color, bubble, and then vaporize.

I grabbed one of the grappling hooks and shouted at Pat to switch off the dresser. She did and I lowered the hook back down the hole and then swung it and jiggled it past the newly cut gap in the slab. I fished for the dresser tool, guiding it by the monitor screen, and saw the hook loop around one of the legs of the cart.

"You can't pull it up with that," Williams shouted at me. But I just shook my head and gave a few tugs on the chain. After a couple of tries, I managed to rotate the dresser a few degrees so that the beam's aim was shifted. Pat saw what I was up to and she flipped on the power again. Another section of slab melted away.

I heard a cheer and looked up to see that everyone was standing around us now. Their eyes were jumping back and forth from the monitor to the hole as Pat and I ran off our final series of downs. I twisted the tool a little further; she powered it on and burned away more of the blockage. Once she burned through the chain holding the hook and I tumbled backward as it snapped free. There was a bit of snickering as I landed on my ass. We had the end in sight now and the mood had improved considerably.

Before I could stand up Chan Singh had already lowered another hook into place and was signaling for Pat to turn on the power. I stood back, unceremoniously thrust into the role of spectator, and grinned. I saw movement to one side of me and saw that the Old Man had slipped into the work area unnoticed. He was standing silently, arms hanging loose at his sides and a thin streamer of white smoke was ascending from the tip of his cigar.

I heard Pat shout, "I got it!", and everyone except the Old Man let out another cheer. With no words between them Chan jerked the hook back out of the hole and Stroemann powered up the electromagnet. He lowered it hand over hand until we all heard the *snap* as it kissed the metal slab -- now sundered. Stroemann tugged and we could hear and see the section of slab break free from the wall of the well. Stroemann wheeled up the cable and the jagged fragment appeared at the lip of the hole. Several hands reached out to grab it.

Another cheer -- we could all sense touchdown now. The magnet dropped out of sight again and the other section of slab was free. Pat called for Chan to lower the hook onto the cart and he did, snagging it easily the first time. I grabbed another hook and lowered it from the opposite side of the hole. Chan and I stood there like ice fishermen, with a catch too big to lose and too heavy to reel in. Then Stroemann dropped the magnet so that it *snicked* onto the dresser cart. The three of us began to pull slowly, and very carefully, and the cart shifted in the monitor. Several others grabbed one or the other of our chains and we all tugged together.

Someone began to chant, "Go, go, go," and we all joined in.

Finally, and grudgingly, Hawking's throat disgorged its unwelcome lodger. Pandemonium broke loose. People were clapping, cheering, crying all at once. I hugged Chan and Stroemann and I guess just about everyone else in the crew. You would have thought we had just won the Super Bowl. We all went crazy and Pat just stood off to the side with a big grin on her face and tears streaming down her cheeks.

The Old Man let us carry on like that for maybe a couple of minutes and then he slowly worked his way through the circle of bodies and stood near the edge of the hole. As soon as we became aware of him standing there we quieted down. In a minute we were standing around with stupid grins on our faces, holding our breath and waiting to see what the Old Man would say.

He reached out and lightly touched the dresser cart, still hanging like a misshapen fruit from the end of the electromagnet. With a sudden chill I realized that no one had thought to get it down from over the hole. I saw a couple of heads jerk and I knew that thought was belatedly making the rounds. But with Snyder standing there none of us were too anxious to move. He looked at each of us one at a time, meeting each pair of eyes, challenging us. Then he turned to Pat.

"Talbot," he said, staring at her, "come here."

Pat looked at him uncertainly and hesitated. She let the smile melt from her mouth and she wiped at her cheeks with the back of her hand. I saw her tense as she crossed the space to where the Old Man waited. When she was next to him he said nothing at first, just continued to look at her through that wispy veil that rose from his cigar. When he finally spoke it was almost a whisper.

"Look at this dressing tool, Talbot. Take a good look. Do you see what your carelessness has caused?"

He raised his hand and touched the edge of the cart. "I want you to have this dresser, Talbot. I'll make it a gift to you as soon as we are finished here. You keep it as a souvenir, a reminder of your incompetence."

Pat was glassy-eyed now. She said nothing and didn't move.

"Because, Talbot," the Old Man continued, "you will get nothing else from me for this job. You are fired. If you can afford to pay, I'll sell you passage back to Konstantine. If not, find your own way back. And I promise you this. You will never work for this or any other outfit again."

The rest of us were dumfounded, unbelieving. The camaraderie had changed to outrage. I looked at Pat, searching for a reaction. But she stood staring at the Old Man soundlessly.

And then in a single motion that must have taken seconds but seemed endless, she raised her right hand to the power switch for the electromagnet. Her fingers lingered there for a moment, and she said just two words.

"Fuck you."

She turned off the power. I watched the dresser cart plunge out of sight down the well and I heard a gut-churning crunch.

Snyder's cigar dropped from his mouth and followed the cart. I'd never seen a look like that on his face before. He was catatonic. Pat turned away from him and walked away.

Her movement seemed to shake Snyder from his trance. He became aware that all of us were staring at him; his eyes narrowed and he glared at us in turn. Then he looked at Pat, who'd reached the bottom of the ladder. He started to say something, hesitated, and turned toward me instead.

"Mowboata, you're in charge of getting that dresser tool back," he snapped. "I want it out by end of shift."

He turned to go after Pat.

"No," I said quietly. There was a gasp from several members of the work crew. Pat was nearly up the ladder now and I saw her glance back at me when I spoke.

Snyder was frozen where he stood. He looked at me, uncomprehending, as though he was witnessing a breakdown in natural law. A member of *his crew* had refused an order. I shied from the open fury of his stare, turned my back and walked away from him. Behind me I heard the sound of tools being dropped, and of shuffling feet, but not even a faint murmur of a human voice. I folded my arms across my chest and turned again to face him. I found that nearly half the crew had joined me. The others were standing immobilized like statues, as though some slight movement might shatter the fragile shell of restraint and invite destruction down on all of us.

Snyder's eyes glazed over. Every filament of muscle in his neck, face and arms was stretched tight like a cobra ready to strike. His fists were balled into hammers and his chest was rising and falling with shallow breaths. We were transfixed in a tableau that could explode in an instant.

It was Pat who released us. She started climbing again and disappeared up through the access hatch. Snyder saw the movement and turned toward the ladder. He looked back in my direction once, and there was loathing in his face. Then he scrambled up the ladder and left us alone.

We stood around looking at each other for a while, making nervous noises. I had a gut-twisting like I'd just been told I had days to live -- which might not have been too far wrong. I had to get away from the work site; I decided to go after Pat. She wasn't in her cabin when I got there.

An hour later the word came down from the OldMan.

"Stow up and lift off."

We did. It took several hours to stow and I spent as much time as I could searching for Pat. Williams said he thought Snyder had summoned her to his cabin. No one had seen her since.

I went back to her cabin just before lift off and it had been emptied out, though a few personal belongings were still there. She'd apparently taken her strange rocks with her too. I couldn't find them and no one on the crew even knew what I was talking about when I asked around. Singh had thought to check the lifeboats and sure enough one was missing. One of the dinghies could hold three people and they were designed for a few weeks survival at most. Being alone and conserving her supplies Pat could stretch that quite a bit, but it wouldn't do her much good. The boats didn't have enough delta-vee to escape from Hawking and they sure couldn't withstand being this close to the Sun for very long. I felt sick and mostly stayed in my cabin until we lifted off.

Two hours later we were burning away from Hawking. It disappeared toward Sol with Pat Talbot astride it and with its mysteries intact. We had scooped out a couple of tons of its surface, which would no doubt be of interest to the scientists. But the Science Salvage Act guaranteed the *Wildcatter* crew would get little financial reward for that. The venture had been a bust for the Old Man -- and none of us were losing any tears for him. Snyder never mentioned his missing assistant tool dresser again.

That was the last time I served on a Snyder ship. When we got back to Konstantine the Old Man fired most of us and more than half of the rest resigned. I had a hell of a time getting work on any of the other spec ships for a long time afterwards. The Old Man saw to that. It took Snyder almost a month to sign a fresh crew. It turned out his find on Titan was the biggest one yet, but I never regretted losing my share.

That was nearly five years ago, and for a long time I couldn't think about Pat Talbot without hurting. But I thought it was over, until yesterday.

Yesterday I got an anonymous packet in my e-mail. The packet was composed of three linked files and there was no note or other explanation attached. It'd been netted to me from somewhere here on Konstantine Station and the sender's I.D. had been deleted.

The first file was a clipping extracted from one of the on-line weekly news publications. It was dated almost a year ago.

> *Tel Aviv 09/22/48 (UPI): Scientists at Israel's Ben Gurion Institute announced today that, after several years of research, they have successfully synthesized a quantum black hole ... Institute Director Dr. Mohinder Chopra stated that the breakthrough had come as a result of unexpected recent discoveries about the properties of these mysterious microscopic objects.*
>
> *In a related development, U.S. Senator Gary Smith (R. Texas) today called for immediate international sanctions against Israel. "Tel Aviv's attempt to monopolize the technology of the quantum black hole must be thwarted," Senator Smith was quoted as saying. "There can be little doubt that this 'breakthrough' came as a result of illegal acquisition of discoveries from one of the*

independent speculator ships, yet another example of Israel's open disregard for the Science Salvage Act."

The second file was a prospectus for Wolfman Discoveries, Inc., a privately held trading corporation based inGenevathat had been formed two years ago. The company's business seemed to be derived from an exclusive, and classified, contract with Ben Gurion Institute. The company's officers were not identified. The prospectus included a formal offering allowing me to buy shares in the company.

The third file was a high resolution visual image. It was a photograph extracted from an old magazine, maybe National Geographic. It was a picture of a dead animal, its leg crushed in a steel vice trap, its body horribly mutilated. The animal was one of those cats that used to roam theU.S.western plains -- a puma or cougar. A wildcat.

Jesus, she's alive! Somehow, impossibly, she made it back and she's coming after the Old Man. I don't how she did it, or why she's decided to let me in on this, but I'm not fool enough to bet against her again.

Today I sold my condo and bought ten thousand shares of Wolfman.

Jack Clemons has a Masters in aerospace engineering and spent most of his working career on the Apollo Moon Program and NASA's Space Shuttle Program. He has appeared on the Science Channel in the series "Moon Machines" and has written and made numerous presentations on the space program, on the importance of systems engineering (for non-engineering audiences), and on leadership.

Amazing Stories and the Future

Amazing Stories is now entering its third resurrection. The future success and continued existence of the *World's First Science Fiction Magazine !* is largely dependent upon community interest and support. The more active readers, visitors and registered users there are, the more likely this effort is to attract serious investors.

You can help by visiting the website, visiting the blog and registering, visiting the Facebook page and 'liking' and by letting your friends and fellow fans know about us.

CHAINMAIL, A ROUND-ROBIN INTERVIEW WITH THIRTEEN MEMBERS OF THE BOOK VIEW CAFE

An Introduction to Chain Mail

When Sue Lange (BVC) and I put our heads together to try and come up with something interesting, timely, fun AND do-able, we ultimately ended up with something interesting, timely, mostly fun and almost do-able. How much so I'll leave to the reader to decide.

Sue played the dual roles of enthusiastic supporter and willing cat herder. The results, or lack thereof, are all my fault. My intentions were inspired by my desire to work with all of Book View Cafe's wide-ranging talent, to get to know them a bit and in turn to hopefully get them excited about the impending return of Amazing.

I also consciously modeled the format after SFSignal's Roundtable discussions, an interview series I have had the privilege of participating in on a number of occasions. (They are up for ***two*** Hugo Awards this year!) But I also had hopes of *modifying* the format.

I wanted to see some interaction between the various participants. I hoped to bring a bit of the give and take that one experiences while viewing a panel at a convention and maybe take advantage of the one skill every author is well versed in: the ability to take an idea and ***play***.

The concept was pretty simple: give each author their own question to answer and then have them forward the question and their response along to the next author in line. A game of Telephone via email.

It sounded pretty good when I started out with six authors. By the time we reached 14, I had my fingers crossed.

Nevertheless, Sue persevered, reassuring me that everyone remained on board, happy and engaged. (Author Like Happy!). I don't know how much of that was reality, wishful thinking or Sue's dedication to her mission with the Book View Cafe, but I would like to take this moment to thank her.

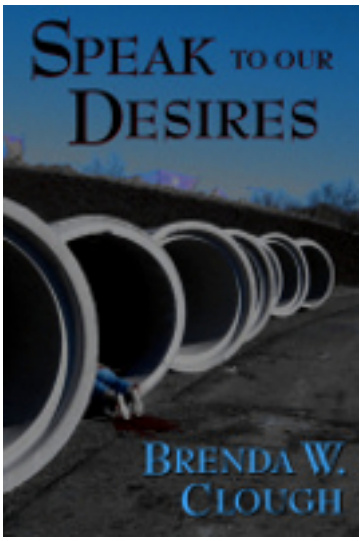
Ultimately we all got through it. In future, I intend to try this format again, but I think we'll stick to no more than half a dozen participants at any one time.

I'd like to thank everyone involved. I think we ended up with some interesting results and even managed to get a bit of a vibe going. I hope you will agree.

(Ed. Note: The author and book images are active links; author images link to biographical information, while publication images link to blurbs, blogs and backgrounds on the imaged material. Please take a moment or two to check them out. For additional information about the participants, please visit the Contributors Page.)

Amazing Stories: **Is science fiction definable? If so, what is your definition?**

BRENDA CLOUGH

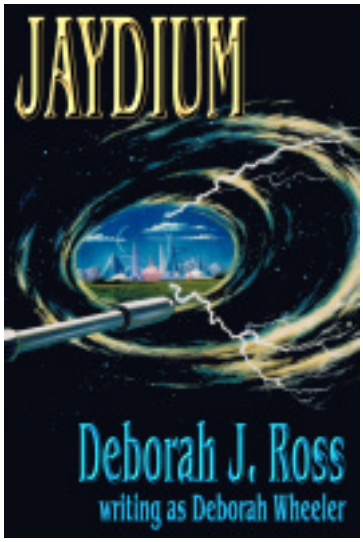


Well, if you think about it in evolutionary-tree form, SF is obviously a subset of fiction, which is a branch of fantasy — all fiction is to a greater or lesser extent fantasy. (And written fiction sits with written poetry, essays, and nonfiction in the great clade of Literature, which joins up to the big main trunk of Art — we can wave over the gap at our fellow creators in Quilting or Headbanger Punkadelic or Classical Ballet.)

Does SF have to include technology and the impact of technology? This seems to exclude things like DUNE by Frank Herbert, which would never do.

I kind of incline towards a wider definition that involves societal change, often driven by technology. This makes SF the primary way to experiment with 'what if' scenarios, and would allow us to include 1984 by George Orwell. A case could be made that SF is mostly a marketing definition. This would allow for why THE HANDMAID'S TALE by Margaret Atwood was not sold as SF even though it exactly meets the definition. If you go this route, then anything with a cover depicting space ships, aliens/planets, or a raygun can count as SF.

DEBORAH J. ROSS

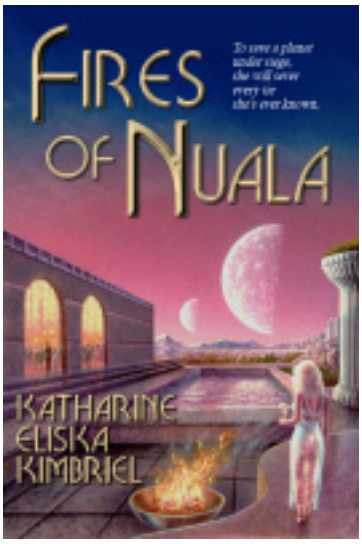


What defines science fiction is more than the presence of certain elements -- rockets and rayguns and robots, oh my. It has to do with the handling of those elements, of ideas and "what-ifs."

For example, Audrey Niffeneger's *THE TIME TRAVELER'S WIFE* does not feel like science fiction to me. Externally, it fits the category, but it fails to explore the implications of its central idea; in essence, it's a narrowly intimate story that exists in a vacuum.

In film media, *STAR WARS*, for all its robots and starships, offers the sensibilities of a Western, but *STAR TREK* constantly plays with ideas and their human implications.

KATHARINE ELISKA KIMBRIEL



Yes, I think so. The best science fiction contains a sense of wonder, and the question "What If?" Occasionally you will see a science fictional story that leans heavily on one of these goal posts. *STAR WARS*, for example, is strongly in the Sense of Wonder camp. A "What If" movie might be *12 MONKEYS*, which while bleak is definitely asking a lot of "What If?" questions. I think that *BLADERUNNER* contains both these narrative and thematic goals. Authors do not always write the same way for each idea they explore. They may choose to lean more heavily in one camp or another -- or movie interpretations may change the emphasis of a story. Is the story *TOTAL RECALL* is based on as heavily in the "What If?" camp as the movie? Where do we put concepts like *X-FILES*?

My first SF novel, *FIRE SANCTUARY*, was born from two "What if?" inspirations. First the famous photos of the huge vegetables produced in fields near where the atomic bombs were dropped, and then a small article I read about wiring a bone break to a battery to speed healing. In my mind, two questions formed -- "What if things could not only survive, but thrive in radiation?" and "What if the myth of the healing hands of a ruler were true?" The culture of Nuala was born.

I started with "What If?" but before I was through, I tried to give that world some of the awe and grandeur the best SF has always held.

PHYLLIS IRENE RADFORD

Years ago Science Fiction needed to have science as the core of the plot. Or what we now call hard SF. I'm thinking of Syne Mitchell's work about gene therapy becoming a god send and pandemic nightmare. Futuristic stories with telepathy were considered just fantasy--telepathy was classed as wishful thinking, and therefore fantasy, no science involved. *STAR WARS* and *STAR TREK* are fantasy because they are character driven stories about future societies. The science of warp drive and transporters were gimmicks and not part of the plot. Except when they broke. Even then the stories were about coping and working together to find a solution.

Life changes, business models change, publishing changes. As far as publishing is concerned what I said this morning may be obsolete by sun down. However, in the last ten years we've seen a lot of blending around the borders of all the genres, paranormal romance, futuristic mysteries, historical sciences. All the definitions have become blurred. Every genre seems to spin off more and more subgenres. Brenda's analogy of a tree branching off into a multitude of twigs is apt. SF has become an entire shrub of its own.

VONDA N. MCINTYRE

SF is a branch of fiction in which the author explores possibilities impossible in real life, but possible in another place or time, or with advances in knowledge or technology. Early SF was mostly about ideas; now a good deal of it is about how the ideas, changes, new technology affect the story's characters.

JUDITH TARR

SF is what I'm pointing to when I say it.

I tend to see it as occurring in the future; if it occurs in the past, it probably got there by time machine, and/or the technology is at least as advanced as our own (but see below). It asks "What if?" and then takes a scientific approach to the answer: based on the scientific method, even if the science is not actually possible or even probable as we currently know it (FTL drives, anyone?).

I tend to see *STAR* TREK and *STAR WARS* as SF because of the space travel and the aliens and the reliance on a high level of technology. Saying they're fantasy because they're about people implies that SF isn't, and that's not how I see it.

I see *DUNE* as SF because [a] future, [b] space travel, [c] alien planets. The technology has branched 'way off our contemporary view of it, but it's definitely there, from stillsuits to Mentats to starships. It's well on its way toward Clarke's Law: "Any technology, if sufficiently advanced, may be indisitinguishable from magic."

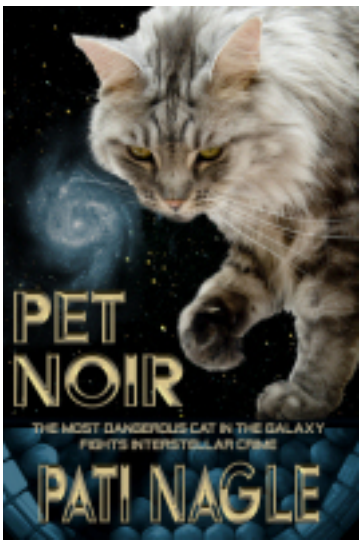
For that matter do I see McCaffrey's *PERN* as SF? Actually I do. Alien planet again. The fact the inhabitants are at a feudaloid level of technology doesn't remove the fact that the dragons are genetically engineered and the riders are human colonists. And they're fighting alien invaders. Using psi and time travel. All dearly beloved SF tropes.

But then I wrote human mutants in a slightly alternate Middle Ages and got labeled Fantasy because [a] female writer, [b] Middle Ages, and [c] terminology of the time labeled them "elves." Which they are actually not. My thinking and worldbuilding were based on contemporary science and the SF I had read all my life. The "magic" was psi, which I was reading in what then was considered SF, from such titles as *PSI HIGH* and Joan Vinge's *PSION* to the likes of **DARKOVER** and, yes, **DUNE**.

THE TIME TRAVELER'S WIFE? Fantasy. No explanation for the McGuffin, it's just there. It's magical "realism," similar in inspiration to *THE CURIOUS CASE OF BENJAMIN BUTTON*.

Because I'm pointing to it and that's what I'm saying.

PATI NAGLE



Science fiction is always changing, hence pinning a definition to it is difficult. When I was a kid, SF seemed to be about adventure, exploration, and the aforementioned "sense of wonder." The genre has moved away from that in recent decades, and I think that's a loss. In the 60s, SF and the space program together inspired a lot of kids to seek careers in science. They desired to make real the imaginings of writers they enjoyed. I'd love to see that enthusiasm return.

Brenda and Phyllis both alluded to "hard" science fiction, in which technology itself is centrally important, as compared with "soft" science fiction, which I tend to think of as more about the social implications of technology. There are also the subgenres (cyberpunk, new wave, steampunk), some of which flower briefly and fade, others of which become accepted branches of the tree in Brenda's analogy.

For the future, I think it important that science fiction writers should remain welcoming. By that I mean that they should write for new readers as well as for long-time fans of the genre. If we stop talking to anyone but ourselves, our impact will decrease to near zero.Passes.

DAVE TROWBRIDGE

Science fiction is easy to define. The hard part is getting someone else to agree with you.

As George S. Kaufman said, *"One man's Mede is another man's Persian."*

The *EXORDIUM* space opera Sherwood Smith and I wrote has been enthusiastically accepted as science fiction by a community of military gamers, despite the occurrence of a frank miracle —no midi-chlorians or other hand-waving— that makes it fantasy as far as a Quaker friend of mine is concerned. On the other hand, I've never thought of Ray Bradbury as a science fiction writer—for me, he doesn't scratch the same itch that SF does.

The nice thing is that such genre definitions are becoming less important as the Internet progressively reduces the friction built into publishing by the need to push physical objects around. The ongoing virtualization of the written word is churning publishing up into a kind of quantum froth that buds off new subgenres with fissiparous abandon. That same lack of friction makes it easier for readers to find science fiction—or any other genre—that scratches a particular itch, and thus for communities to form around new genres, and in the process define them.

SUE LANGE

For me, science fiction is a story set in a fantastic, yet plausible place. Someplace that doesn't currently exist or that we haven't found but could, because constructing it follows known laws of physics. It could be our future on earth, our future in space, an alien specie's present, a past that we knew nothing about. Although some science fiction does incorporate elements of magic, It does not rely on magic alone to create the fantasy.

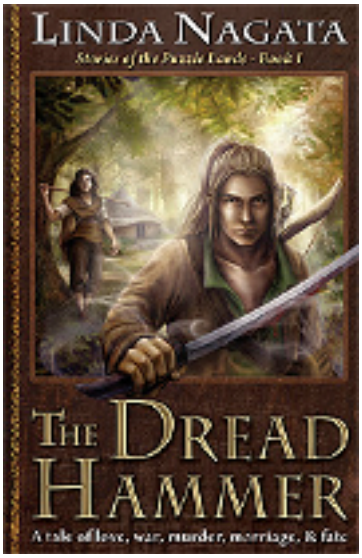
So now I have to define magic to make this definition stick. Magic is a plot device used to create a fantastic scenario that does not need to rely on physical laws.

You could make the case that FTL is at present a magical element. I think, though, using FTL in a story that the author defines as science fiction is legal because the assumption is we will discover a method for FTL in the future. This may turn out to not be true, but I believe the science fiction author that, with a straight face includes FTL in her story and demands that we take it seriously, truly believes FTL will one day be a possibility.

There is no requirement for magic to pass a physics test. The proof (or would that be poof?) is in the pudding. The spell is cast, the prince turns into a frog. There's no description of the spell to let those who follow repeat the
experiment. It's not necessary. It's magic.Fantasy stories that are based on magic rather than science have their own rules to follow, but they aren't physical laws.

Therein lies the difference between fantasy and science fiction. Therein lies my definition.

LINDA NAGATA



Is science fiction definable?

I suppose so, if you like a good argument. It seems to me that the definition changes depending on the era, the books being discussed, and the outlook of individuals, but here's a very general definition:

stories with a speculative element that is attributed to technology, not magic. I'm sure exceptions abound, but for me, that's a good starting place.

JENNIFER STEVENSON

In my view, science fiction is a state of mind, an opinion about the world, a religious view, if you want to be provocative--and science fiction prides itself on being provocative, though it likes to think it is the antithesis of religion. I trace its origins to the argument which Roger Bacon made in favor of science. Bacon's environment was not friendly to science, a term which was in his day interchangeable with magic, and magicians were getting burnt up pretty regularly. Bacon was one of the first to try to differentiate science from magic. A founder of the spirit of science, he used Bill Murray's argument in Ghostbusters: "Back off, man, I'm a scientist."

In science's defense, Bacon argued that magic meddles in things man shouldn't oughta wanna wot of. Science deals with nature, which is beneath man, who is beneath God. According to that hierarchy, man might do what he pleased with nature. "I am come in very truth to leading to you Nature with all her children to bind her to your service and make her your slave."

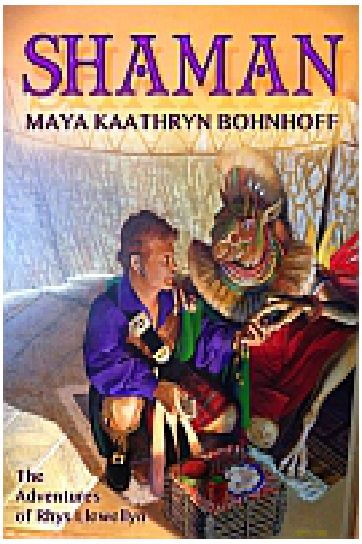
Science and technology don't "merely exert a gentle guidance over nature's course; they have the power to conquer and subdue her, to shake her to her foundations."

Leaving the gender implications out of this discussion, I find here the forceful energy, the expansive survey of all creation as an inviting frontier, and the spirits of conquest and progress which make science fiction what it is. Science fiction is an attitude toward the world; it describes a relationship with nature.

I find that science fiction has evolved around, but never far away from, this core argument of Bacon's. Some authors dispute it, others subvert it, but Bacon is the primary. All later writers are his satellites.

I'm greatly indebted to Evelyn Fox Keller for her remarks on Bacon in "Baconian Science: The arts of mastery and obedience."

MAYA KAATHRYN BOHNHOFF



Critic Lee Mortimer once defined science fiction as: A genre of escape literature which takes the reader to faraway planets -- and usually neglects to bring him back.

As a writer of SF, I reject the idea that it's escapist. I've taken Ray Bradbury's words on the subject (which seem a direct rebuttal of Mortimer's position) very much to heart:

"....the entire history of mankind is problem solving, or science fiction swallowing ideas, digesting them and excreting formulas for survival. You can't have one without the other. No fantasy, no reality. No studies concerning loss, no gain. No imagination, no will. No impossible dreams: No possible solutions.
"...Fantasy, and its robot child science fiction, is not escape at all. But a circling round of reality to enchant it and make it behave....
'... All science fiction is an attempt to solve problems by pretending to look the other way."

Science fiction may be fantasy's "robot child", it is really about making reality behave by merely pretending to look the other way.

CHRIS DOLLEY

Science Fiction is Fiction with all the dials turned up to eleven.

Amazing Stories: Is Science Fiction Dying?

DEBORAH J ROSS

I read this question in three different ways.
One, have we run out of sfnal ideas and writers to turn them into stories?

Two, is it so unprofitable to publish sf that the genre is headed for extinction?
Three, are readers no longer interested in sf? Here is my own very brief answer to the first.

We have not run out of ideas, enthusiasm, or writers. In its history, science fiction received two enormous boosts. The first came at the end of the 19th Century, with the Victorian era explosion of technology and scientific discovery. This was the era that gave us Jules Verne and H. G. Wells, and the next generations of writers. It also continues to generate tales of mechanical genius, romance, and adventure through the current steampunk genre, which hearkens back to the time when technology was understandable by the ordinary person.
The second boost came with the space race of the mid-20th Century and the focus on science education, plus the coupling of astronomy, post World War II pyrotechnics, and old-fashioned derring-do. Then came a period of disenchantment with technology and with science itself; when invention created more problems than it solved, the future no longer looked so shiny. I hope the pendulum has begun to swing the other way now. Although the frenzied pace of manned space exploration has moderated, today's crop of space telescopes (Hubble, Chandra, Kepler, and others) bring us the universe as we have never before seen it, so I hope there will be no lack of inspiration in astronomy, biology, chemistry, geology, oceanography, computers... and therefore, no dearth of great science fiction story ideas.

KATHARINE ELISKA KIMBRIEL

Many thanks for a concise intro, Deborah!

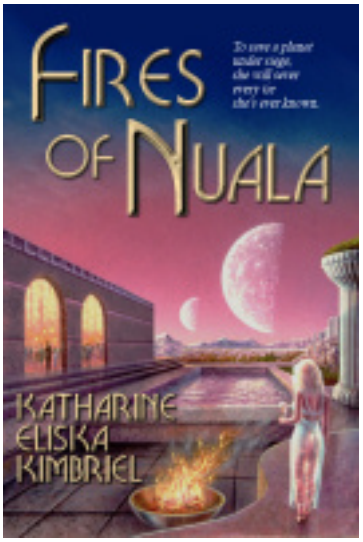
Taking up your breakdown of three parts to this question, I must agree that we have not run out of ideas, interest or writers to take up the banner of SF.

SF has two forms, really — Buck Rogers and Frankenstein. We are still in a period of "Gee Wow!" SF, where the majority of readers and viewers of SF want breathtaking entertainment and joyful escapism. But this does not mean that there isn't a large audience for thoughtful, probing questions about everything from social engineering to a future controlled by corporations. For every Star Wars, there is a District 9.

The books and movies that survive time generally have more than special effects to recommend them.

I do think that some of the Golden Age writers are correct when they say that SF has won the battle of acceptance — in fact, it may be the most popular form of mass entertainment today. But the form that stands out is in visual content — movies, games, television — while the seeds of these forms are found under many subheadings of written SF. Some of those labels are not even called SF.

The other major aspect of SF — If this goes on — is currently a smaller piece of the SF pie. But it's still there. A lot of things in the world are downright terrifying to contemplate, and many people don't want to face those issues head on. But those questioning books will be read and digested by many folk. Some of those readers will write broader-based tales that convey important ideas to a larger audience, and others will go out and begin chipping away at the those problems.



I think that is part of SF's universal appeal — you have a problem. How will humans solve that problem? Their curiosity and ability to survive in extreme situations is what makes SF such a malleable platform. SF is big bucks, for Hollywood and for publishing. It lives!

PHYLLIS IRENE RADFORD

In recent years some ultra conservatives have given science a bad name. Scientific fact has to be wrong if it contradicts faith based interpretation. So, Science Fiction has gone semi-underground and is now masquerading as thrillers that routinely hit the best-seller lists.

The sensawonder, the awe, the "what if" factor that gets you thinking of alternatives is still there. Projecting a scenario forward to demonstrate consequences is still an important storytelling tool. The projection may be as simple as the consequences of extended home-schooling by parents who can barely read themselves, or as complicated as the genetic modification of tomatoes, or gene therapy spiraling out of control. The story may be character driven space opera that retells old morality plays in a fun setting.

It is a part of us and will remain no matter what disguise we put on it.

This denial fad will pass and something else will become the forbidden genre. Then Science Fiction will surge forward with new ideas, new what ifs, and new sensawonder.

VONDA N. MCINTYRE

Every genre goes through booms and busts. I think SF will always be around, even if sometimes it masquerades as not-SF, or if the author engages in (understandable, alas) the marketing technique of claiming their clearly SF work isn't SF at all, at all.

I look on SF as, among other things, a way to explore what might be, what might happen, how changes in culture, science, technology might affect people. I don't pretend to predict, though when one's ideas occur in the real world, it's amusing. But I do speculate, and SF gives me a much wider field for speculation than realistic fiction ever could.

JUDITH TARR

Depends on what you mean when you say "SF." Rockets and robots? Mostly outdated, along with computers the size of railroad cars (that weren't nearly as powerful as the cell phone in your pocket). Space opera? It comes and goes.

My agent says it's mostly moribund on Publishers' Row, but my readers and colleagues still love and want more of it. Speculative fiction in its full range, from alternate history to the Singularity? Alive, well, and kicking in film, on television, and in the written word.

I think the new publishing landscape may be good for SF. There's room for the smaller work and the edgier

idea, as well as for the big sprawling epic like Smith and Trowbridge's Exordium series.

PATI NAGLE

Yes, there's a disconnect between what Publishers' Row is buying and what readers want. This is where independent publishing is filling a gap, resulting in many happy readers.

I agree that SF books are currently on a down trend, especially in New York publishing land, but they won't go away. There are readers who want SF, and there always will be.

DAVE TROWBRIDGE

Fortunately, thanks to ebooks, there's a growing disconnect between what Publisher's Row thinks will sell and what's actually for sale out there. So no, SF is not dying, it's only resting. The phoenix will take flight again!

SUE LANGE

As long as there are science fiction writers writing science fiction, there will be science fiction. I don't know about everybody else,

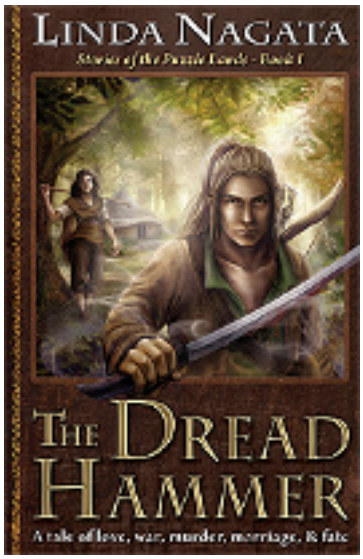
but BVC is holding up its end of the sfnal world.

I agree with Dave and Judith that new publishing models give opportunities to any writer that feels marginalized, but I don't think the sf writer is marginalized. I think writing science fiction is maybe more difficult now than before. It's not that we're running out of ideas, it's just that we're living in a science fictional world now. The predictions of the past are here. We're seeing how yesterday's Gee Whiz development is really pretty boring. And And if you imagine something today, ,chances are, by the time your book comes out, your invention is going to be here and not very eye-popping. It becomes harder to amaze people with simple extrapolations. Everybody's extrapolating nowadays.

To amaze people now requires science that few people "get." Deborah touched on the fact that the first blush of sf popularity used science that ordinary people could understand. Some of the best sf today is inscrutable to non-scientists. And inscrutable even to scientists for that matter. Science is so fractured, it is no longer possible to be an expert in all areas.

Science fiction is not dead, not dying, but it is changing, evolving into two types: escapism for the masses, and the thoughtful, issues-oriented type of sf fiction for the philosophers. Come to think of it, there has always been that dichotomy. We remember the issues-oriented pieces of classic sf, but the escape literature of the day we probably no longer

remember. I imagine that's true of every genre.



LINDA NAGATA

I've been hearing that SF is dying almost since I started writing it. But you know what? SF is still around, and being published in decent quantity from what I can see. I've recently waded back into the short story market place and I'm amazed and impressed at all the publications interested in science fiction.

JENNIFER STEVENSON

Science fiction is commercial fiction. It serves the public of its day, just as romance and fantasy and mysteries and thrillers and westerns serve. Commercial fiction echoes the emotions and answers the questions of the public that buys it.

The science fiction of the past—the canon, the "classic" genre, "the pure product"—served the public of its day.

New science fiction responds to the emotions and questions of the current commercial-fiction-buying public ... or it doesn't get bought.

A fan or writer of science fiction who wonders "where did science fiction go?" might find out by asking themselves, "what questions does my favorite science fiction answer for me, what emotions does it echo for me?" We do not necessarily dwell emotionally in "the present." "The present" is a different decade, even a different century, depending on where in the world one lives, one's personal "golden age," and how involved one is with that version of "the present" where dwell those who write and publish books.
Steampunk doesn't just show us technology we can understand. It returns us to an era when we still stood at social, political, technological, economic, even psychological crossroads we cannot now revisit; technology was entirely hopeful. I leave you to examine that proposition and draw your own conclusions.

Someone who wants to "revive science fiction" should look hard at themselves, at their emotions, and what

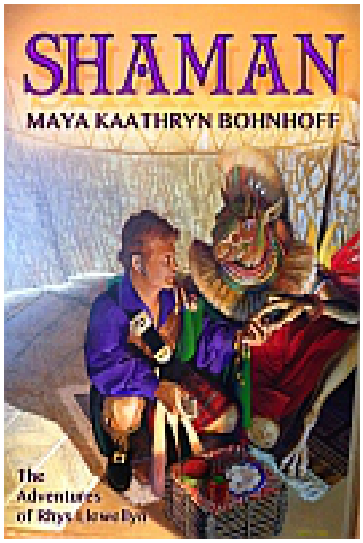
large questions they long to answer. Chances are they're not alone with those emotions and questions. That's where new and successful science fiction comes from.

MAYA KAATHRYN BOHNHOFF

Robert Heinlein famously said that SF wasn't about technology but how people react to it. When I combine this with Ray Bradbury's idea that SF is about solving today's problems by setting them in the future, I can come to no other conclusion than that science fiction will be with us until the end that hath no end.

We will always need to solve problems—even when we're like the Organians of Star Trek fame. That is, beings of pure spiritual energy. If nothing else, we will need to deal with those prepubescent still physical species who arrive on our world(s) assuming that they're all grown up just 'cos their hormones are running amok.

As a market commodity SF, like every other genre, has ups and downs that depend in great part on what real life problems we're facing. I think SF probably booms when things in what we laughing call "real life" get a bit too real. Which is not to say that SF is escapist, but I think what it does do is give us new ways of thinking about old problems.



I have this marvelous device called an iPad that I swear I first saw on Star Trek: Next Gen in the hands of Dr. Crusher. Now my real life doctors have them. And that's just the technology.

I think, also, that the type of SF we read and watch and hunger for depend on what we need to hear. Some SF offers sober assessments of where trends in society might land us (Soylent Green is People!), some assures us that there really is hope for a brighter future (Childhood's End) and some just says, Gosh, wow, isn't this COOL!

Like I said, as long as we have problems that need solving, we'll have science fiction.

CHRIS DOLLEY

What more can I add? It's not dead. It's not dying, and it's not living under an assumed name in the Genre Protection Program.

BRENDA CLOUGH

Yes. And the way that SF dominates TV and movies is in our favor. They'll always be coming back to the books, to mine for ideas, titles, and themes. (Hey, Stephen Speilberg! I'm over here -- just Google me!) And the viewers of those shows and films will be coming back to the books, for more.

Amazing Stories: **Is there a real divide between *literary* fiction and *genre* fiction beyond marketing category divisions? If you think there is: Should genre fiction (as represented by SF) seek to merge with literary, supplant it or strengthen the ghetto walls??**

KATHARINE ELISKA KIMBRIEL

I find this a hard question because in my mind we're talking marketing, not a true difference in concept. Labeling SF literary, or suspense, or paranormal romance, is just a shortcut way of saying one of two things. Either the publisher does not want to go to the trouble of crafting a well-written back cover, promo material and cover choice to reflect the multiple facets of a work, or current wisdom says that "X" is selling better than SF. So Dean Koontz, for example, is a suspense writer, not an SF writer — when most of his works are clearly SF.

To an extent, SF readers have made this easier, because they will generally find a work that has fantastic concepts in it. The publisher doesn't have to tell us about such a novel — word of mouth will eventually reach a huge percentage of SF readers. Give it five years and I'll bet that the vast majority of fans will find a work marketed under another label. Romance fans are also good at this — they found Carole Nelson Douglas's Probe despite its heavy SF leaning, because of the romantic sub-theme. Carole wisely helped this by running an ad in a popular romance flyer.

If I wanted to point at the "difference" between literary and genre fiction, I think the difference would be this — ripples in the fabric of reality. Most literary SF Writers tend to focus on one "What If?" and then try to run a marathon with that concept. Everything in their alternate world, or new world, is a variation on the idea that first seized their attention. A genre writer, on the other hand, takes their one idea, and thinks "Okay, I have bees as a hive mind that is the true first computer. How would that impact humans? How would it impact other animals? We know some ants use other ant species as slaves — would the bees enslave others to do certain work for them? Do humans plant and change their diet for what bees want to harvest? Is the current die-off a war against bees? If so, who figured out their sentience and is threatened by them?"

A literary writer might brush against these questions, but their book is about the strange and frightening glory that is discovering the hive mind of the bees. Good literary SF writers are the David Bowies of the writing world. They create the concept. Then, when everyone else starts expanding, adding to and exploring the concept, they, like Bowie, move on to the next thing that catches their attention.

Bad literary SF writers are like bad genre SF writers — mostly forgotten unless they manage to redefine "ghastly." The good ones, all these writers, genre and literary, will be remembered by someone. Their expression of the idea(s) lives.

PHYLLIS IRENE RADFORD

This is a hard topic usually taken into far corners and conducted in whispers. Both genre writers and literary writers consider the other beneath them. I've heard literary writers describe genre fiction as pot boilers that don't mean anything. Genre writers will say that literary fiction is more concerned with HOW you say something rather than WHAT you say. Those are the polite responses.

The best description I've heard of the difference is that literary fiction looks at a piece of the human condition and inspires the reader to react to the tragedy by going out and changing the world. Genre fiction depicts heroic characters reacting to the that same slice of the human condition and zre inspired by their actions to go out and change the world.

There is power in metaphor. Ursula K. Le Guin's The Left Hand of Darkness comes to mind as SF that crosses the literary boundary to the point of being required reading in many schools. I remember when it was new in the '70s and feminism was starting to stand upright (sometimes with raised fists). For the first time I could remember people talked about gender differences, actually talked rationally rather than sweeping it under the rug like so much filth. By talking about the book we could talk about sexism in our society as a whole. Men saw women as something more than traditional roles and women saw how being militant closed more minds than it opened. The discussion is still going on and that book is still opening eyes. And yet it is set on a planet far, far, away and far, far in our future so it is SF.
Both camps claim it, vehemently.

So I fall back on the idea that we all have prejudices, even the most liberal person has prejudice against ardent conservatives. Our view of life ends at that brick wall of prejudices. By setting a story long, long ago in a galaxy far, far away, or we populate the story world with fairies and elves and dragons, we can peek around that wall to gain a new perspective. Mainstream literature can do it with good writing. That is the purpose of literature from earliest quest stories with a moral told around a fire circle in a cave to the latest e-book thriller.

Literary and genre fiction are just different approaches to the same end. Some succeed, some don't.

JUDITH TARR

In my opinion? No. As Katharine noted, some people and most marketers like categories. They like them even better if those categories can be spun into "better" and "worse," "high" and "low," "real literature" and "that cheap stuff Those People read."

As a writer, I try to write the best possible book that I can write. I don't really care if it's Literature. I just want it to come within yelling distance of the picture in my head, and for readers to enjoy and appreciate the result.

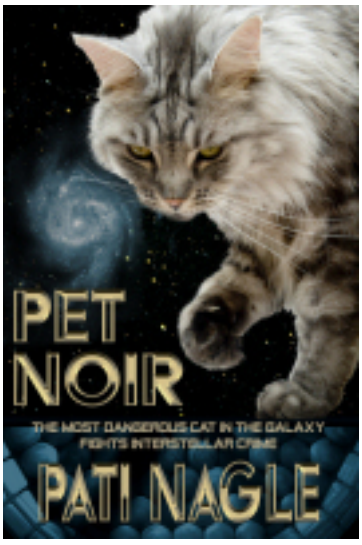
As a reader, I tend to find that genre work labeled "Literature" has more pretensions and (sometimes) prettier prose. And/or an author who Does Not Want the genre label. And/or a publisher looking to increase sales by selling to a larger and more diverse reading public.
Having has that last done for me for a decade and a bit, I can say that yes, taking "Fantasy" or "Science Fiction" off the spine and replacing it with "Fiction" can, indeed, increase the readership and (in my case) actually get the genre to realize that hey, this stuff ain't bad, let's nominate it for an award.

That's marketing. And perception: readers and reviewers who won't touch genre but will touch "real literature." Give them a well-written, well-constructed genre work and you can make them surprisingly happy.

Literature is a genre, too, just like the rest of them. It has certain rules, and readers expect them to be followed. For literature, that's a certain type or style of prose, and a certain level of concentration on character over plot and worldbuilding. Genre SF will tolerate bare-bones prose and characters as long as the worldbuilding is solid and the plotline is clear and moves along at an appropriate speed for the subgenre. But it's all the same thing in the end. Fiction that looks beyond the world we know. Everything else is packaging.

PATI NAGLE

What Judith said. Literary fiction is simply another genre. What the question refers to as genre fiction might be called commercial fiction, as its primary goal is to entertain, while the literary genre has a somewhat different focus. There's no reason for genre fiction to supplant literary fiction, which is a much smaller genre with a much smaller market.



DAVE TROWBRIDGE

When I hear the term "literary fiction" I reach for my gun. Spray-gun, that is: "Quick, Henry, the Flit!" What's being triggered is memories from my middle and high school years of books with boring covers being handed out as assignments when my room and every surface in the house was loaded with brightly-colored paperbacks with spaceships and BEMS on the covers. Later on, of course, I discovered that some of those fusty stories were pretty special—I'm sorry it took so long to rediscover Jane Austen. (Thanks, Sherwood!) And I find I'm still angry at my 11th-grade English teacher—the one who kept vodka in her "water bottle" and for whom constructing a guillotine during the semester assigned to A Tale of Two Cities meant an automatic A (what a collection she had!)—that science fiction was "garbage."

My personal experience of modern literary fiction is limited because, as Evil said in Time Bandits, "If I were creating the world I wouldn't mess about with butterflies and daffodils. I would have started with lasers, eight o'clock, Day One!" I want that Big Idea, the What If, the OMG What a Cool Idea, not the excruciating autopsy of "the human condition" that practically every review in sources like the New York Review of Books and such seems to promise.

Yeah, I know I'm missing out on some gems. I've encountered modern literary fiction that I enjoyed. Maybe it's time for me to purge that image of pinch-faced literary arbiters reading books with their pinkies extended. But, damn, I keep discovering new authors and new books in genre that feed the teenage boy for whom science fiction was the breath of life—and there's all that juicy non-fiction out there too that feeds the grown up science fiction writer. So many books, so little time.

SUE LANGE

The big difference between "literary" fiction and any genre fiction is that literary writers experiment with the language and style, while genre writers experiment with the tropes of that genre. A genre writer can be literary and vice versa. The great writers in either category push their respective boundaries and are ultimately remembered for breaking the rules. Which side claims them is pretty much up to the editors and publishers who buy their work. If you are writing ground breaking science fiction that is also experimenting with language you'll probably see publication in Magazine of Science Fiction and Fantasy. If you write straight ahead science fiction with little to no language experimentation, you'll probably get published by Analog or

Asimov's. If your writing is subtle with a slow plot that's a touch weird, maybe you'll see publication in McSweeney's or other open-minded literary magazine.

LINDA NAGATA

I'll be the contrarian here and say: absolutely, yes, there is a real divide between literary and most genre fiction—which is not to say the sets don't intersect. Of course they do. Then again, I think there's wide disagreement on what qualifies as literary. For me, literary books are those with not only "prettier prose" as Judith said above, but with depth, with subtle things going on—books that make an intellectual demand on the reader. Some literary books are incredibly boring to me, some are incredibly wonderful, and of course I can say the same thing about some genre books that I don't think of as literary.

Regarding the second part of the question: many genre books are literary, and many literary books are genre. The sets overlap and I have no interest in building sturdier walls between them, because a good book is a good book. Why would you want to fence them out? Oh. Because of marketing. To me, this is where the marketing issue comes into play. Not too long ago on twitter someone remarked that his wife had insisted the movie Avatar couldn't be science fiction because she liked the movie. With attitudes like that lurking about, it's easy to see why the publisher of a great, literary novel like The Story of Edgar Sawtelle would never mention in their advertising that the book is arguably a fantasy. The thing is, we don't get to make the rules that define "genre" and "literary." All we can do as readers and writers is to promote the books we love, and to ignore the "slings and arrows" launched from either side of the debate.

JENNIFER STEVENSON

I have no patience with this debate. The people who like to argue the most about it are pretending very hard that it's not about money: where the book is shelved in the store, and what kind of cover goes on it so that the right reader picks it up and enjoys it and the wrong reader passes it by, quite reasonably, as "not my cup of tea." To argue whether my taste is intrinsically better than yours would be impolite and fruitless. Not that it isn't. Better, I mean.

MAYA KAATHRYN BOHNHOFF

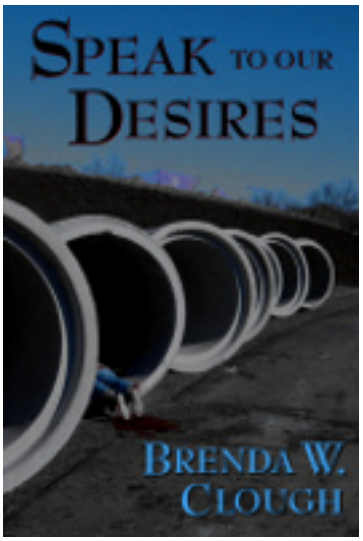
I'm kind of with Jen on this. I think it's an imaginary debate. Toni Morrison writes a type of fantasy some call magical realism; so does Louis Borges, Italo Calvino, Umberto Eco and Isabel Allende. But you'll never find their books in the genre sections. I write the same kind of fantasy, but you'll never find my stuff in the "mainstream" literary sections. The difference, according to some literary critics, is that real literary fiction isn't popular fiction, because the unwashed masses wouldn't grok it. It has nothing to do with the quality of writing, but only to do with appeal.

That's the critics. Bookstores, I notice, have a different slant on this. In bookstores all over the country (possibly the world) someone makes a command decision about where to shelve a book. I've noticed lately in Barnes and Noble, that when an author reaches a certain level of appeal, they are removed from the genre racks and moved to "fiction and literature". As a result you find Jennifer Ashley and even Sue Grafton shelved where you'd least expect. Ditto David Baldacci and John Grisham.

I read widely in a variety of genres. It's the way a writer handles a subject that engages me, not the "genre" he or she writes. I suspect many readers would find that to be true if they were given half a chance to step out of whatever ghetto they're most comfy in. I think one of the things that online stores such as Amazon have done is break down the genre shelves and allow readers to see books in a different way.

There's one writer that I respect a great deal because he's resisted his publisher's obvious desire to position him as a "literary" writer and that's Michael Chabon, who writes a type of fantasy/magical realism that I adore. When he released his last book, I found it in a standalone display rack sandwiched in between literary fiction and SF&F. I genuflected.

BRENDA CLOUGH



I am an omnivorous reader, and personally pay no attention to these distinctions whatever. The complaints break down into:

Marketing: bookstore placement, mostly. This, along with book cover art, is mainly designed to guide readers to books they might enjoy.

Reviews: Genre work, unless it's hugely best-seller, doesn't get the major reviews. This problem has been largely obviated by web reviews and sites like Goodreads; book review sections in the newspapers are a dying breed, alas, and for good or ill their

power is ebbing.

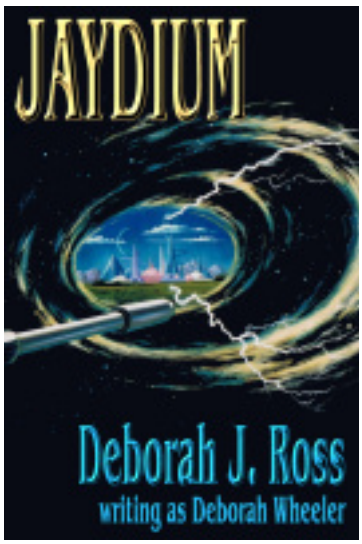
And, last and best, legacy: Whether a work makes the jump from best-seller or popular schlock into Respected Literature. This is very hit-and-miss; works (MOBY DICK is an example) can languish in limbo for a generation or three and then suddenly be Discovered again as a major work. And who reads Theodore Dreiser now? He was a very popular writer in his day and showed all the signs of making the leap to the immortals, but no.

I am not sure we can or should do anything about it. Except write the most thrilling books we can, of course.

DEBORAH J ROSS

I'm going to sound like a gangster and respond, "Who's asking?" If the reader is asking, what they really want to know is how to find good (or great!) books. The genre distinctions offer the illusion of making that search easier, but what happens is that large numbers of books that the reader would adore then become invisible. True, some readers want only one particular kind of reading experience (Big Ideas! Slice-of-Life! Happily-Ever-After!), and they want some way of sorting out their preferred genre from all the others out there. Hence, the separation of genres on bookstore shelves.

If who's asking is an author, then the implied question is how can a book be positioned or marketed for maximum success? In this age of 25-words-or-less blurbs and elevator pitches, how can I reach the readers who will love my book? Easy labels, snappy slogans, and pigeonholes "R Us."



If the question comes from a librarian – pause for a moment while said librarian tears out her or his hair – it's a bit more complicated because afore-mentioned nearly-bald librarian must simultaneously play match-maker between reader and book, and discern the proper placement of the book within the larger body of works-of-words. Please note that the Library of Congress does not distinguish between science fiction and literary fiction. It's all fiction. Such a boon this is to those of us who read widely across genres – we can actually find all the works by a given fiction author in the same place, under the same call number. (Not so most public libraries, which shelve science fiction or mysteries separately, although

I once found Katherine Kurtz's Deryni books under "Historical Fiction.") Then, of course, we authors get pressured into using different names for different genres, with the result that unless some astute librarian realizes we are really the same people, our work ends up scattered-by-pseudonym, rather than scattered-by-genre.

(Vonda N. McIntyre and Chris Dolley chose to pass on this question.)

***Amazing Stories*: Fantasy and science fiction used to be lumped together on the shelves. For several decades fantasy was largely considered the red-headed stepchild of the two. Currently, fantasy seems to be in the ascendancy. Is this a societal response to the uncertain world we live in? Is fantasy 'dumber' and therefore able to appeal to a wider audience? Or is it science fiction simply 'harder'/scarier for most readers?**

PHYLLIS IRENE RADFORD

All Science Fiction and Fantasy is Speculative Fiction, all exploring the "What if." SF just works harder at finding a logical explanation for breaking the laws of physics with proximity to black holes, gene therapy, and aliens with super powers. Fantasy can always fall back on magic, demons, and dragons with super powers.

That Fantasy reader's acceptance of things that cannot be caused SF readers to lift the corner of their lip in a slight sneer. They had the purer literature because it had science in the background. Have you watched Eureka lately? Certainly the scripts embed scientific sounding words into their gadgets and explanation, but unless you are a theoretical physicist on the cutting edge of research it's all gobbledy gook that no one truly understands. Call the atomic metathesizer a magic wand and the computer program a spell in some ancient forgotten language, it's all the same. But the stories are fun. That's what makes them so popular. The fun.

Fantasy is fun even when presenting a doom and gloom scenario about character we have grown to love. We know it's fantasy and we are willing to absorb the metaphors of socio/political conflict. Science Fiction can do that, when it wants to. I am not as well read in SF as I am Fantasy, probably because I immersed myself in the sub genre during a period when SF writers and readers took themselves much too seriously. I crawled out of the depressing murk of probable enslavement by corporations, or nuclear Armageddon, or artificially generated plagues that looked way too realistic and could happen to me. The dire circumstances leeched the energy from me to do anything about this probable future. I turned to stories about enslavement by evil emperors, natural disaster Armageddons, and plagues created by wizards with relief, recognizing the story and the need to do something now before the future happens for real.
Yes, Science Fiction is scary. Fantasy can be too. It's the distance of metaphor and the fun factor that makes fantasy more appealing to me.

VONDA MCINTYRE

It's possible to write "dumb" sf just as it's possible to write "dumb" fantasy. Smart, internally consistent, coherent sf and fantasy are much more satisfying to read and to write. And to watch, since we're including TV and movies. One of the more irritating elements of Eureka is the fake science. Nobody, including rocket scientists, understands it, because it doesn't make any sense. The other irritating element of Eureka is the plot, which is almost always "Crazy scientists do something stupid and thoughtless that will kill a favorite character/destroy Eureka/end the world; Sheriff Carter, because of his common sense, which is morally superior to being smart (even though he is not, in fact, stupid), solves the problem and saves his daughter/his lover/Eureka/the world."

One similarity between good sf and fantasy is that the writer doesn't change the rules in the middle of the game. With sf, you may decide to stay within the limits of reality as we know it, or you may decide to speculate and push the envelope or challenge a scientific theory on purpose (faster-than-light travel is a common choice). With fantasy, you make up the rules of your world, but you have to stick to them.
As Phyl points out, a major strength of both fantasy and sf is the ability to create thought experiments and explore the "What Ifs?"

JUDITH TARR

I've fought the "SF smart, Fantasy dumb" fight all the way from the trenches of the internet to the pages of AMAZING itself. My feelings can be expressed by the statement that science fiction is a subset of fantasy, and can we move on?

What I'd like to move on to is the other half of the question: Why is fantasy resurgent right now, and why does sf appear to be in a slump? Some of this I think is backlash against the goshwow SCIENCE!!!! of the early Space Age. Lots of things that we thought were amazing and fantastic and wonderful now turn out to have difficult consequences. Nuclear power, for example--in the Fifties people were treating bomb tests as entertainment. Now we've seen the less desirable results of that, and we've also seen Three Mile Island, Chernobyl, Fukushima. The happy child that science used to be is now a wary teenager--and that teenager is

going through some difficult phases. The Creationism phase: let's just deny it all and hide behind a millennia-old myth. The environmentalism phase: we've got to clean up our own room before we move out into the cosmos. The mom and dad cut off the credit card phase: sorry, kid, we need that money to pay the grocery bill.

And there's also the rise of the internet. I'm not playing Blame The Internet here. I'm saying it's profoundly changed how we approach each other and the world. In many ways that change is good. In some, not so much. The tropes of classic sf--robots, rocket ships, scientific triumphs and disasters--have all, in one way or another, become real. Even space exploration--it's in a slump of its own, but it's still alive and quietly evolving; it is moving on, though by no means at the pace our genre might have wanted.

What has moved on is the virtual world, and that world seems to gravitate toward a less scientific kind of fantasy. Remember Clarke's Law? Any technology sufficiently advanced becomes indistinguishable from magic? In the virtual world, we're there. We're exploring deeper crannies of the human id, and also developing new ways of working and playing together as a species. Fantasy in the broad sense provides an idiom for dealing with this, and a metaphor that resonates with millennia of human evolution. Science as a metaphor is a late development, and science fiction is one of the youngest of all literary genres. It's still alive, still has its followers--but like everything else, it's evolving.

We may have moved on from robots and rocket ships, but we certainly are still asking "What If?" Will science fiction as a publishing category see a resurgence? Sure, if something happens to give a boost. At the rate planetary science is galloping on, for example, we could find actual alien life. And then if that catches the imagination of enough people, voila. Brand-new SF Golden Age.

PATI NAGLE

I agree with Judy about the relationship between fantasy and SF. Maybe there's currently some backlash against science, but I also think SF has fewer readers right now in part because much of the SF written in the last two or three decades is not very accessible. Some of it is so sophisticated as to be opaque. Some is self-referential, a conversation that's taking place among the core SF community. The casual reader who picks up a book to see if it's interesting is not going to catch cross-references and associations that amuse those who are deep in SF culture. S/he won't be entertained by that, and might even be confused by it. S/he loses interest, picks up the next book – "What's this one about? Dragons? Cool!"

I'd love to see more new SF stories of the "Golden Age" type, where adventure is more important than sophistication. Those are the stories that capture the imaginations of young readers and inspire them to get into science.

DAVE TROWBRIDGE

It seems to me that as a subset of fantasy, science fiction would naturally appeal to fewer readers. Perhaps the Golden Age of science fiction was simply a period when the zeitgeist of technological optimism made science the preferred magic wand of fantasy, and now we've returned to a more natural balance. And, it's true, as Pati notes, that much of SF is self-referential, thus drawing on a smaller common set of archetypes and tropes, which would tend to limit its appeal compared to fantasy.

However, the Golden Age is still with us. The Exordium series that Sherwood Smith and I wrote (and are now reissuing in a revised second edition) was a conscious attempt at a retro Golden Age space opera with modern sensibilities, and we're not stopping there. Other authors currently updating this venerable tradition—each in their own inimitable way—include R.M. Meluch, Matthew Hughes, and Charles Stross. Thanks to the Internet and the ebook, I look forward to seeing even more of both this and other subgenres of science fiction.

SUE LANGE

I was going to pass on this one because most of what I was going to say has been said. But here's a great illustration. Pati said this: "…much of the SF written in the last two or three decades is not very accessible. Some of it is so sophisticated as to be opaque."

And then Dave mentioned Charles Stross. How accessible is his work to the average non-geek but gee whiz loving reader?

LINDA NAGATA

I like the term "speculative fiction"—those stories not entirely grounded in the world as we know it—and there are wonderful books from one end of the spectrum to another. I do think Pati has a legitimate criticism when she talks about the accessibility of some SF, and it's a criticism that can be made against some of my own work, but that's not to say this type of story isn't worth doing. There is an audience for books that assume a fairly high level of scientific literacy on the part of the reader, and I'm often impressed at how well these books sell. But it's a niche market, and I do think these books can be harder to grasp and harder to get into for the unaccustomed reader than more general works. So what? We each read the books we like and most of us, I hope, read across a wide range. I do think that science fiction, with all its technological trappings, is still hugely popular—it just gets experienced via Mass Effect, Half Life, Metal Gear, etc., and less often via books than was once the case.

MAYA KAATHRYN BOHNHOFF

I think when times are particularly scary, many of us gravitate more toward stories that can't possibly come true. Fantasy fits that bill pretty nicely. SF is, by it's very nature, more firmly grounded in the here and now and the real problems of society than fantasy has traditionally been.

To give a snapshot of what I mean: I started out as a writer of science fiction with about half a dozen stories in Analog before I wrote my first fantasy, (THE MERI). A friend of mine who was a romance writer read THE MERI and said, "I really liked it! I had no idea fantasy could be so philosophical. I thought it was just escapist fluff." Three fantasy novels later, reviewers were telling me I wrote fantasy with rivets. I wrote in fantasy worlds, but tackled the problems of those worlds as if I were writing SF—inventing pragmatic magical gizmos and flipping Arthur C. Clarke's dictum about science and magic 180 degrees.

So, there is a perceived dichotomy between the two genres: SF is pragmatic and fact-based; fantasy is a willow-the-wisp genre, airy fairy and with out limitations or rules. And this dichotomy exists in the minds of readers and writers as well. I can't count the number of new writers I've heard say they liked the idea of writing fantasy because there were no rules to follow. Some fantasy writers, I'm sure, approach the genre as if

that were true.

Okay, to be honest, I think maybe those would-be writers were admitting to laziness. And I can tell you that I do three times more research for a fantasy story than I do for an SF story because I have to make up most of the rules from whole cloth and then stick to them.

I find fantasy appealing, then, on two levels—it feeds a particular desire for fiction that "can't happen here" and it's also an opportunity to walk into the imagination of another writer and marvel at their ingenuity.

Bottom line: I think people read whatever feeds their particular joneses. They may want to contemplate real possibilities or they may want the real world to disappear while they refuel.

To be honest, I think the cycles we see in literary offerings in bookstores has less to do with what people want to read and more to do with what the industry wants to offer them. Most readers I know are far more omnivorous than most publishers imagine they are. I suspect that for any cadre of readers who crave sober, gloomy, challenging assessments of futuristic problems based on current trends, there is a group that are starved for sparkly vampires, clanking Victorian machinery and magical realms that thrive cheek by jowl with the "real" world.

Two things I think are true: just about everyone wishes they'd gone to Hogwarts or were going to ship out on the starship Enterprise.

CHRIS DOLLEY

I think Maya was spot on when she said, 'I think the cycles we see in literary offerings in bookstores has less to do with what people want to read and more to do with what the industry wants to offer them.' Exactly. Publishing is a business and books have to make money. But choosing which book is going to make that money is often a lottery. Yes, there are authors whose name is practically a gaurantee of a bestseller. And there are the media tie-ins which, again, rarely fail. But... then there's the rest. And having a great book does not always equate to financial success.

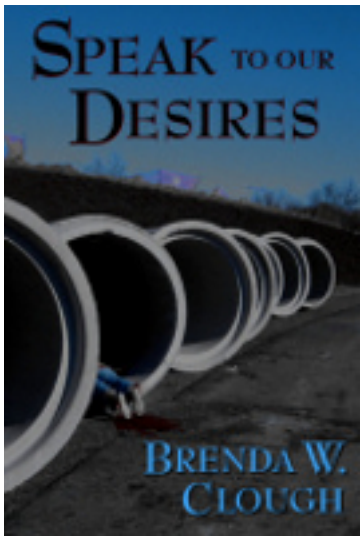
So publishers look for trends. Zombies are in, Vampires are out. But with lead times on books of one to two years, trends can come and go before the book is published. Or the trend may never have existed except in the eyes of a handful of editors.

One of the things I've noticed about the huge surge in independently published books is how well SF is doing.

The major publishers may think it doesn't sell, but there are thousands of new authors who want to write it, and hundreds of thousands of readers who want to read it.

BRENDA CLOUGH

But there's a larger cycle. There's what we might call the Long Count – the long slow swell of literary fashion. The Spirit of the Age, maybe. Right now the Spirit is definitely enamored of fantasy. Fifty years ago, at the height of the golden age of SF, it was indeed SF: Asimov, Clarke. Another generation or so earlier, and fantasy ruled: Barsoom, Pellucidar. If we may say that the current Spirit started – what would folks say -- with George Lucas and STAR WARS? Then get your fork: It's about done. In another ten or fifteen years, it'll be as over as the hobble skirt and fins on Chevys. SF's time is coming. Again.



DEBORAH J ROSS

I want to echo what Chris said. There are plenty of readers out there who adore science fiction, even the "difficult" stuff, and by and large, they're comfortable with digital technology. Their numbers won't create an instant New York Times Bestseller, but are certainly sufficient to make it worthwhile for writers who epublish and hence have extremely small expenses. I'm betting on the internet making those books and authors available to those readers.

My thought about the state of fantasy today is that it started out as much more narrow in scope. Think E. R. Eddison and Lord of the Rings. Then we had werewolves in London and elves in Manhattan, not to mention cross-overs to Young Adult and Romance and mystery. Much of what used to be labeled horror became "dark fantasy." So now we have a hodge-podge catch-all that perhaps takes up a larger share of the market simply because it encompasses more sub-genres. What do you think?

KATHARINE ELISKA KIMBRIEL

I think that there's truth to your suggestion, Deborah – we have a lot more sub-genres, so instead of picking up and reading the back of every SF or Fantasy novel out there, we receive more clues from covers whether a book is what we're looking for. Maya's comment both made me smile and grabbed my attention:

Two things I think are true: just about everyone wishes they'd gone to Hogwarts or were going to ship out on

the starship Enterprise.

This is something I struggle to keep in front of my eyes when working on a story -- the so-called "sense of wonder" that is at the core of what all SF and Fantasy writes appreciate, even if it's not the first thing on their shopping list of "My Perfect SF (or Fantasy) Novel." When we forget this, it may be that we are not writing SF or Fantasy. We can be writing a thriller, or a polemic, or a romance with magical trappings – but it's not truly SF or Fantasy.

People who enjoy messing around with tarot (and like a lot of Fantasy writers, I've researched tarot, too!) would suggest that this is like the Wheel of Fortune – sometimes SF is in ascension and sometimes it's Fantasy. Just wait, and the wheel will come around again. This doesn't mean that the next SF wave will be SF the Golden Age Writers, or the New Age SF writers, or the Cyberpunk writers would recognize and embrace. But it will ask "What if?..." and it will have that kernel of wonder. Most of Book View Café's writers have both these qualities in their SF and their Fantasy.

We still value and seek out those elements -- even if NYC doesn't choose to give them to us. I think that more than price is part of the resurgence of the SF backlist in ebook format. "What if?" and Sense of Wonder still lives!

(Jennifer Stevenson chose to pass on this question.)

MIKE GLYER'S FILE 770

Amazing Stories: Margaret Atwood stated that she wrote _speculative fiction_, as opposed to _science fiction_ which she characterized as "talking squids in outer space"*: what was your reaction upon learning of Atwood's statement? Has your response to it changed now that Ms. Atwood seems to be backpedaling a bit?

*(*For a bit more in-depth look at Atwood's reasoning, this response to Ursula Le Guins' then recent review of The Year of the Flood may help.)*

VONDA N MCINTYRE

As one of the few SF writers to include a character who is in fact a talking squid in outer space (Nemo in Starfarers), I decided it would be fun to take the tentacle and run with it: www.talkingsquidsinouterspace.com

And it has been fun, particularly putting together the Natural History section. Cephalopods (octopus, squid, cuttlefish, nautilus) are fascinating creatures. The real-life natural history is in a lot of ways more interesting than the imagined science-fictional talking squids.

For example, I don't believe any SF writer has presented a squidly character who talked out of both sides of its mouth, the way a cuttlefish might say different things on either side of its body. ("Come to me, my little cuttlefish, I am a strong and gentle lover" on one side, and on the other "Get your squidlips out of here, competing male cuttlefish, I am big and strong and this lady cuttlefish is mine mine mine.")

I'm sure that Margaret Atwood has never read a word I've written; most literary writers who venture into SF don't read much SF. She's entitled to say her work isn't SF, or it is spec fic, or to make up her own definition of SF, speculative fiction, or skiffy, even if her definitions don't agree with anybody else's. (Arguing over definitions of SF is a good old fashioned parlor game among SF readers, writers, and critics.)

I'm entitled to say that SF is the equal of any other branch of literature, realistic fiction included, and that civilizations built on speculation about cephalopods, anarchists, or aerogels are a lot of fun to imagine, invent, and write about.

JUDITH TARR

I always thought "speculative fiction" *was* science fiction.

Also that the term was around long before Ms. Atwood laid claim to it.

Shows you what I know.

Vonda illustrates beautifully the difference I've observed between literary writers "speculating" and science-fiction writers science-fictionizing. It actually reminds me of the way some rather prominent science-fiction writers have described fantasy as "dead easy, just make stuff up, as opposed to Our Very Careful Scientific Worldbuilding."

Except, you know, fantasy writers mostly don't. But literary writers, that I have observed, mostly do.

Not that I have any problem with that. Sometimes when you reinvent the wheel, the result just might be a working warp drive. But you don't get to claim there was no such thing as a wheel before you reinvented it, or if there had been, that it was an inferior object and anyway you prefer to call it something else. Which you didn't invent, either.

People *could* just write what they write and let the labels fall where they may.

DAVE TROWBRIDGE

My reaction was irritation at the too-familiar literary posturing, and then a brief surge of pity for a writer unable to accept heartfelt compliments on her work. I'm glad she's apparently becoming more comfortable with the idea that some of her work might be considered a form of science fiction.

Perhaps one day she'll get over her reluctance to write books that "have things in them that we can't do yet" and stretch her art even farther.

SUE LANGE

I'm with Judy on this, I don't believe she invented the term. I don't think she said she invented the term, either.

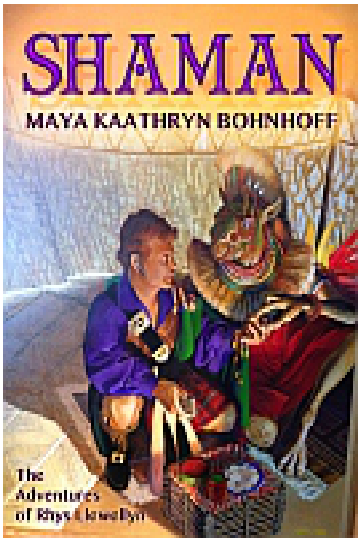
I believe she was trying to classify her work for an audience that, as Vonda stated, loves to fight about classification. I think that what she's trying to say is that although she wrote futuristic work, it was more allegorical in nature than straight ahead science fiction which does not apologize for itself the way allegorical

fiction does.

Would George Orwell consider his work science fiction? Probably not, but we as sf fans embrace the work anyway. He wrote what he wrote because he was using allegorical characters and situations to illustrate a point. Just because we as science fiction fans love the sf elements doesn't mean he would embrace the entire genre and say, "yes, that's what I'm writing." I think he would say he's writing anti-communistic pr before he'd admit it was science fiction.

Of course, that's just speculation. Like Atwood's fiction.

MAYA KAATHRYN BOHNHOFF



To me, that characterization is no more valid than Lee Mortimer's snark about SF being the escapist genre that "takes the reader to strange new worlds and neglects to bring him home again" (or words to that effect).

Writers (and politicians) are famous for making bald (and sometimes snooty) pronouncements about things then having to backpedal. I recall Rita Mae Brown saying that using a word processor was cheating and encouraged sloppy editing because it did all the work of writing and made it too easy to cut and paste. This, from a woman who writes novels with her cat. (I'm smiling as a write this.)

We all write speculative fiction. And those of us who write stuff that is stuff categorize as strictly SF or fantasy can all back up to that higher level container which, to me, is all the "speculative fiction" label is.

I mean really, in a sense, isn't all fiction speculative? Whether it happens in space among talking squids or in a castle inNottingham, isn't it all asking "what if...?"

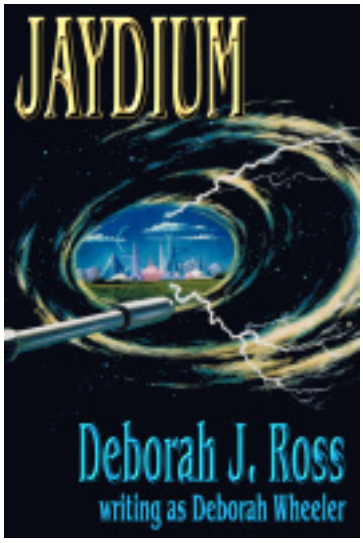
BRENDA CLOUGH

All fiction is fantasy fiction. Even that very small subgenre of 'true history' fiction (in which Teddy Roosevelt or Emma Goldman comes onto the page with their historical words in their mouths) is fantasy. You were not there when Lincoln gave his Gettysburg Address, were you? So you must be fictionalizing it to a greater or lesser extent if it appears on your page.

And under that huge fantasy fiction umbrella, we have our smaller tents: literary, mystery, science, romance.

In other words, Margaret Atwood is not condescending to join us. She has noticed that she is under the umbrella with us. She has been, all this time. Wake up and smell the coffee, honey!

DEBORAH J ROSS

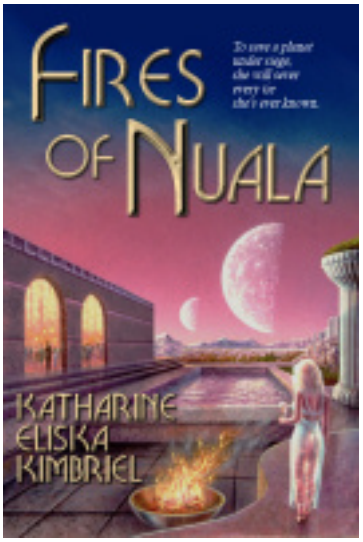


I'm a bit wearied by the expostulations of people who haven't read science fiction because they know ahead of time they won't like it, it's trivial and self-indulgent, and therefore *their* (near-future/dystopic/etc.) work can't *possibly* be science fiction. So they run around finding new labels for it. "Speculative fiction" as a term has been around at least since 1889 (*Lippincott's Monthly Mag.* Oct. № 597: "Edward Bellamy, in *LOOKING BACKWARD*, and George Parsons Lathrop, in a short story, *THE NEW POVERTY*, have followed the example of Anthony Trollope and Bulwer in speculative fiction put in the future tense.") Certainly, it was widely enough accepted in the science fiction community for Heinlein (1947), L. Sprague de Camp (1953), and Samuel R. Delaney (1969) to have used it. But this is neither here nor there, except to demonstrate that Atwood has, perhaps unintentionally, appropriated a term used by science fiction writers to describe their own work.

Underlying the attitude of "My work is serious literature, therefore it can't be science fiction" are the assumptions that science fiction is either based on ignorance of human nature or it's carelessly written, to abysmal literary standards, that science fiction writers are so enamored of gadgets or weird aliens that they don't do their research or consider the social (etc.) implications of their concepts, and that they are uneducated about the larger field of literature. I find this small-minded and sad-minded, but I don't suppose anything I (who featured a race of intelligent, star-travelling gastropods in my first published novel) can say will change their minds.

In the end, it's their loss, while we continue to celebrate the creativity, insight, and excellence of our field

KATHARINE ELISKA KIMBRIEL



And fascinating, intelligent, star-traveling gastropods they were, Deborah! As my esteemed colleagues have already said, speculative fiction *is* science fiction, and the term has been used for avery long time. When I started out, I tended to refer to my novel as speculative fiction, because I didn't have people being blasted out of orbit every other minute. (That was another, unpublishedversion of the book.) I'm a big believer that SF is about "What If?" and "Wow!" Every speculative fiction novel should have at least one of those things in it – preferably both. I felt that it was sad Atwood couldn't accept the fact that a new group of readers had discovered her, and might seek out other books she'd written. She's not the only literary writer to dip her toe into speculative fiction. How ironic that there's a chance the book she will be remembered for is her speculative fiction novel.

The best story I can contribute on the topic of what-do-we-call-it comes from the late Warren Norwood. He liked to throw a verbal bomb into a panel by stating, "Science fiction is fantasy." As people would inhale and prepare for lively discussion, he would add: "Arthur C. Clarke's *The Nine Billion Names of God*." And the audience would go

"Well...."

Every fiction author, if they're honest, writes speculative fiction. The question is, what parameters do they set on theirvision and imagination before they start writing. Do they set their imagination free, that first draft, and see what bubbles up? Who knows, it might be champagne. That's what I'd ask Ms. Atwood, if we had a chance to discuss the topic.

PHYLLIS IRENE RADFORD

What the others said, better than I could.

(PATI NAGLE, LINDA NAGATA, JENNIFER STEVENSON and CHRIS DOLLEY passed on this question)

Amazing Stories: **Electronic publishing (the entire enterprise, not just e-books) has largely destroyed the magazine and newspaper markets (and is making in-roads into the publishing industry), while at the same time giving a voice and a platform to more individuals than ever before. For established authors, is this current situation problematic, an opportunity, or are we just living through an upheaval that will eventually sort itself out?**

JUDITH TARR

Opportunity. Definitely.

Established authors, as in authors who have been or are being published by the majors (I'm not going to talk about new authors--that's a whole 'nother kettle of sandworms), currently have more control over their own work than they've had in at least a century. Works that just a couple of years ago would have languished in the obscurity of used-book bins and remainder sales are now coming out in new and viable forms and finding new readers. Authors who have been dropped by their publishers not for lack of quality but for lack of sales are now able to publish new works in venues and formats that were never available before. Publishers are no longer the only real game in town, though they're still tremendously powerful. It's a whole new world.

It's also an upheaval of serious proportions. Yog's Law, *"Money always flows to the author,"* has shifted. Authors are now being held responsible for more of the process of getting their work out there--and not just in self-publishing. Publishers expect authors to carry more and more of the load of promoting their books. Advances are falling with sales numbers. Publishers' business and accounting models are decades behind the times. There's a slow seep of big-money authors away from publishers toward doing it themselves, which I think will become stronger as print numbers keep falling and publishers keep lagging behind the curve with accounting, marketing, and tracking of trends. Now they've got the Department of Justice on their case, literally, while Amazon works to bring them all down and set itself up in their place.

Authors are caught in a tsunami, but thanks to self-publishing and digital publishing, they have a real chance not only to survive but to thrive. If they were totally dependent on publishers as they used to be, they would be swept away.

I do believe it will sort itself out. Publishers as a concept are not going anywhere, though the current entities may not survive much longer in their current form. Publishers concentrate resources in one accessible place: acquisitions, editing, production, art direction, distribution, all the things that take a book from the author's mind to the reader's eye. They also pay advances, which give the author the means to write one book while the other is in production. Setups like Kickstarter offer some help with this while everything shakes down, but realistically, if an author wants to have time to write, someone else should be doing all the rest of the work of getting the book out to the readers--and while all of these things can be bought, how many authors have anything like the kind of money needed to pay for it?

Book View Café is trying an old model in a new way: the cooperative, run by volunteer labor. The author is not only in charge, she's becoming a publisher, not only for her own work but for that of others within the cooperative. It's one way to weather the storm. What it will all come to, I don't know, but I think--I hope--that authors will continue to have more opportunities than ever to get their work out there, and more power to decide what and how and where.

DAVE TROWBRIDGE

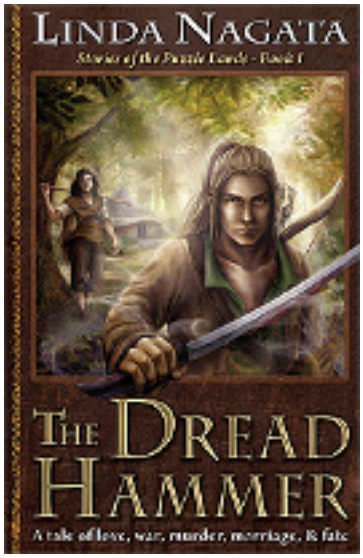
Judith pretty much said it all. I just want to emphasize the power shift that's taking place as the Internet and open-source software make it easier for an author (or group of authors, as with Book View Café) to assemble a team to take the place of a vertically-integrated publishing company. There's opportunity here not only for authors but anyone else with one or more of the talents needed.

It will be interesting to watch the swirl of new business models for the various pieces involved in publishing coalesce into a new dynamic stability. One thing is for sure: there will be more ways than ever before to "*take a book from the author's mind to the reader's eye*," and we'll all be richer for it.

SUE LANGE

Electronic publishing has certainly not destroyed the magazine/newspaper markets. I still get my magazines delivered in hard copy and I'm not hearing whiny please-get-your-friends-to-sign-up-for-subscriptions from them. Our hometown newspaper is still being sold on the newsstands next to New York Times. These entities are still print publishing as well as trying to figure out epublishing. Some do better than others, but they have not been destroyed by any sense. And as far as I can see, most readers are still reading print books more than ebooks.

The changes due to epublishing that Judy mentioned are very real. I hope at some point some entity is going to realize what a burden current marketing requirements for writers is. Hopefully they'll figure out how to make money doing that for us so we can go back to writing. I loves me some social media, but really, it does wear on one.



LINDA NAGATA

I used to subscribe to several magazines and the hometown newspaper. I don't anymore. Nearly all my reading is online or on my Kindle. I do subscribe to the Honolulu newspaper online, but our 112-year-old hometown newspaper, The Maui News, is having a hard time. Electronic publishing, like any major shift, brings jeopardy and promise.

As to whether established authors can expect diminishment, opportunity, or upheaval, I would answer "yes." Authors who have thrived in print have seen sales decline and rumor has it that being a bestseller now ain't what it used to be, while for those of us who never thrived in the traditional system, the opportunities are very real. No matter who we are as writers though, all of us get to deal with the upheaval--and I'm not at all sure it will eventually sort itself out. I rather suspect things will go on evolving and that there might not be any safe ground to stand on for a long time.

Personally, I am extremely pleased with the opportunity, but it's not a gold rush. Some authors are doing very well, while some of us are still paddling hard, trying to catch a wave. With traditional publishing though, if you didn't catch the wave the moment your book shipped, your future wasn't too bright. In this new world, we get a lot more chances to make something happen and that's a huge transformation.

JENNIFER STEVENSON

What they all said.

Gazing into my crystal ball, I predict that print books will "return," along with print newspapers and magazines, but more cheaply made, although perhaps not more cheaply priced. There will be a couple of landmark antitrust lawsuits, arriving too late to save some print publishers but changing the landscape some more. Tastemakers will emerge who comfort publishers sufficiently (i.e. they are not volunteer reviewers hiding behind anonymous handles) that publishers have something approaching the reliable lobbying power they once had with the chains via co-op, and publishers will no longer feel adrift, marketing wise.

Bestsellers of yesteryear will either go rogue completely or return, but more wily, to publish sometimes with major publishers, sometimes independently, and sometimes with smaller presses, multiplying their income streams in order to stabilize their cash flow. Oh, and vaudeville will make a comeback.

MAYA KAATHRYN BOHNHOFF

It's the nature of life that what presents a challenge also presents opportunities and vice versa. It was the hope of catching the opportunity—or as Jennifer said, the wave—that informed our decision to start Book View Café. We recognized that alone, our efforts to build up a following might be swallowed up in the mad rush to the gold fields. But as a cooperative effort, we can help each other build a following.

One of my friends, Jennifer Ashley, is doing very well selling her regency mysteries (which are seriously addictive) off her web site. This after her publisher felt they weren't doing well enough to continue. She has since done jaw-droppingly well just promoting them and selling them off her web site. BUT, she already had a huge following for her historicals, romances and erotica. Not every author at BVC has that kind of pull. I know I don't. But together, we are developing it. That's the opportunity. The challenge is what it's always been —how to promote, distribute and sell our literary dreams to the readers we know would love them.

We're working on that.

August 1923. Two and a half years before the debut of* Amazing Stories*, Hugo Gernsback published an "all SCIENTIFIC FICTION NUMBER" issue of his signature publication,* Science and Invention*.

Reader response was promising and Gernsback decided a magazine devoted to fiction alone could be a success.

CHRIS DOLLEY

I see this as a Publishing Spring and, like all revolutions, there will be unexpected winners, unexpected casualties and it'll take several years before the dust even begins to settle.

But I don't think the first casualties will be authors or publishers. I think agents and the 'bricks and mortar' bookstores could be squeezed first. If publishers start cutting back (both on books published and advances) and more authors start self-publishing, then both the profitability and the need for an agent diminishes. Already some agencies are re-inventing themselves - offering their services as epublishers to their clients. I expect some to move into PR and marketing as well. With the huge rise in self-published authors, and with publishers cutting their promotional budgets, there's a demand out there waiting to be filled.

The 'bricks and mortar' bookstores are already under pressure from Amazon. There was a move to sell ebooks at bookstores in partnership with Google. But, from what I've heard, Google are now pulling out, citing lower than expected sales. Times are going to be very tough for indie booksellers.

As for authors, I see this as a huge opportunity. Yes, there will be problems. I can see more authors being dropped by publishers. I can see more agents going out of business. But then this has always been an occupational hazard, and the determined author bounces back a few years later with a new *(pseudo)* nym. The advantage the author has this time is that they don't have to wait. And they don't have to change their name. They can self-publish.

Some authors will baulk at this. They don't have the skills or the energy to start learning new skills of ebook formatting or – God forbid – self promotion!

Which is where the BVC model comes into its own. Trading skills in a co-op is the ideal way to get your books produced and keep both your hair and your sanity.

BRENDA CLOUGH

Any new development creates a new market niche. People are already setting up businesses, helping authors get backlists into eformat. Somewhere somebody is going to start a fine little business manufacturing ebook graphics in bulk. I foresee that at some point our little co-op venture will top out – there is a limit to how many people can be in a co-op and still have it function effectively. By that time the industry will look

different.

I can't imagine that authors won't survive. Not all of us, but most of us will keep on creating. It's the finding of the new outlet for that creative power that will be different.

DEBORAH J ROSS

I've long since given up making predictions. Most of the time, I have no clue why one book sells and another doesn't (well, okay, I have lots of clues as to why some books *don't* sell). But here's what I believe:

People will always want good stories. They'll want to hear 'em, read 'em, see 'em (theater, films, etc.). They'll want to act them out. We are a story-telling species. The medium is far, far less important than the story. Flexibility/adaptability/range are the keys to surviving uncertain times.

Paper books have been around for a long time, and still offer strengths that other media don't. Durability is one, as we have no electronic storage medium that rivals the centuries that acid-free paper lasts. Books offer physical pleasures that ereaders don't (at least, so far) and (getting wilder here) people who grew up with books are less likely to completely discard them than people who grew up with computers. So we have overlapping generations of book-pref and computer/edevice-pref.

We're definitely in a shakedown period of electronic publishing. Some of what's going by the wayside should stay there, but often, good stuff risks becoming lost as well. It will take a while for new systems to emerge, and for errors to correct themselves.

One of the greatest potentials for epublishing is the rebirth of the midlist. This is where the most imaginative, risk-taking writing lives. These books challenged readers, to be savored over and over. Once upon a time, read-it-once best-sellers subsidized the midlist, to everyone's benefit. Then came the era of bean-counters, where every book was supposed to be a best-seller, so away went these precious but not *wildly* successful books. Now, most of them did make money. Just not enough. Enough, though, to support an author if the right audiences could be reached. This is where I am hoping electronic publishing will shine, by providing a framework for works that do not pander to the lowest-common-denominator audiences, and by using the power of electronic communications to connect these books with their audiences.

At least, that's what I hope will happen.

KATHARINE ELISKA KIMBRIEL

My peers have touched on just about everything on the topic, and so well! One thing I think I'll emphasize here, because I personally have to fight to avoid getting caught up in this trap. If you don't get the book written, as well as you possibly can, none of this brave new world will matter to you as a writer or to your potential readers. Start establishing an on-line presence, yes, and investigate the new offerings in blogs, social media, writer networking, etc.

But don't lose sight of who and what you are – a writer, telling stories people will want to read. Those of us who are older than twenty-five have seen several book revolutions come around (remember Waldenbooks?) There may well be multiple, huge changes in the next five, ten, or twenty years.

Decide if you want to be in the game. Get your butt in the chair and write your story. The game is not going anywhere – it's evolving. Yes, a few people will pull a brilliant ploy and checkmate in five moves. But most of us are going to be here a while if we want to win a game. Whether you're playing checkers or Go, there's always a strategy and many ways to win.

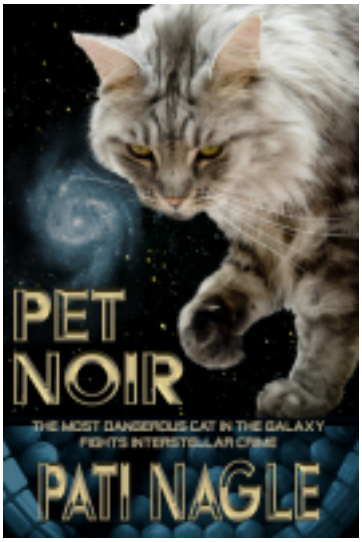
(PHYLLIS IRENE RADFORD, PATI NAGLE and VONDA N MCINTYRE chose not to answer this question.)

Amazing Stories: **Will we still have printed books in the future, or...?**

PATI NAGLE

There will always be a place for printed books.

The most likely scenario I see is that they will become art objects, collectible and expensive. There will still be coffee table books, signed limited editions, and I hope there will always be a gigantic unwieldy and indispensible physical edition of the OED.



The majority of casual reading and probably research will move into electronic form. I think this is a good thing, not a bad thing. The current system of publishing paper books (especially mass market paperbacks) is incredibly expensive and wasteful. The ebook is destined to replace the mmpb entirely, I think within the next five or at most ten years. (There! A prediction! Check back in five years and see if I was right!)

DAVE TROWBRIDGE

I think it likely that reading for recreation or entertainment will move into electronic form faster than reading for information or enrichment.

In a way, ebooks represent a return to an earlier form of the printed word, the scroll, and as such (so far), are not as easy to use as a book for recalling information, and do not encourage the kind of deep reading that changes one's life. There are simply more sensory clues in print than in an ebook: the location on the page, the look of the text, the thickness and weight of the book before and after the page on which the information was

encountered—the sheer tactility of a bound book is of inestimable use in organizing the information it conveys: with it, reading is a whole-body experience, just as is memory itself. One doesn't care so much about such things in recreational reading, but in the kind of deep reading I'm speaking of, I doubt the ebook will replace print any time soon.

To put it another way, while I expect that within my lifetime the latest romance, mystery, or space opera will most likely exist only as bit patterns, there will always be bound copies of Austen or Aristotle. And it may be that print-on-demand will evolve to the point that one can have the pleasure of a "real" copy of virtually any work, so that the shelves of one's "real" library would end up being even more of a social signal than they are now!

SUE LANGE

Books will become a status symbol. Only teenagers will read them because only teenagers are interested in status. I'm sure the old timers will have a library full of books they never read for their status, but teens will carry around copies of The Happy Hooker and Catcher in the Rye forever.

Genre literature, considered disposable, will never see the printed page. The thing that will be most missed is the bin of old books with tacky cover art at tag sales. There you can find the tastes of former generations in the artwork of 99cent paperbacks. I hope someone is collecting up that artwork for online display. It won't be the same as stumbling across one of yesterday's lurid covers, though. You do well to snap anything you thusly find today for it will be worth a fortune in another twenty years. That's my prediction

LINDA NAGATA

Survivalist manuals. Those will always be in print.

Personally, I lost my love affair with printed books when I opened my copy of The Silmarillion and had to toss it because it reeked of mildew.

That said, many people are collectors and book collectors are much kinder to their books than I am. So yes, I suspect print versions of "significant" books will continue to be available for a long time to come.

JENNIFER STEVENSON

Given the amount of waste paper and recycled paper we're still dumping into the landfills, and given that bookstores and publishers are being forced to rethink the way they've done business for the past seventy-odd years, I expect that when the dust settles we'll have cheap paper books again--cheaply-made books, anyway--for the paper-only reading market.

I also bet they won't be returnable to the publisher for a full refund.

CHRIS DOLLEY

: I think the demise of the printed book is a long way off. In Britain recently there was a move to get rid of cheques – they're outdated, expensive to operate, and everyone should move to electronic payment. Then came the backlash. People liked cheques. Not everyone had a mobile phone or a computer. And the authorities backed down and reversed the decision.

The same applies to books. Not everyone will want to buy an eReader. The question is: will there be enough of them to make publishing paper books viable? Niche publishers of printed books will say yes. But the big boys? At the moment they seem to be fighting a desperate rearguard action to protect the hardback – where, apparently, they make the most money. I really have no idea how this will play out. Ten years ago, I'd have thought the hardback would disappear long before the mass market paperback. I never bought hardbacks, I always waited for the paperback. But now? It really is anybody's guess. And the decision doesn't lie so much with the publishers, but with the companies that own the publishers.

BRENDA CLOUGH

My vision is for books to shift to the true print-on-demand, with all the customization and flexibility that e-formatting will allow. They're already doing this here and there, but the business has nowhere near matured. It should be like this:

I decide to buy a copy of, oh, Neil Gaiman's latest. Off to the bookstore I go, where there is only one examination-and-display copy of the work on the shelf.

To buy it I place my order at the counter, selecting from the menu display, which looks just like the one at Burger King and is manned by an identical minimum-wage clerk. Yes, hardbound. My living room is done in hues of blue, so I want the blue cover option – there are a dozen to choose from. I am old-fashioned enough to enjoy it in dust-cover format, too, rather than in a library binding. I want the R-rated text, and display my ID to prove I am old enough to buy it. And while I'm at it, I might as well spring for those racy illustrations by a noted graphic artist – Gaiman's comic-book roots always make his fiction very visual, so this is a worthwhile investment. Since I am in the US, the default is American English, but I can toggle it over to British spellings if I like, and I would do it for a more deeply Brit writer.

Paper stock? I am rather picky about tactile input, so I upgrade from the cheap light paper to a slightly more heavy bond. Extra-black ink please, to accommodate my visual handicaps, and yes, let's have it at 14 point in Garamond, my preferred font. All my books are in Garamond! Deckle edge? Fancy colored first letters to start off each chapter? Only a small upcharge, miss! Oh please: talk about overkill. What is this, the Book of Kells? They'll never quit coming up with new little features to try and lure the dollar out of my pocket! Forget that, and the matching slipcase too.

When I am finished ordering, I go and have a cup of coffee and browse the other books. In fifteen minutes my Gaiman novel is printed, bound and ready, exactly as I ordered it. The clerk slips my purchase into a bag, and

I clutch it to my chest as I head home. It is deliciously warm, like freshly-baked bread – hot off the press.

DEBORAH J. ROSS

I'm a printer's daughter, and I love the feel, weight, look, and smell of books. I would be sad to see printed books disappear, and I don't think they will, if only because paper is so much more durable than electronic storage media. Acid-free paper, when kept clean and dry, can last for centuries.

It used to be that owning printed books divided those people who read from those who didn't (with the exception of people who did all their reading in library books). Actually, once upon a time, only wealthy people could own books (or subscribe to paying circulating libraries, which were the only kind in existence.) Now we have 3 categories: people who read and own books; people who don't read; and people who read and don't own books. This is a very interesting development. Just as the introduction of the free public library and cheap paper-backed books changed the book-owning and reading habits of generations, I think epublishing will do the same.

Right now, there's still an aspect of novelty about ebook readers, but eventually many people will become accustomed to doing most of their reading in that form. Then perhaps printed books will be the next hot thing – wow, you can lend it to your friends! Everyone can see what you're reading! Whether that happens or not, I think we've passed the threshold of acceptance of ebooks as an enduring part of the menu of reading options.

KATHARINE ELISKA KIMBRIEL

That's interesting that they tried to phase out checks in Britain, Maya – I missed that bit of business. Here in Texas, checks are making a comeback, because credit card fees are now crazed for businesses. I get $5-$10 discounts several places by writing a check instead of using credit.

Also, records, of all things, are making a status comeback. So why not books? I see a world with much of what has been suggested – art books, an OED for those who can afford it, and Brenda's wonderful take on "Have it your way" books are just the beginning. I thought that trade paper would replace mass market paperbacks, but ebooks have pushed trade to one side and are charging ahead.

One thing I would like to see more study on, though. A recent lengthy **article** talked about whether we don't remember an ebook as well as a printed book, if computers are better suited to certain types of reading. I actually think that may be true, for me – but is that because I started with bound books, and had all those physical, tactile clues to help me remember a book? Do younger readers have that same association with an ereader event as I have holding a real book?

I know I will probably learn to like an ereader, for convenience and storage reasons. But I'm struggling to keep copies of favorite books in print form!

PHYLLIS IRENE RADFORD

What everyone else said. I've adopted an e-reader and love the experience, except for remembering to charge the battery. As I age and my vision changes and my fingers stiffen, I find the Nook—an old black and white version I bought 18 months ago—easier to handle and I can adjust the font. That being said, it is more difficult to read during a power outage even with a clip on light. We have some lengthy dark sessions up here in the mountains, about hour 5 I begin to long for a print book and candle.

Recently I was dealing with a fellow author in Croatia. His English is near perfect and idiomatic, as are most of his age group in Eastern Europe. They all have computers, but have to go to cyber cafes to access the internet. E-readers and e-books are very rare. They buy print books in English because they can't get them in translation. Until the rest of the world catches up with US and western Europe, there will be a market for print books. How long? I don't know.

Just last month my colleague was delighted to be able to download the Kindle app to his computer in a cyber café and install it on his own computer at home. Now he can read e-books, and proof read the electronic stories and books he sells to the US markets. He said he's leading the pack of his friends in achieving the freedom of e-books.

For a time we will have both. I don't think we'll ever totally lose printed books, for many reasons.

JUDITH TARR

I expect the printed book will become a specialty item: a way of preserving exceptionally beautiful or valuable or important material. The love of the physical book will go the way of the buggy whip—i.e., still thriving in its narrow niche of enthusiasts and hobbyists, but not an essential item in every household—and electronic will become the default form. Then lovers of the ebook will deplore its demise in favor of whatever format supersedes it (direct download into the reader's brain?).

Unless of course the Pulse happens. Or the collapse of civilization. Or the Butlerian Jihad. Then we'll all be back to copying precious texts by hand.

*(*MAYA *KAATHRYN BOHNHOFF and VONDA N MCINTYRE chose to pass on this question.)*

Amazing Stories: **BVC is about authors getting together to mine their backlists, share some of the workload and mutually promote each other. Is this a representative model for how an established author will be able to survive in the e-publishing age? What one thing would you like to see added to the mix that you believe would help increase the effectiveness of your efforts?**

DAVE TROWBRIDGE

BVC is but one of many possible models for how established authors can survive in the era of e-publishing, and the important thing to keep in mind is that for the most part, these models are not mutually exclusive. In fact, from the perspective of an author, they might better be labeled strategies, or modes of operation.

However, BVC has two strengths that set it apart from most other strategies: its cooperative structure and its consensus-based decision-making process. Say what you will about "traditional" publishing; at its best it offers an extensive support system for authors that's hard to replace. It's a rare author that has all the skills needed for a successful writing career, but as BVC grows, so too the support it can offer members increases.

The other half of the equation is consensus, which lets BVC explore the new publishing landscape without getting locked into old ways of doing things. It leaves us free to experiment, learn from mistakes, and profit from new perspectives. It's hard work—artificial hierarchy and power relationships are a lot easier—but it's far more adaptive. And interesting!

That brings me the long way round to the second part of the question. What one thing would I like added to the mix to increase our effectiveness? I've no idea, but I fully expect I'll know it when I see it—after much discussion and modification. For me, that's the best part of this experiment in cooperative, consensus-driven publishing, and I'm looking forward to seeing what happens next.

All of the cover art for the entire run of Amazing Stories can be viewed at Galactic Central Press. Make sure to leave time for viewing – there are 609 images.

SUE LANGE

I think networking has always been important for authors. I see BVC as more a small, formal network than a representative model for established authors.

There are other entities publishing backlists. We do more co-promotion and sharing of the work than other backlist publishers, but I'm not sure that means we have the right formula. We try to keep our finger on the pulse and all that, but most of the time we're trudging through, trying to separate the wheat from the chaff of the Brave New Internet World.

There's a lot of interaction between us and we're all terribly creative. That means we're always looking at bandwagons and trying to figure out if we should jump on or follow behind to pick up the offal. I hate to even mention anything I might like added to the mix because one of us here will pick up on it and next thing you know we'll have a new committee or something. It's exhilarating and exhausting.

LINDA NAGATA

We're in the midst of so many changes now, I'm almost afraid to think of any more. We're currently working on a new store, which is an essential part of the mix, and the publicity committee is hard at work developing new strategies.

Farther along, I'd like to see us get a stronger connection with reviewers, maybe via Netgalley or something similar. Just getting the word out is, to my mind, the biggest challenge.

JENNIFER STEVENSON

As we get bigger, we get more businessy. We're now publishing two books a week more often than we publish one. That pace accelerated on us rather suddenly, and threatens to get faster. We're making more money. With that comes business responsibility. The hardest thing for a business to do is to survive growth. Our process is no longer jogging along with our work. It's beginning to lope.

Next step? Jet packs!

MAYA KAATHRYN BOHNHOFF

BVC came about because a group of us were despairing of the work load (above and beyond meeting deadlines) that was expected of writers by major publishers.

We are expected to do our own PR, come up with marketing plans, and promotions. We were wondering what publishers actually offered besides the physical book. The publishers' model seemed to require every author to be writer, editor, PR department, marketing maven, song and dance man and event coordinator all rolled into one.

The BVC model works on the theory that while few writers really can be the whole package, if we banded together, we could cover all the bases. We were pretty much right. And as the membership grows, we are beginning to have depth at the various positions—heh, it's like a baseball team, I guess. I think it's a very good model because it allows the writers to own the entire process, to do things collectively and collaboratively, to have the editorial opinions of peers who have their best interests at heart, to have a support network they can call on for help and ultimately to have an outlet for the publication of their books.

I think the piece we want to grow most, now is public and market outreach so that when BVC releases a title, readers flock to buy it. I think we'd all love to see our backlists continuing to be read and, of course, earning us money so we don't have to do anything but write.

CHRIS DOLLEY

It's worth mentioning that BVC doesn't just publish backlist. We publish original work too. Some of these books are additions to previously published series, and some are totally new creations. We also have shared world anthologies.

The strength of BVC is that it's flexible and evolving — something essential in the current marketplace. If someone has an idea, we have thirty plus creative brains who can make it work — or set up an experiment and prove that it doesn't. One of the things that life soon teaches you is that, however well you plan, something unexpected always come along. Which is why flexibility is key.

If someone had told me three months ago that getting BVC books into libraries could become a big deal, I wouldn't have been convinced. But then the major publishers started pulling their e-books from libraries, or raising their prices, or restricting the number of times an e-book could be borrowed. And an opportunity arose for us to step in and work directly with libraries.

BRENDA CLOUGH

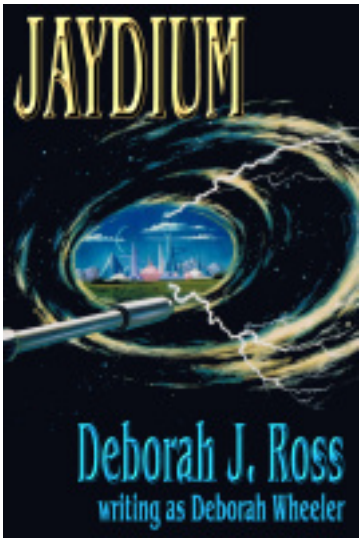
In that line, I was reflecting only this morning, about how an individual author, having published some ebooks, might be able to sell them to a library system. The answer: with great difficulty. Municipalities do not want to cut deals with individual authors. They want e books in big old wads, many at once. They want to write one check, to Simon and Schuster or Random House, and not fifty checks to Author A, Author B, and so forth. Having lots of authors makes it possible for BVC to do this as well. If we had rolled up, one by one, to give it a try, nobody would succeed.

The other fun thing with a co-op model is being able to step out of your zone, and sail off into new adventures. I would certainly never have set up my own blog. But splitting the blogging duties among a group makes it much easier. And a BVCer with the gift for that sort of thing could become quite a master at the massaging of software and managing of e-stores. Not me, babe — if I get the time my ambition is to master

graphics programs.

DEBORAH J. ROSS

Sooner or later, hopefully sooner, we are going to have to address the print option and some way of making our catalog available in bookstores and dealer's rooms. As it is, our sales potential is limited by how to get readers into the bookstore — or how to let them know about individual books. As we've discussed recently, the blog portion of the website gets a lot of traffic, but very few of those visitors wander over to the bookstore. Most of our promotion is on social media sites, which are inundated by announcements and "buy my book!" from self-published authors. Unless a BVC author has an established readership or the promotion is done as a discussion, interview, or other "value-added" method, there's little to distinguish our releases from the gazillion others.



Once potential readers take a closer look, read a sample chapter, etc., I think most of them are smart enough to see that the quality of BVC publications (both content and formatting) sets us apart from those gazillion self-published books. I suspect — although I do not have any data to back this up — that one sale predisposes a reader to more. The challenge is getting the reader to, in essence, pick up and look at that first book. This is where a partnership with bookstores comes in. Even if the reader does not purchase that particular book, the connection BVC = professional quality gets made.

That's the real value of having print books available in stores; the actual sales may be small, but the educational value can be immense.

KATHARINE ELISKA KIMBRIEL

I like the suggestions above — it illustrates the importance of choosing great, creative people to work with! We are on the same wavelength — get quality work into the hands of our readers, in every form we can figure out.

One thing I think I can add to the mix is that I'd like us to come up with a simple way to let people know that new works have entered our ebookstore. Perhaps we can create a form that each product manager can use to enter the pertinent data and images. So each Tuesday when new books launch, anyone on our mailing list would receive a tiny digest of "New Works this Week @BVC." You'd have to opt-in, but we could show a sample to people of what they'd receive. This would be sort of an RSS for people who don't want to use RSS. And have a link to recent announcements on-line, so people can quickly see what is new for the month, etc.

You note I'm not mentioning an obvious way to do this — a newsletter. That won't work unless we can create

a form, and then assemble the forms easily into a newsletter. Part of my scheming is to automate everything we can, so we can get back to writing!

PHYLLIS IRENE RADFORD

I think Kathi just made my job as keeper of the catalog a bit more complex. It's a great idea. We have half the mechanism in place. Now we need one more step (or six) but I'm sure someone will think up a way to do this. That's the beauty of the co-op; every email or forum discussion triggers something newer and better. We evolve.

I was in on the very first discussions of how to increase our web presence. We did that and kept on growing as our readers evolved and wanted something a little different. We have the collective skills to keep up with those demands as long as we listen. And we do listen. With forty members we have forty different circles of contacts and exposure. A lot of those circles overlap but not all. I don't have the same readership as Pat Rice but I share many with Deborah J. Ross. We are reaching orders of magnitude more readers than one or even two working alone.

Because we are all working together and learning from each other, I see our membership as much stronger than at the beginning. I see members stretching their skills and adding new ones every day. That is the most satisfying part of the entire experience.

What do I want to see happen? As mentioned before I feel like we're ready to explore print options soon after we launch the new book store. Other than that, I'm not looking for any one improvement. Working with the constant evolution is marvelous enough. I'm starting to see name recognition of the Book View Café at SF conventions. I'm looking forward to that.

VONDA N. MCINTYRE

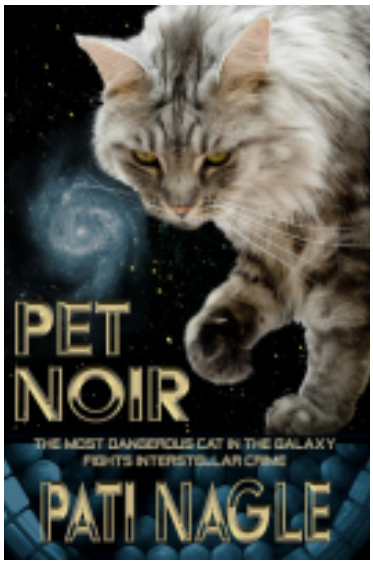
Book View Café is one possibility among a number of possibilities. I like the camaraderie and the pooling of skills and the community. I hope that as time goes on that our operation and other small independents will get more attention, as people learn that they can read independently-published books on their dedicated ereaders, rather than being locked into the larger distributors.

JUDITH TARR

What They All Said.

Building our readership has always been one of our main goals, and probably always will be. Finding a way to be heard above the roar of the crowd. Experimenting with different strategies.
Interesting that so many members have mentioned the print option—I was vocal in support of it when I first came on board in early 2009, but everyone agreed it wasn't time. Is it time now? I see we'll be working on that again soon—and maybe this round, someone will say, "I have an idea! I'll see what I can do to make it a reality!" And someone else will say, "I don't have the skills to do what you're doing, but here are some other things that might help." And then a third person will add, "OK, while you two work on this, I'll see what else we can do to push this thing toward completion." And that it will happen, because that's how we do things around here.

PATI NAGLE



I think we'll see more groups of authors working together in the future. There are already a number of author collectives out there and more popping up all the time. Just this week a new one came out – romance authors working together to brand their work as quality ficiton. BVC is a true cooperative, with a model that's unlike any of the others I've seen. We've been around for over two years now and we've learned a lot about what works and what doesn't. There's more to learn, of course.

Print is definitely in our future. So are some formalizations of our structure – inevitable as we grow. But we'll always be a cooperative, a group of authors helping each other. That's our foundation and our strength. I think outreach is one of the places where we need to grow, and I expect our new bookstore to make that a lot easier.

Amazing Stories was published continuously from April 1926 until Winter 1995. The first uninterrupted run consisted of 69 volumes and 592 issues. A second run from Summer 1998 till Summer 2000 increased the volumes to 72 and the number of issues to 602. A third run from September 2004 until March 2005 brought the volume number to 74 and the issue count to 609.

The fourth incarnation of Amazing Stories will begin with Volume 75, Issue 1, whole number 610. There will be no *last* issue.

Amazing Stories: **The Google Book Settlement supposedly offered authors a way to earn on their works (through advertising) and offered wide distribution and immediacy in exchange for largely co-opting copyright. Ursula K. Le Guin (one of your members) came out strongly against it. Works would have been (freely) available to libraries, schools, etc, whereas now we have silly things like e-books that 'time-out' at the library. GBS was bad – but what's the alternative?**

SUE LANGE

First off, the idea of my writing being paid for by accompanying advertising is distasteful. If that's what the Google Settlement offered, then…eek. On the other hand, I wouldn't turn down publication in the New Yorker, so what am I talking about? Something about Internet ads, though. They seem overwhelming compared to magazine ads. More in your face and hard to ignore. And ads on a page of a book? Yuck.

Second, Ursula objected to something very specific in the Settlement: the orphan clause. The one that stated if a copyright owner of a work could not be found and the book was out of print, the work would fall to the public domain. That is objectionable. Why is it so important that orphans be dealt with at all? Google can't find the copyright owner? Big deal. It's not a horrible loss if some work is not available via Google Books. We'll survive until the author makes it out of the comfort room to sign on the dotted line.

Which brings me to my third point: the opt in/opt out choice. How annoying! I needed a lawyer just to figure out what the difference was. Seemed like either choice was wrong. What if your situation changes? Like one day you wake up to a chorus of angels and you finally understand the ramifications of the Google Book Settlement. Omigod, you made the wrong choice!

I can't remember which I chose. To be honest the Settlement has little effect on my life. I make so little money from my intellectual property, it's not worth quibbling over. However, there are writers who make a living through their writing. For them it's different. They need to pay attention.

There is one thing Ursula mentioned in her blog posts on the subject that made me jump on her bandwagon. It's her reaction to the Mickey Mouse clause of the copyright law. She dislikes it. Me too.

Lengthening the life of a copyright to 70 years beyond the life of the author (120 years for corporate authorship—why?) was a bit much. Hey I'm all for providing for heirs. Considering the difficult conditions of an artist's life, there often isn't much to pass on to their kids. But 70 years? How much time does junior need to get his own lemonade stand up and running?

Ursula felt that if the Mickey Mouse clause wasn't so limiting, the whole orphan thing would go away. Material would fall into the public domain within a reasonable amount of time and the number of orphans out there would be too small to worry about. She's right, but I doubt very much the Mickey Mouse clause is going to go away so we're stuck with these "orphans."

What is the alternative to the Google Book Settlement, then? I say live with the brats. Accept the fact of the orphans' existence. It's not the end of the world. If a work is truly important and the world demands it, then Google or some other entity should work hard to find the copyright owners. Of course, a really important book that the world wants would have that effort behind it no questions asked. So we're probably talking about books that don't have a large readership. How terrible is it if they don't get digitized for a generation or two? IMHO.

CHRIS DOLLEY

Addressing the library part of the question, this is something that Book View Cafe is looking into. There are very real fears that publishers have about libraries loaning ebooks. The major fear is that if readers can download an ebook for free from a library, why would anyone ever want to buy a book? Borrowing a print book is different – you have to physically visit the library – but ebooks, you can download from anywhere – 24/7. And they don't wear out.

Some publishers are so frightened of this that they've stopped selling ebooks to libraries, others have increased their ebook prices to over $100, or limited the number of times a book can be borrowed. We've taken a different approach. We offer a discount to libraries of up to 45% on our ebooks. Why? Because a.) We believe passionately that libraries should be supported. My local library supported my reading habit for years when I couldn't afford to buy books. Now it's my turn to help them. b.) An author's biggest fear is anonymity. By working with partner libraries we believe we can raise our member's profiles. c.) The future is never as scary or as rosy as people think. Planning your current strategy on the assumption of a future Armageddon in book buying habits is crazy. A far more sensible approach is to be flexible and look to influence and take advantage of future possibilities, not to dictate terms, or pick up your books and walk away.

And there are plenty of alternative book lending models that do not lead to the death of publishing. I receive an annual PLR payment from UK libraries. I believe Public Lending Right is also used in Canada and Ireland. It's a way of reimbursing authors by paying them a sum based on the number of loans of their books. Currently PLR is funded by government grant. There's no reason this system couldn't be funded by library subscription IF the number of library loans became a serious threat to the bookstores.

We've only just started our library initiative and already Book View Cafe supplies books direct to Douglas County Libraries in Colorado and Wheelers in Australasia. We plan to expand rapidly.
(passes) & Promo for up-coming question

BRENDA CLOUGH

This is one of those issues where, like Bette Midler sings, ya gotta have friends. I know almost nothing about the Google settlement, and cannot spare the time to bone up on the subject. However, there are groups that can and do, particularly the Science-Fiction & Fantasy Writers of America. They're running around researching, testifying, writing briefs, and in general keeping on top of the subject. I am a member and can count on them to figure out what the best thing is, and do it. They will let me know if effort on my part (probably whining to congresspersons) will be called for.

And, while I'm at it, I plan to pay someone to do my taxes, and have a professional with a shop full of the right tools to rotate my tires. There are Heinlein heroes, who can do everything – in novels. In real life, we delegate. Life is too short.

DEBORAH J. ROSS

is too busy writing to try to figure out the Google Settlement.

(Ed. Note: Which is of course its own statement about the settlement.)

KATHARINE ELISKA KIMBRIEL

I tried to fill out the paperwork for Google Settlement when I was ill, and failed miserably. I realized my only solution was to stay affiliated with writer organizations, have an Internet presence, and get my backlist into production in some form as quickly as possible. I confess, that's why it all started. I was just busy writing away and went: "You're going to declare my books orphaned? Wait a minute!"

So, Google — you radicalized me. Author Rights Now!

Fact.

PHYLLIS IRENE RADFORD

My objection to the Google settlement was that it was negotiated by an organization I do not belong to and I was expected to accept their orders without question. They had no right to negotiate on behalf of the 90% of authors who do not belong.

On top of that, proof of copyright ownership fell to the author. Google took everything they wanted and would only give it up if we provided a ream of paperwork. I don't think so.

Author Jay Lake uses the analogy that if he has a barbeque on his back deck he hasn't used in 2 years doesn't mean it's free to anyone who wants to take it. Same with a book. It may be out of print or no longer available, that doesn't mean it's up for grabs.

Chris answered the library question very well.

VONDA N. MCINTYRE

Ursula's Google (Un)Settlement page is at http://ursulakleguin.com/Index-GoogleSettlement.html and her petition is at http://ursulakleguin.com/GS-Petition.html
The orphan books question wasn't the only problem with what Google wanted to do. It was a problem that being out of print (OP) was redefined to mean "in the public domain," which it isn't. But that wasn't the only problem.

The worst problem with Google's program was that you had to opt out of it. I'm not terribly prolific, but trying to claim my own work in the Google database was a nightmare. After spending a good deal of time and growing more and more resentful, I said to myself, "Self, I'm not doing this!" and opted out entirely.

oogle's idea of making everything available to everyone under any and all circumstances might in theory have been a good idea, but I notice that their attempt to grab my work — some of which was OP (but not public domain) until Book View Café brought it back into print — was hardly the pure good-to-society effort that a lot of people made it out to be. They were planning to make a lot of money from it. Perhaps a bit might trickle down to the writers.

It's funny how you get called a Communist if you suggest that maybe it isn't fair that nearly all of the increase in the GNP over the last thirty years has gone to people who are already obscenely rich (as opposed to the people who have created the increase in productivity, which would be working class and middle class people with stagnant incomes).
But if you point out that you own a literary property, you're accused of being a selfish greedy writer. Most writers aren't rich, obscenely or otherwise, and most professional writers would like to be able to pay their bills. This is increasingly difficult in a world in which "We have to pay the printer more, we have to pay the distributor more, amazon.com wants a bigger discount on book prices, Google wants a share of your work without bothering to ask, we have to pay executives millions of dollars, give them millions of dollars of bonuses, give them millions of dollars of golden parachutes when they leave the company" results in "We're paying the same advance for a first novel now as we paid in 1975."

In 1975 I could live for a year on the $3500 that Fawcett Gold Medal paid me for The Exile Waiting.
Now, not so much.

JUDITH TARR

The Settlement does appear to be dead, thanks to various court rulings that point out that, you know, there is this thing called copyright, and it does not mean what Google thinks it means. They just want to share all of human literature! For free! And make millions off it.

As they all do. Facebook, for example. Pinterest, whose terms of service add up to, "All your content are belong to us." Pirates in their fleets and legions, some of whom are actually charging users for their illegal downloads. It's a constant game of whack-a-mole, and it never, ever stops.

I admit, in my innocence at the time, that I opted in to the Settlement, because if they were going to steal my work anyway, at least I'd get a pittance for it. Or maybe it wasn't innocence but cynicism. I have never believed in Google's motto, "Don't be evil." They're just as evil as every other corporate entity. Corporations exist to make profits. Period. They will do this in any way they can get away with. Grand theft author? Why not? Most authors are too powerless, too naïve, or too dead to know the difference.

Except that, with the rise of the same social media that are becoming obscenely rich on our unpaid content, authors are better informed. And more powerful, which is a bit ironic but there you are. Knowledge is power.

And that is why I'm in favor of offering my BVC books to libraries. That's my choice, I can opt in or opt out with complete freedom, and if readers like my work enough, they'll click the link and buy it so they can keep it. I grew up in libraries, being a voracious reader with no budget, and I feel strongly that in doing this, I'm paying forward. Honestly? It geeks me out. My books! In libraries! It excites me beyond measure.

About the long term issue of ebooks never wearing out: I suspect there may be a term limit set on ebooks as time goes on. Whatever the life span of a library book is--five years? Ten? Offer a license, renewable at the end of that period. Libraries are replacing their physical books or else culling and disposing of them. I don't see why ebooks couldn't be set up to work the same way.

PATI NAGLE

The Google deal was a brazen attempt to grab the publication rights of thousands of authors. This is theft, folks. Had it succeeded, Google would have made millions at the expense of independent writers. I'm glad it failed. It frightened and confused a lot of authors. It infuriated me. I now avoid doing business with Google because of it.

We support libraries because libraries purchase the books they lend. They represent a source of income to us as well as a great tradition of making books available to those who can't afford to buy them. Most of us have used and continue to use libraries. BVC's work with libraries is an exciting development this year.

DAVE TROWBRIDGE

To me, it just more proof that Qoholeth was right: there is nothing new under the sun. Enclosure of the commons by the wealthy and powerful is an ancient struggle that will never cease. We won this round.

(Linda Nagata, Jennifer Stevenson and Maya Kaathryn Bohnhoff chose to pass on this question.)

Amazing Stories: **Amazon has made moves that seem to indicate that it wants to become the 'Wal•Mart' of publishing (they dominate the distribution channels and are now starting to offer their own imprints; [I believe that they will eventually squeeze everything down to treating authors as hourly wage earners and works as 'works for hire': if you want the kind of distribution Amazon can offer, this is the contract you have to sign.] Do you believe that efforts like BVC can successfully retain enough market share to remain viable in the face of efforts like Amazon's? Is the small boutique publisher going to thrive?**

LINDA NAGATA

Umm, "the tighter your grip, the more star systems will slip through your fingers"?

Right now Amazon offers a decent deal to indie authors. How long that good deal will last is a subject of great debate and anxiety. As a writer, I'm firmly of the "don't put all your eggs in one basket" school, as well as the "keep control of your own work" school, but every writer has to decide what works best for them.

I don't worry that we'll all eventually be reduced to creating work for hire, because why would we do that? The authors I'm aware of who do work-for-hire go into it with eyes open, knowing what they're going to get out of it. Sometimes that's just a paycheck. Sometimes it's publicity that will help to push their other books. It's a business decision. But if there was no choice, if we were required to give up copyright or to agree to onerous publishing terms, we can walk away, just the same as if a traditional publisher offers an unacceptable contract. Yes, most of us make the majority of our income at Amazon, but if the terms change, so will our income and there will be little reason to stay.

I can certainly see tribes of readers and writers: those within the corporate fold, and those without, but there will be options. A monopoly is very hard to maintain, especially in the age of the Internet, and especially

among a branch of the information/entertainment economy. Even if we have to live on the margins of that economy for a while, it's a big world. So yes, I can't see a world in which there is only one publisher. There will continue to be small presses and boutique publishers like BVC.

But BVC is more than a publisher. It's a bookseller too, a place where people worldwide can buy their ebooks as an alternative to the giants. It's up to us to give them reasons to do that, which is one reason we're currently in the process of upgrading and streamlining the book buying experience at our website.

For genre readers, a small site like BVC can make it easier to find the kind of quality books you'd really like to read. It can offer a closer connection to the writer, and the knowledge that you're supporting your favored writers' next books by purchasing from a cooperative, where the writer gets a better deal. But one of my favorite aspects of BVC is that our books can be purchased worldwide at a fair price. By contrast, if Amazon sells one of my books to someone outside the "Amazon countries" my royalty gets cut in half and the buyer has to pay fees that are not negligible. I once had a book on special at $2.99; a buyer in Europe told me he paid $5.74 for it.

In the end though, the shape of the bookselling world will be determined by the readers. Do readers want to be able to buy only from Amazon? Will most readers be okay with whatever 99-cent or $2.99 books make up the current bestseller lists? Or will a meaningful number of readers be willing to pay a little more and go a little deeper to find the books they really want to read and to support the authors of those books?

I think small booksellers and distributors will become more important and more visible as the book economy evolves.

MAYA KAATHRYN BOHNHOFF

I'm positive there will always be room in the marketplace for BVC and other "boutique" publishers, just as there's room in the marketplace for other types of boutique operations. I mean, just think of all the boutiqueries that exist outside the literary world—bath and body shops, clothiers, shoe boutiques, jewelry stores, perfumeries. They exist online and in brick and board stores. And they exist because of the type of shopping experience the user wants.

At Book View Café, we've st riven to create a warm, cozy atmosphere for our visitors, plus we've tried to make ourselves accessible to them so they feel as if they are part of what we're trying to do. Wal-Mart style businesses have to shoot for a one-size-fits-all paradigm. We don't.

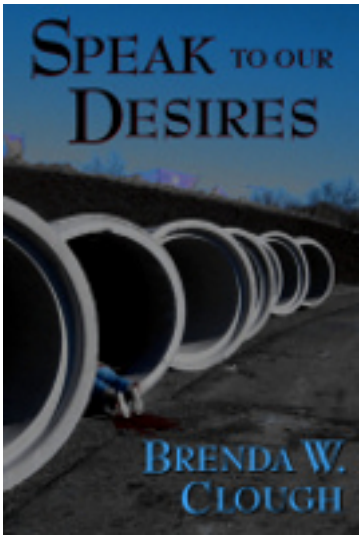
I think what will happen more and more, too, is that BVC and other boutiques will network and support each other. We've made a point of building relationships with like-minded organizations. I think that will only grow.

CHRIS DOLLEY

The future never turns out the way you expect. At the moment the advance of Amazon appears unstoppable but the more it grows, the more it's going to be noticed by politicians and interest groups. And no one likes a monopoly.

Also the business world is far more volatile these days. There was a time when brand was everything, companies would defend their brand name to the death and, often, when a company folded, its most valuable asset was its brand name. Now I see companies that have spent decades building up a brand, change their name to whizzbang.com because it's new and dynamic and they're seeking out a younger customer base. And you see organisations become household names who, two years ago, no one had ever heard of. This is why I wouldn't bet on Amazon becoming the only player on the block. New names will spring up to challenge them.

As for BVC's future, the huge advantage we have is we're quick, flexible and willing to experiment. Plus we have no offices to rent or staff to pay. And we're determined. If one of us sees an opportunity we have the people and imagination to analyse that opportunity and do something about it. Quickly. Not many publishers can say that.



BRENDA CLOUGH

At this moment (checks watch) Amazon is the big dog. I can't see this lasting forever, or even more than several more years. Chris is quite right – things are moving too fast. It wasn't so very long ago – five years? When Amazon's profitability was still an open question. And the market is steadily fragmenting, right before our very eyes. No, we writers will be okay – as long as we're flexible.

DEBORAH J. ROSS

is deeply suspicious of big business, so will throw reason and caution to the winds and offer the opinion that unless and until Amazon owns the whole darned intarwebs, authors will find alternate ways of marketing their books and will stay with Amazon only as a long as Amazon plays nicely.

KATHARINE ELISKA KIMBRIEL

"The most flexible element in any system has the most influence on that system." I have discovered in the past couple of years that I am astoundingly flexible. I think a large percentage of writers are the same way.

Bluntly put, if Apple comes up with a simple, highly refined way to upload books to their store, and the store becomes very searchable and supportive, then every writer is going to want to have a version of their books at Apple. I've just watched Barnes & Noble come up with a new marketing ploy for re-releases and new ebooks in older, midlist series. The new idea is selling ebooks like hotcakes and making scads of money for the authors profiled. And it's only 30 days of exclusivity.

Amazon is not unbeatable. That's part of why they keep pushing the envelope. They know that someone, somewhere, is building a better mousetrap -- and building that mousetrap without the weight of old technology and ten-years-ago thinking to haul along. I'm waiting for a new Internet site that is totally ebooks, offering a great interface and great terms. We'll all be there!

It's like the publishing gurus say – writers are the creators. We're ground zero. For the really good stuff, we're needed. Everything else will change, but we'll still be in there creating.

PHYLLIS IRENE RADFORD

In decades past we've seen traditional publishers grow and gobble up the competition until they are so bloated they can't survive their own bureaucracy. Small presses absorb the cast offs and rise to the top to replace Senior Bloat. This makes room for new small presses, innovative, reader and author friendly to chip away at the big monster. Amazon is approaching the point of bloat. BVC and others are ready and waiting.

It's a cycle. It repeats itself.

VONDA N. MCINTYRE

I've done work for hire and a good bit of it, especially the Star Trek novels, was good fun. The Star Trek novels subsidized several of my original novels. I took some heat from colleagues who thought I ought to get a morally acceptable (to them) job. Under most circumstances I doubt I would find a work-for-hire contract acceptable for original fiction.

As amazon.com gets more influential, publishers get more panicky. Even small presses have increasingly grabby and non-writer-friendly contracts. Why they think abusing writers is going to do them any good is beyond me. For the moment, I'd rather hang out at Book View Café where I have some control over how my work is presented. I could be persuaded to go with a commercial publisher for the work in progress, but at this point it would take some persuading.

JUDITH TARR

One thing that has kept the wheels of publishing rolling right over authors and their rights is the huge mass of would-be writers who are desperate to get published and will take any terms, any terms at all, to achieve that dream. If one author declines to take the lousy terms, there are hundreds or thousands of others who are willing, even eager just to see their work in print (whether that be on paper or in electronic form).

And yet, ironically, Amazon's attempts to trump "traditional" publishers by offering authors (however temporarily or cynically) much more attractive terms have contributed a great deal to the transformation of self-publishing from despised stepchild and last resort of the untalented and the unmarketable, to a respectable and in many cases preferable alternative. This is a profound change in the way it all works, and it puts the author more in control of her work than she's been in at least the past couple of centuries.

I don't believe that's going to change. I still see authors who suffer from a kind of Stockholm syndrome, who will not or cannot let go of their dreams of being published under the twentieth-century model, and who will accept awful contracts because they are publishers' contracts--and I include the publishing arm of Amazon (versus the self-publishing arm, which is basically an upload service and a storefront) in that category. But more and more, bigger and bigger names in traditional publishing are testing the waters, and they're not lying down and taking it. They're making their own terms, or founding their own entities, like Pottermore--or like Book View Café.

That genie's not going back in the bottle. Enough authors have had a taste of what's possible, and they'll find ways to keep making it happen, regardless of who's currently trying to grab all the marbles.

PATI NAGLE

They've said it all. It's an exciting time in publishing. Will Amazon be the big dog? Who knows, but in the meantime they're helping us, the authors. If they stop helping us, we'll always have BVC.

DAVE TROWBRIDGE

I expect many "boutique publishers" to thrive. Amazon is reaching for both monopoly and monopsony status, which makes them everyone's target. But in the process, they're opening up new ecological niches. I don't think they can occupy them all. Small cooperative ventures like Book View Café hold their books and their readers close to heart. They can be highly adaptive, especially if they manage to stay non-hierarchical and consensus-oriented.

This makes "swarming" a natural tactic for them. Expect to see more and more co-marketing efforts among boutique publishers; social media has greatly reduced the effort involved to launch such initiatives.

SUE LANGE

One great thing about Amazon is that it teaches people to be accepting of ebooks. Before the Kindle, the ebook world was growing at a slow pace. Because of Amazon's marketing machine ebook sales rocketed. Entities like BVC could never have such an impact. Because Amazon is there, much of our evangelical work has been done. The only reason Amazon did all that was because it sees itself as a monopolist. So be it. I don't think empire building is as easy as it once was. Amazon's first battle was against brick and mortar bookstores. They pretty much won that war, but there are still bookstores in existence. Just like Mickey D's won the food wars,

but you and I still go to our favorite non-franchise restaurant whenever we eat out.

(*Jennifer Stevenson chose to pass on this question.)*

Amazing Stories: **Recently there has been an uptick in the number of "sub-genres" related to the field. Where before there was just "science fiction", that split into 'space opera', 'hard' and 'new wave' during the late 50s/early 60s, now there's — science fiction romance, western sf, post-apocalyptic, slipstream, alternate reality — the list goes on. Is it helpful to have all of these sub-categorizations (allowing readers to find what they really want) or detrimental by pigeonholing work and placing impediments between a reader and the discovery of new types of works?**

JENNIFER STEVENSON

The sky is not falling.

If you want to find the kind of story you like to read, and you're looking online, you have to have the sub-categories.

Thirty years ago it was possible to read every single book published by all the publishers in the SF/F genres, every year. That hasn't been possible for decades. There have been just too many titles!

The sub-categories (or tags, as they're called in metadata) do via search what you used to do in a brick-and-mortar bookstore when you browsed through the new cover-out titles. In the bookstore, one glance at the cover art told you whether it was your favorite genre, or the one that made you say, "Bleah, I pass." You could look at a whole shelf of covers and make those decisions without much conscious thought.

We don't consider how fast the human eye and our decision-making brain cells work until we have to rely on search engines to approximate them.

Brick-and-mortar stores are hard to find right now. Publishers are putting out fewer titles in print (paper books) right now. The ebook market is loaded with far, far more titles than it ever was before, and there doesn't seem to be a limit to that...right now. These changes change our habits, our opportunities, the landscape.

That said, there may be a limit to how many books in a specific sub-category a given reader can hoover up. (And we're all book hoovers, aren't we?) Once we've exhausted our favorite genre, we either move on to a new one, or we reread the old stuff.

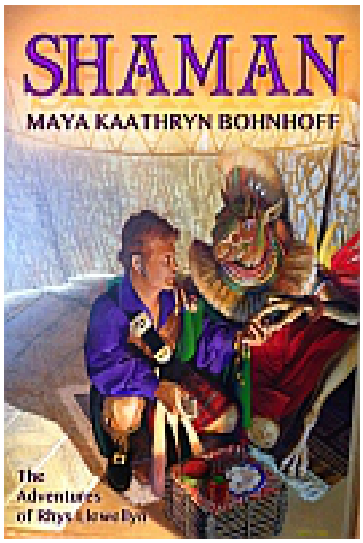
Which is what we've been doing for years anyway.

No, the sky is not falling.

If I were addressing this to writers, not readers, I would be talking about how to sell books in the new environment. Whole different slant, but same message. The sky is not falling.

MAYA KAATHRYN BOHNHOFF

I'm with Jen. I don't think this is such a big deal as long as no one takes these sub-genres as holy writ. I think they're a natural outgrowth of writers exploring different aspects of the major genres. I don't think about what genre a story is, really, until I've finished writing it, then I look for someplace to put it. As a result I have stories and novels that refuse to color inside the lines. There are elements of fantasy and SF in TACO DEL & AND THE FABLED TREE OF DESTINY (Book View Press) and MAGIC TIME: ANGELFIRE (Harper-Eps) but in quite different ways.



But as natural as that seems to me, I know it throws some people for a loop. I've heard readers comment bemusedly on the mystery elements in an SF or fantasy novel, yet that's become almost a sub-genre of its own. Seanan McGuire writes what most people call urban fantasy, but I file it under mystery-thriller on my iPad. Ditto with Jim Butcher who is considered supernatural detective lit. That's the beauty of online bookstores. You can find your books with searches on genre or title or author, or browse the virtual stacks reading cover copy—which is what makes me buy a book, not the genre label.

Having said that, I can sort of sympathize with the brick and board bookstores that have to figure out how to shelve stuff. They're sort of married to the major categories. And I know that it's increasingly difficult as a reader to figure out where my favorite authors are shelved in a B and B, which is why unless I'm in a sniffing and browsing mood and have ready cash, I shop for eBooks online.

Who knows, maybe B and B stores will sit down and figure out if there's some way they can eliminate the strict genre labeling and shelve everything by non-fiction and fiction by author name. Right now the genres are bleeding into each other in bookstores and I think everyone is a little confused. I know I am . . . :)

CHRIS DOLLEY

As others have said, this is really a labeling problem. Physical books can only be placed on one shelf and the genre/subgenre label is an aid to the bookseller. But, at an online retailer, books are not so much shelved as tagged, and these tags are not always subgenre labels, often they relate to the style or characters to be found within the book. Vampires, funny, British, magic, France, high-tech. They're all different ways to catalogue and locate books, and are a boon to both authors and readers.

This is especially true for those of us who like to write books that straddle genres or are difficult to define. We

had a hard time getting publishers to see those books as commercial – but where would we shelve it? – now we don't have to worry. We, and our readers, can tag it instead.

BRENDA CLOUGH

Yes – how lucky we are that we live in an age where things can be shuffled into as many categories as we like! It is argued that this means that the young reader will no longer be able to wander around the shelves in a library or store, stumbling upon something wonderful. But surely this is balanced by the ability to use a search engine and find all the YA novels featuring female brunette werewolves in existence; there are probably fan pages dedicated to such things. Or dropping into Amazon or a review site and swapping titles with likeminded geeks.

There is almost no limit to the granularity of this kind of thing. Here's a pointless and giggly example: http://redscharlach.tumblr.com/post/19565284869/otters-who-look-like-benedict-cumberbatch-a

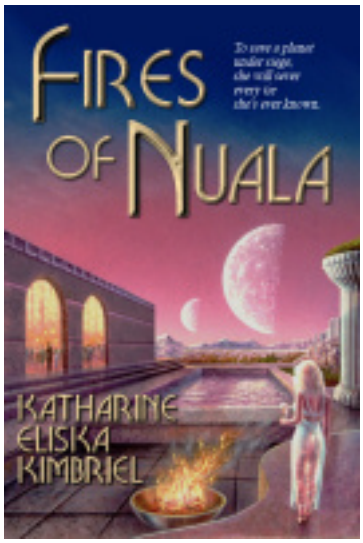
DEBORAH J. ROSS

I have no idea if this is a good thing or a bad thing, and even if I did, I would most likely be wrong. However, I do have some thoughts on the tendency to make more and smaller sub-sub-sub genres. One pertains to the desire on the part of many readers to find a book that is exactly like the last one they loved in terms of reading experience. This tendency explains why there are so many sequels-ad-nauseum in both film/TV and books.

Years ago, I took over stewardship of the library at my daughter's elementary school, so I got to watch what books which kids were picking. The big thing back then was Goosebumps. We parent librarians had high hopes for the series, because the titles and covers appealed to boys who were otherwise "reluctant readers." With glee, we watched the boys check out one after another of these books. I at least had my fingers crossed that at some point, they'd branch out. Mostly, however, they didn't. They wanted that exact experience, and after reading three or five or twenty books with basically the same plot, they'd get bored and stop reading. As frustrating as this was to witness, I believe that some reading is better than none, and those kids carried with them the memory of first discovering that books can be cool. And picked up another book some day. Maybe Harry Potter.

The other thing about sub-sub (etc.) genres is that so many of them are crossovers. Science fiction mysteries. Westerns with magic. Paranormal Romances. Steampunk vampires. There's a playfulness in taking elements we love and seeing how many new ways we can combine them. It must drive the marketing people nuts.

KATHARINE ELISKA KIMBRIEL



As far as I'm concerned, having tags/sub-genres is the greatest invention since movable type. I adore a true thesaurus, with so many shades of meaning sliding from one word or concept to the next. It's what I love to read, and what I write. It is nothing short of a miracle to be able to emphasize that variety for readers. I write SF mysteries, dark fantasy, rural fantasy, cultural-anthropological SF – and books for people 8-88 in age. And there are people looking for those books!

The only problem with sub-genres is getting the right words attached to the right cover and "back copy/cover copy." Writing PR is a special gift, and fortunately at BVC we've discovered that we do a better job writing copy for each other than for ourselves. Definitions keep changing. Now we have tags to help our descriptions change with the times.

PHYLLIS IRENE RADFORD

What the others said.

VONDA N. MCINTYRE

Does the fragmenting of genre give publishers more opportunities to market books, or only more ways of saying "We don't know how to market this?" (Because it won't fit in a pre-cut slot.)

I don't know.

I wonder, though, if publishers have left it too late, if they've said "We don't know how to market this" to too many writers? Publishers often say to writers, "We don't want Book B that will fit into the small marketing slot 29-17, because it might damage the prospects of Book Z that fits into the large marketing slot 186-9a." A lot of writers are tired of hearing this, tired of being at the mercy of marketing slots and the downward death spiral and ugly, grabby, greedy contracts, and are going it alone.

JUDITH TARR

As a writer who, when allowed to run wild, crosses genres with absolute abandon, I benefit personally from the proliferation of tags and subcategories. I Kickstartered a novel that couldn't find a print publisher because, among other things, none of the marketing departments had a clue where to put it, and will publish it with Book View Café, where it will be possible to virtually shelve it in several categories.

I can see the downside of both writers and readers running into too many tags and categories--that way lies madness--but it's also a real opportunity for niche works and authors who don't fit into any clearly defined slot.

DAVE TROWBRIDGE

As Chris noted, this is mainly a labeling problem, but I like to think of it as a prime example of skiamorphy: the shadow of an older technology (the space occupied by paper books) cast across a new technology (e-books, where a practically infinite number of e-books can dance on the head of a pin). To the extent that fissiparous sub-genre meta-information places impediments between readers and the fiction they want to read, creative people will devise ways to make things easier, we'll learn new way to relate to books—and "word of mouth" will become even more important.

SUE LANGE

As a reader I get turned off by labels. The more information I have about a book before I read it, the less interested I become. The only thing I care about is good writing. Genre does not matter to me. The problem is with the definition of "good writing." There's no way to use that term because it's subjective. For me, good writing has little to do with plot, character, or veracity. It has to do with style. When books start to be labeled per style (bone-dry; ready for prime time; sick and twisted; in your face; subtle with hints of incest) I'll be more able to respond to this question. As it is though vampire homoerotic western just doesn't say much about whether I'll like it. Oh, I get a good picture of the plot, characters, and setting, but I really could care less about that.

(Pati Nagle and Linda Nagata chose to pass on this question.)

Amazing Stories: **Publishing outlets are being inundated with queries, submissions and emails from self-published authors who have sold a few books online and now think they are ready for the big time — which they largely aren't. Additionally, there has been an increase in self-published authors getting together and promoting each others works (often through Amazon reviews, or, increasingly, by starting websites, publishing anthologies billed as "filled with works from #1 best selling SF authors" none of whom you've ever heard of). Do you think this negatively affects sales of established authors' works? How do *real* authors rise above the fray without looking like they are attacking the growing legions of wannabes?***

*(*Ed. Note: This question is not meant to impugn or denigrate those self-published authors who are professional and who prepare their self-published works in a professional manner.)*

MAYA KAATHRYN BOHNHOFF

I think it has to impact sales of established authors, if only at the level of the available reading time and resources that our readers have. If I'm reading a book by a self-pubbed author, I'm not reading the latest from Seanan McGuire (not to worry, Seanan, I make time for yours). And ultimately, I think that after the first flush of "oo! I can get this free or cheap!" readers will come back to writers who create a superior reading experience. Writers they can trust to know what words mean and know how to use them. I'm already hearing

rumbles of a self-publishing backlash from readers who have felt ripped off after buying a self-published novel only to find that it was unreadable.

I critique and edit a lot of manuscripts by writers who often end up deciding to self-publish. I've also read a number of self-published books. Reading some of these novels can be difficult and even exhausting. So many of them are so poorly written that I suspect a lot of casual readers will simply give up. If the writer is flawed craft-wise but tells a good story, I think there will always be readers who think their work is good — and this is true of traditionally published writers whose work is also poorly written and poorly edited.

Which brings me to part two of the question. What can professional, experienced authors do to rise above the fray? We can put out the best work we possibly can. Tell the most coherent stories using the most beautiful, dynamic, and stirring language that we can bring to bear AND we can make sure that our work is edited carefully and thoroughly before it goes to print. That's hard even for writers with traditional publishers because of all the austerity measures that publishers are on. I'm convinced there's a lot less thorough editing going on out there because the editorial staff lacks the resources to do it. The latest flap with Raymond Feist's new eBook is a case in point.

So producing a high level of work that engages the imaginations of our readership is one key, I think. Another is to engage with the readers in a positive way. One of the reasons we started Book View Café was that we were unhappy with the distance between us and our readership. We wanted the experience to be more interactive and we wanted to know what the readers are thinking, what they'd like to see on our website, and read in our pages. One of the things I love about writing media-tie ins is that there's a huge fan presence on websites and forums. The fans feel as if they own a piece of the action. I'd like to see that extended to non-media tie-in work as well. I also think simply behaving toward other writers and fans alike with professional courtesy goes a long way toward amicable relations all around.

I also think we can try to help the "wannabes" out a bit. When they ask what they can do to be taken seriously, we can give them one really good piece of advice: get someone to read your work for content and get someone to edit you — someone who's not afraid to draw blood.

BRENDA CLOUGH

Oh, Maya, if only young writers would seek out tough critique. I have had students who got huffy when I pointed out they were using an idiot plot (i.e. when the thing stays in motion only by keeping all the characters idiots). There are none so blind as those who will not see.

What we are losing at this point is the brutal Darwinian winnowing of the marketplace. An aspiring author doesn't need to face the reality of low readership for a long long time now, if ever. By giving away Kindle freebies, relentless shilling on Facebook and social media, and gaming the Amazon ranking systems, a faux boomlet can easily be created. It may be a while, before readers realize that not every free Kindle ebook is

worth the effort of downloading it.

DEBORAH J. ROSS

I think part of the problem is that young writers see editors as gatekeepers, people they have to please in order to gain admittance to the Club of Publishing. Ditto agents. Acquisitions (or representation) is only one part of the editorial job, and those of us who have had the privilege of working with a good editor know how much that person contributes to the quality of the final product. At her best, an editor sees into the heart of what the writer is trying to accomplish and offers suggestions aimed at making the book more completely and gloriously itself.

We talk about developing effective pitches (very short marketing "hooks" that can be delivered in a minute or two) for agents and editors. I think we can take that same concept and use it to market our work in a way that puts it apart from the vast morass of awful self-published stuff. Attracting a reader's interest has several parts, one of which is a nifty gimmick-statement. (And most of us feel inadequate to compose these for ourselves, which is why it's great to do it for one another.) Next comes the bit where we also communicate that we're established professionals, and we give the reader something for free. That could be a sample chapter or a blog post about how the book came about or an interview or something else. Something that helps the reader to decide if this nifty-concept has substance behind it.

KATHARINE ELISKA KIMBRIEL

Ditto what has been said. It's hard to know how to add to all these great comments that I wish I'd said myself. One thing I felt I could do was join a group who felt as I did — that we wanted not just another ebook storefront, but to create a place where we could tell total strangers, "Yes, the books from this site are in Sturgeon's 10% — they are quality by writers who have faced professional editors and survived!" And we can say this even if we haven't managed to read a book by that author. I am continuously delighted as I work my way through the Book View Café list at the quality, variety and sheer inventiveness of my fellow members.

We can communicate this by sharing the load at BVC, and also by reviewing good books. I can't waste time reviewing bad books — there are people who enjoy that. I don't want to rip into a book, whether it's something tossed off for a few laughs or bucks, or someone's precious heartsblood. But I can tell people that a book is definitely worth their time, and why I think so. I'm beginning to read self-published books, and review them. I want to talk about books that should have a wider audience, and let people know that good self-published (self-pubbed?) books are out there — but those books may not be the ones with the fanciest covers or publicity. Still, I think the constant barrage of free books has made the reader a bit leery of "Free." Good writing will benefit, if we are honest and share the news about great books.

PHYLLIS IRENE RADFORD

Two years ago we were told by "those in the know" we had to flog the social media with our promotional material. Now we see a backlash from people who are tired of seeing nothing else but self promotion. They call it pimpage with a reason. Certainly those of us who have survived the editorial process in traditional publishing, and respect it, have to self promote. But we need to establish a web presence for ourselves first. We need to engage our readers in our blogs and forums about other things, including the process of writing and not just the demands to go out and "BUY MY BOOK."

People who are self publishing because they haven't been able to break the barriers at the gate of traditional publishing are not accepting the idea that the barriers are there for a reason, to weed out books that are weak in plot, character, and or craft of writing. When the world refuses to beat down their doors to buy their self published novels, I hope they are smart enough to step back, take stock, and reassess their process. Maybe take a writing class or two. The cheap and easy thrill of free books is wearing thin. There will always be those who will read anything free and never pay — that's why pirate sites flourish. But for honest folk who want a good read, free or super cheap is no longer the solution.

When I first bought my Nook, Barnes and Noble had free book Friday. A new free book each week. At first they tended to be older backlist books coming out to promote later books in the series. That's good advertising. Then the list got inundated with self-published books that didn't meet the same quality. So much so that free book Friday has become Bargain of the day. Most are $1.99 - $2.99. All seem to be previously published and re-released by the author. The tide is turning.

Readers who care about what they read, who use e-readers to save time in busy schedules, are going to re-set the current mode for us. For the better.

VONDA N. MCINTYRE

I don't blame new writers for self-publishing. Most writers do (as Kathi says) put their heartsblood on the page. They give little pieces of their heart to an editor, and the editor leaves it in the slush pile for three years and then loses it. I'm sympathetic to overworked and underpaid editors, but not sympathetic to the lousy manners that have crept into publishing.

A lot of work that goes straight from writer to ebook is badly written. So is a lot of work that goes from writer through editor to print publication. A lot of best-selling work is badly written. The ability of a writer to touch the pulse of a reader doesn't necessarily correlate with the writer's ability to write a graceful sentence.

Editing is important, if you get an editor who wants to make your book the best of itself that it can be. Same goes for copyeditors. I've been extraordinarily lucky with editors and copyeditors. But we all have horror stories relating to editors who think they can write our books better than we can, which generally speaking they can't.

As a midlist writer, the only way I can get my backlist to readers is via ebooks. This is especially true of Dreamsnake, which isn't available via Basement Full of Books and which got tied up in two different publishing meltdowns. Besides, the days when publishers kept midlist SF in print indefinitely are over and gone. As far as I can make out, what commercial publishers are looking for is a copy of the last next best thing.

If they're the gatekeepers, they're not doing a very good job of it. They're not shepherding new writers through several books, allowing a career to build. They're offloading most of the work of publicity onto their writers. They publish one or two books by promising newcomers and then throw the writer away, or deign to buy another book, if the writer is willing to use a pseudonym and take a first novel advance, which has barely increased since I sold The Exile Waiting, my first novel, when you could live for a year, if frugally, on $3500.

Everything in publishing is changing.

Nobody knows what's going to happen. We're in the fray.

JUDITH TARR

This is a really important and rather difficult question. The rising tide of the self-published and the sense that "traditional" publishers are a thing of the past has become a meme, and as such, has divorced itself from actual facts or experience—on both sides of the argument. As I've said elsewhere, publishing isn't dead and won't be dead at any time soon, but the shape of publishing is going through profound changes.

I think our authors' co-op is one effective way to cope with the rapidly changing landscape. Persisting in writing and producing work of high quality —from basics of plot and character and style to proofreading and copyediting and book formatting—helps us to stand out from the crowd. So does being selective about who joins the co-op. We expect a certain level of craft from candidates, and continue to expect that as we publish more original works in addition to backlist that has already been edited and produced by print publishers. I like to think we're taking the best of the old world into the new, while letting the worst die a well-deserved death.

What we hope to accomplish by this is for readers to say, "If it's from Book View Café, I know I'm getting a well-written book, well packaged and clearly readable, without glaring errors. I can trust this group to give good value for my money." And those readers will come back for more of what we have to offer.

DAVE TROWBRIDGE

I think it inarguable that Gresham's Law applies to e-publishing as much as it does to monetary policy. At least in the short run, bad books will drive out good—look at the trouble Amazon is having with spam books. But readers are quickly learning how to spot counterfeit works, and judge the signal-to-noise ratio of an author's social media presence.

I think a good online strategy for professional authors who want to rise above the fray is encapsulated in Tolkien's words: "all that is gold does not glitter." Those who simply try to deliver quality and value whenever they write—tweets, blog posts, book reviews and, of course, their books—will attract, and more important, hold readers.

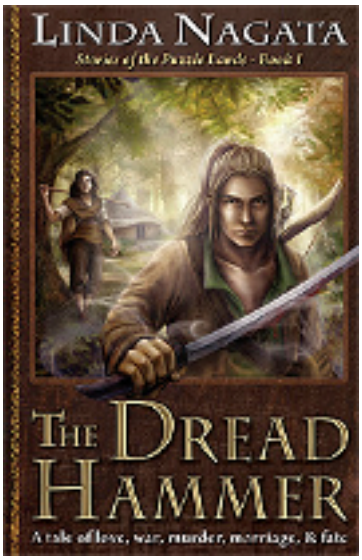
That's part of the mission of the BVC blog, and of our members' participation in other online communities and venues. And it's working.

SUE LANGE

I can't add much to this discussion except that it occurred to me that the real gatekeepers in the past have not so much been the editors and publishers, but the authors themselves. Whoever could withstand criticism and

return to the drawing board to do better, became a writer.

LINDA NAGATA



I agree with just about everything Vonda said. Self-published authors are just trying to live their dream and a fair number are succeeding impressively. I'm a self-published author. My two most recent novels were published by me, without having ever been submitted to the traditional marketplace. I felt I had more to gain by retaining control and doing the job myself—but I've certainly had to develop a thick skin in the process, because there are still a lot of flaming arrows being launched at "indie" or self-publishers.

It is true that for a reader this is a buyer-beware world—more so, than once upon a time—but ebook samples are a great way to try before you buy, and to winnow out the books not worth your time.

Do I think heavily promoted self-published books negatively affect sales of established authors? Maybe. On the other hand, maybe these books are appealing to a different readership than those who have long made up the core readers of the SF genre—and maybe these new readers will ultimately become our readers too.

As to the last part of the question, how do "real" authors rise above the fray...? In the end, it's up to the readers, not the writers, to decide who stands out, who gets decent sales. The thing that matters most in book sales is good word-of-mouth. If you like a book, please talk about it, review it, get your friends to buy it and read it too. There is no better way to help the authors you like stay in business.

JENNIFER STEVENSON

I think it's a fantasy many conventionally published authors have, that readers give a flying swiss petunia about "quality," as we like to call it. You know. The things we work hardest over—good grammar and punctuation, clean copy, error-free continuity, well-built worlds, blah blah blah. Conventional publishing has certainly put out its percentage of books that might not pass a quality review, say, at Book View Café. And do readers care? Nope.

Writers who haven't made it past the gatekeepers in New York may feel that publishing is a Secret Club with irrational rules and mean members, and they have a fair amount of justification for feeling that way. The ins and outs of producing a book in cooperation with a committee, which is conventional publishing, are tricky enough. Add the really important stuff—the way authors

are paid, for example—and now everybody thinks it's an evil conspiracy.

I was going to pass on this question, but I feel someone has to say, "Give the noobs a break." Some of them are selling better than I ever did with New York. If I stick my nose in the air about their misuse of punctuation, do I look smarter? Do I look more professional? Am I even right? The customer is always right. If you want to write a flawless novel, you can do that in your bedroom. If you want to sell it, talk to the people who are buying novels. I get pretty sick of authors beefing about the stupidity of publishing, and I are one of those. I have no patience with authors who beef about the stupidity of readers.

(Chris Dolley and Pati Nagle chose to pass on this question.)

Amazing Stories: **. Production and self-promotion/marketing seem to be the two big bugaboos for authors who are trying to work within the current reality and still make a living. Most authors are not big self-promoters, and most authors don't want to sit down for a few hours of copyediting, proofing and layout AFTER spending a day writing. How do you go about managing this disconnect?**

CHRIS DOLLEY

We find that authors come in all sizes and have all kinds of different skill sets. Some of us love the techie stuff — ebook formatting, web site design. Others like the social side and are natural communicators. Some have worked as editors for NY publishers. Some have worked as graphic artists. This is where a co-op excels — if you need a job, done be it editing, a second reader, formatting, cover design, or PR advice — all you have to do is ask and they will come.

Personally I enjoy formatting ebooks. I was a designer/programmer in a previous life and don't see it as a chore. So I swap my skills in return for editorial advice.

Another advantage of being in a co-op is sharing knowledge. There's a lot of dubious marketing advice out there and even the professionals are not that sure what works and what doesn't. Some believe it's all down to social media, and advise authors to blog and tweet and like and friend everyone in sight. Which can be an enormous time sink.

In 1926 Hugo Gernsback was reportedly "paying himself $100,000 per year." That salary would be the equivalent of $1.26 MILLION in today's economy.

We take a different view. With the huge improvement in sales reporting that you can now get from the likes of Amazon and B&N, it's much easier to evaluate which marketing strategies work and which don't. So we experiment, and report back to the membership. Then experiment some more. This way we help each other avoid the time sinks that show little return and concentrate our effort in the areas that work. And, often, those areas don't take up a lot of time at all.

BRENDA CLOUGH

Oh, sing it, Chris! The co-op model is the only way I could possibly get into e pub. And the other fun thing is, you can dip a toe into areas you haven't tried before. You want to get better at formatting? Now's your moment! I have been wandering into cover art, which I have always observed with a jaundiced eye from the author's point of view.

And as to PR: it is difficult to announce to the world that your new novel is the hottest thing since Dickens. But if associates and fellow BVCers do it, it is much more convincing. Furthermore, there are too many places these days. No one person can be a presence in all the possible venues for announcing a book. But, with a group, we can divide the labor. Somebody can be Speaker to Smashwords while others rattle the bars over at Goodreads.com.

DEBORAH J. ROSS

Speaking about PR, book promotion, and community, the key has always been offering something of value. Way before electronic publishing, we all knew writers who alienated everyone by continuous, obnoxious self-promotion. You might be able to strong-arm a few strangers, plus your doting aunts and long-suffering siblings, into buying your book, but pretty soon, everyone else will flee when they see you (modern version: UnFollow or deFriend) if all you ever do is pressure them. If the book is less than stellar — and let's face it, most such books are pretty awful — then that news will spread like wildfire. To a lesser extent, this also applies to uncritically promoting anyone else's work.

The alternative is to share cool ideas — why this book is a great read or what nifty things you discovered while researching it, or a thoughtful discussion of someone else's work. That then provides a context for mentioning your own, but in a way that gives readers a reason to seek it out. It also lends to the creation of communities, groups of people who come together — whether in person or over the 'net. We share, we discuss, we get to know one another, we witness one another's disappointments and cheer their triumphs. These groups are themselves connected to other communities, and make possible the word-of-mouth that is the best form of publicity.

KATHARINE ELISKA KIMBRIEL

The current demands of promotion would be overwhelming without fellow writers at Book View Café, Backlist eBooks, SF-FFWs plus a few tech-savvy individuals who are always happy to share their expertise with others. I literally had to run away from the Internet last summer — went somewhere to write that

required a 30 minute drive to the Internet, and found myself rested and 75 pages further by the end of the visit. It would have been even better numbers but my laptop died and I was waiting on another one. My longhand is slow! Finding a good niche for your own interests and things you want to share makes modern promotion interesting and do-able. I read whenever I can, so reviewing was a natural thing for me. The trick was learning to post my reviews widely, and use my name so people could find more of my reviews. I prefer a conversation, so Goodreads, Live Journal and oddly Twitter interest me and are enlightening. Facebook is becoming unmanageable, and is turning into a way station rather than a destination. Tools can maximize your time — bitly's ability to tell me which links are clicked on teaches me how to craft enticing posts.

I enjoy watching how other writers use the Internet to connect to their readers. Sherwood Smith has built a huge community of fans over years of essay conversations at Live Journal and other venues. She did this in snippets of time, on her breaks at work, and it's an impressive achievement. All this through her own curiosity and interest in discussing things with other interesting people. John Scalzi has turned a diary into an art form, promoting his own work heavily, yet in a fun manner, and also supporting other writers, artists and nonprofit causes. I find that so much of the Internet destroys my concentration, so I'm using their example and trying to find my own footing in the flood of information!

PHYLLIS IRENE RADFORD

I have always promoted my books because I learned from Romance Writers of America (RWA) the business of being a writer and the importance of taking control of my career back in the early 1990s when e-books were still a fond daydream. Now the publishing world is changing at the speed of light and many traditional publishers are moving at the speed of the giant three toed tree sloth. If I want control of my career, I need to do a lot more on my own. Instead of cringing in the corner, crying (tried it, doesn't do a bit of good) I embraced the co-op model of the Book View Café from the beginning.

The reasons I cringed and cried was because there was so much about life on the internet I couldn't or wouldn't do and I didn't know who to ask to teach me. Now I have a wonderful co-op of people in a similar situation more than willing to teach me what I can learn and learn from me what I have to teach. I have fallen into the role of editor and I manage to put my detail oriented self into maintaining the catalog. Other people take over the tech roles and PR and graphics that I suck at.

In the past 4 years we've tried new fiction, free, everyday on the site. We've tried the heavy blasting of social media with our press releases. Each worked for a time but have evolved. With the wonders of the internet we can now engage our readers in conversations through blogs, twitter, facebook, live journal, whatever suits our style. Others in the co op pick up the slack on the other media. We are in a position to look at the changing wants and needs of our readers at the speed of DSL or cable modem and offer them more of what they want. We know that today the readers want engagement with the author and the book where my publicist in NY is still tied to press releases and advance reading copies to a select few reviewers.

I like the idea of engaging my readers and giving them a vested interest in my books. I also like the idea of having an entire team of back ups to help me evolve with the business.

VONDA N. MCINTYRE

I'm your classic introvert, so I'm glad to be part of a co-op where I can contribute minor tech skills in ebook creation and web page maintenance while observing and learning from my colleagues. I'm in awe of the range of talent, abilities, and knowledge at BVC.

JUDITH TARR

I completely suck at promoting my own work, but if I'm engaged with someone else's work, I can get out there and tell everybody this stuff is great. A co-op lets me do this while also getting my own work promoted by colleagues who can do it better than I ever could. In return I do whatever needs doing for the group. I've done copyediting and proofreading, I've participated in anthologies, and lately I've been the New-Member Coordinator (paying forward all the wonderful and generous help I got when I came in to the co-op).

The new publishing landscape has lost track of the part where money flows to the author. So much of what authors are expected to do these days requires expenditure out of pocket. A co-op offers a solution. The investment of time and energy is not trivial, but the return (and the sense of community and consensus) is huge. It's well worth it for me.

PATI NAGLE

I agree with the others above who talk about the advantages of the co-op model. BVC is indeed a godsend, and enables us to put out high quality ebooks through teamwork. Deborah touched on something I think is important, though. We have to remember that the writing comes first. BVC is a great place to experiment with promotional possibilities, but the absolute best promotion is to have a lot of good work available to the public. In other words, the best thing a writer can do for his/her career is to write more, and write well.

DAVE TROWBRIDGE

Book View Café authors handle the burden of production and promotion by outsourcing it to like-minded authors in a non-hierarchical publishing cooperative. Since we're all volunteers, and operating in an abundant gift economy of many and varied publishing talents, Marx's ideal of "from each according to his ability, to each according to his need" works very well for us.

For instance, my first book from Book View Café was proofread by Judith Tarr and formatted by Vonda N. McIntyre. Not long after, I was formatting books for Sherwood Smith and Julianne Lee. I've worked on publicity with Sue Lange and Chris Dolley, and have been helping Vonda, Linda Nagata, and Pati Nagle (and others) develop our new bookstore. Each of us in turn gives and receives what's needed to bring our books to market, in a rhythm that feels to me very natural and unforced.

That's not to say there are no rough spots. Practical anarchy is hard work. We're still evolving; trial and error are the order of the day. But one skill every author has to have for success is the ability to listen, and it turns out that's a really, really powerful business tool, as well. As an old Sicilian proverb has it: "Talk, you teach; listen, you learn," which makes BVC a graduate course in publishing for all of us.

SUE LANGE

I love this from Chris: "There's a lot of dubious marketing advice out there and even the professionals are not that sure what works and what doesn't."

That's been the hardest part of the Internet experience. Every day there's a new bauble to play with. And jumping ship from one media outlet to the next is no good. Kathi's example with Sherwood is a case in point. LiveJournal is not necessarily the latest, hippest thing, but there's a bustling community of people over there that have used it for quite some time and don't necessarily need to go twitter, facebook, or tumble.

And I totally love this from Dave: "Practical anarchy is hard work." I might start putting that in my signature. I never knew there was such a thing as practical anarchy, but I think that's exactly what we've got here. It definitely works, but as the man said, it is hard.

LINDA NAGATA

Book production is a lot of fun for me. It is in fact a great excuse to avoid writing, because book production has now become legitimate work. Since I have a background in web design and development, with enough Photoshop skills to be dangerous, I had just the right skill set when the ebook revolution hit, and was able to put out most of my books on my own, in electronic and print formats, even before I came to BVC. This was actually a long-time dream for me. I remember back in the nineties, sighing over how I would love to be a publisher as well as a writer, and now I get to do that.

But promotion—I'm no good at that at all, which is why I'm so grateful for the creative minds at Book View Café, always looking for new and innovative means to get the word out on our books. So as others have said, that's the way BVC handles the disconnect between writing and publishing: by sharing skills and helping out where needed.

DRINK TANK

JENNIFER STEVENSON

I find blogging hard. I worry that I should have something to say. (I know, right?) On the other hand, Facebook was made for me—lots of very short interactions with a very large array of people. I can mimic wit in under 30 words, no problem. Haven't got good with Twitter yet. But today I did a podcast interview with friends at FromPage2Screen Melissa Craig and Charity Parkerson and realized it was much, much more fun than a "blog tour." Soon I'll be doing one for Small Beer Press, to promote the new audiobook of my first novel.

What does this teach me? Do what you love doing and don't do the other stuff. And try new stuff as it comes along. You never know.

Oh, and Book View Café is truly the bees knees. We have amazing depth of resources for experimenting with new marketing strategies, retesting formerly successful strategies, and always helping one another out "on the ground" ... oo, lots of benefits.

MAYA KAATHRYN BOHNHOFF

I love maintaining a blog and I love blogging, though finding the time to do it is daunting. But other than that, I just want to write and write and write. I actively dislike the business side of writing and, though I don't mind tweeting and blogging, self-promotion is for me, about as pleasant as a root canal, though I think I understand dentistry better than I do self-promotion.

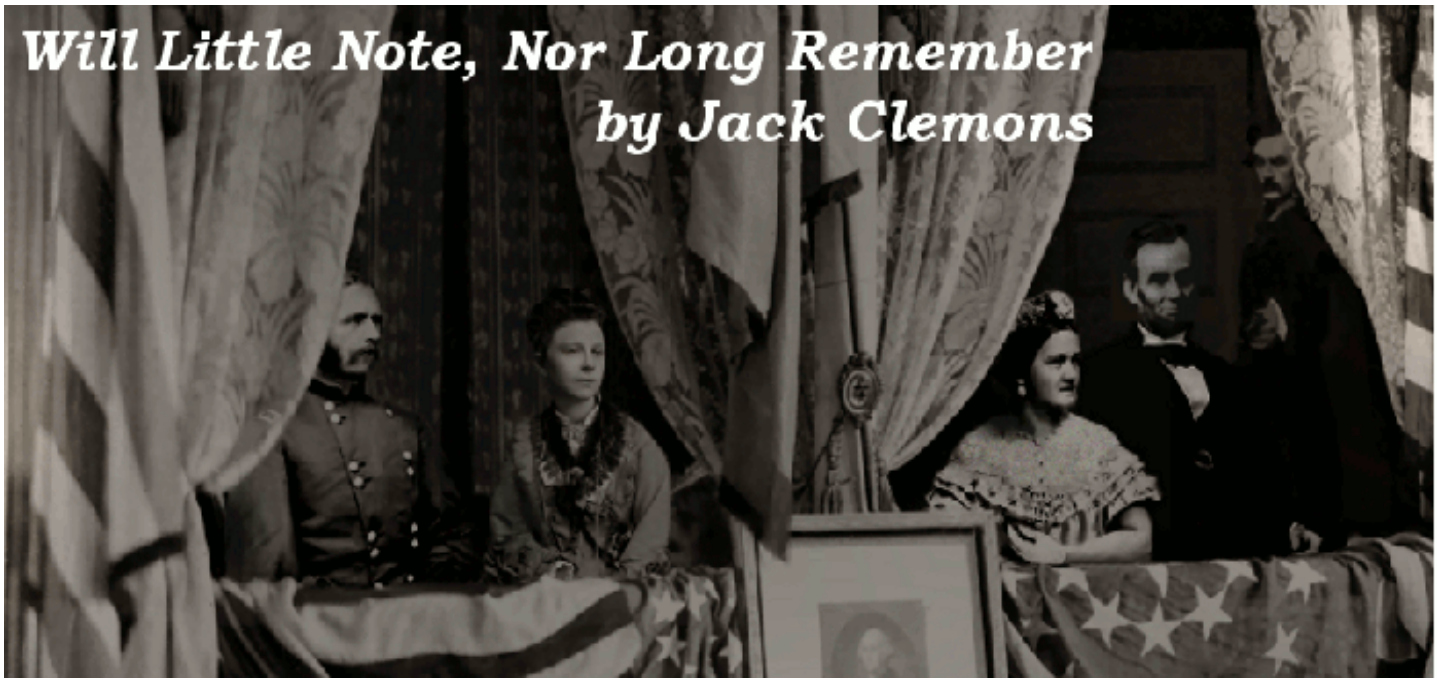
The problem is, when I'm not with other writers talking about writing, I'm painfully shy and inept socially on top of it. I'd've made a great nun, were I Catholic. I enjoy sucking up information and spinning it out again in story form.

So Book View Café is a great organization for me. I can promote other writers' stuff and do it without a qualm and I can play in the Word Press sand box to my heart's content, and work at becoming a better writer instead of trying wrap my mind around something I really don't know how to do.

Sadly, our time with Sue and Vonda, Dave, Linda, Pati and Maya, Brenda and Chris, Jennifer and Judith, Phyllis and Katharine and Deborah has come to an end.

I would like to thank each and every one of them for giving of their time and consideration; I sincerely hope that they receive some benefit from having participated - which means that you all reading this should now hightail it over to the Book View Cafe and get yourselves some fine readin!


Hey Kids!
Command Your Own GIANT LASER TANK!
DEFEND! Your Planet From Planetary Invasion
GIANT LASER TANK
©2012 AMAZING STORIES AND FRANK WU
3D Keychain model coming soon from Amazing Stories & Award Winning Artist Frank Wu



The entropy lines of the time-transporter field bowed outward above the receiving platform, distorting the small room into a grotesque, carnival-mirror reflection of itself. The field lines collapsed, sending miniature dust devils dancing over the hardwood floor. They fluttered the fringed hem of a hand-sewn quilt that was draped over a carved bed.

Dr. Geoffrey Wilson stepped down from the platform and allowed his eyes to focus in the room's soft light. The sulphurous glow that radiated from the receiver's brushed-metal surface faded. It yielded to a gauzy light that slanted through the dust motes dancing in the air before him. As the field dissipated, the room regained its rectangles.

An upholstered bergère chair stood beside the bed, and next to that, an oversized chest of drawers. A smoke-stained oil lamp and a white ceramic pitcher and bowl rested on the chest's upper surface. A thick braided rug, which softened a large oval in the center of the floor, was the room's other furnishing. A few unremarkable paintings, suspended from long cords, were scattered over subdued wallpaper. A single wooden door, capped by an open transom, led to an outside corridor.

A window opened into the room and the sunlight spilled through it, settling into an angular pool that flowed over the floor and onto a corner of the rug. A breeze trailed in behind the sunlight and billowed a pair of sheer cotton curtains.

A man stood across the room from Wilson, his arms folded over his chest. He was watching him, waiting for the field effects to subside. The man was tall and muscular – some would describe him as blocky. He had dark eyes and brows and a lion's mane of black hair. He wore a new three-piece gray suit cut in an antique style.

His tanned skin was drawn into cobweb wrinkles at the corners of his eyes. As their eyes met, Wilson flinched. The man's stare was hard and inhospitable. Wilson dropped his gaze and brushed at the hem of his knee-length toga.

The man stepped forward. "Professor Wilson?" His voice was guarded.

Wilson extended his hand. "Yes."

"Aaron Malleck." He didn't return the handshake. "Welcome to 1865," he said, but didn't sound like he meant it.

"Thank you. I'm ... relieved to be here at last."

Malleck didn't respond.

Wilson turned around and looked at the receiving platform which squatted in the doorway of a narrow closet. The air above it still shimmered like summer heat over blacktop.

"The device is incredible," he said. "I feel I have just stepped here from the next room."

Malleck's lips parted in a thin line. "A simple effect produced by a complex system. The bulk of this 'device' resides in the laboratory from which you embarked." Malleck gestured in the direction of the open closet. "But I'm sure you know all that."

Yes I do, thought Wilson, so why am I getting this condescending lecture?

Malleck stepped around Wilson and bent over the platform. He removed a section of baseboard in the interior closet wall. A dark space opened there of the same dimensions as the platform.

"Excuse me; I'd rather not leave the receiver in the open." He pushed the edge of the flat metal box with the toe of his boot until it disappeared beneath the closet wall. "My colleagues here would find it confusing." He bent again and snapped the baseboard back into place. As he straightened up, he gave Wilson a quick inspection. "I'd say that's true of you as well," he said.

Wilson fidgeted. He felt unaccountably embarrassed by his form-fitting leotards. Malleck turned to the closet again.

"We must do something about your clothes, professor." Malleck said this as if Wilson's choice of clothing offended him. He selected one dark suit from several there and handed it to Wilson. "Change into this and then we'll discuss your itinerary."

Wilson accepted the clothes and sorted them onto the back of the chair. As he loosened his braided belt, he glanced down at the city street, visible through the open window. "It's hard to believe," he said.

Malleck settled on the edge of the bed with his eyes closed. He looked up when Wilson spoke. "Yes, I suppose it

is."

Wilson struggled out of the leotards and paused for Malleck to continue. He did not. The man is annoyed with me and I've just arrived. Malleck's attitude irritated him. He had many questions, but the man's hostility was daunting. He tried again. "How long have you been here, Mr. Malleck?"

Malleck frowned and opened his eyes. "Twenty-three years."

Wilson blinked. "I don't understand. Do you mean Demeter has been shuttling you back and forth across a quarter century of this era?"

"No. I mean I have lived in these times since 1842."

Wilson pulled the toga over his head and reached for the rumpled cotton shirt. "I understand a few years, but I didn't realize traffic to the entire era demanded such attention. The Department requires a full-time representative here?"

Malleck raised his eyebrows. "I'm certain there are a number of things you don't realize, Professor. Did you forget how you got here? You can appreciate the need for a permanent persona in this time, if for no other reason than to provide visitors like yourself a secure place to arrive and depart."

It was obvious that Malleck lost no love for such visitors. Wilson just nodded and finished buttoning his shirt. At least he had coaxed some conversation from the man. He was curious. What would make a man devote the bulk of his lifetime to living in the past?

"However," Malleck continued, "as you've no doubt surmised, providing escort is only one of my duties. An annoying and distracting one, I might add."

I would not have guessed that.

"I've read two papers by you in the Journal of Applied Historiography, Dr. Wilson. They relate to the subsequent influences of the Civil War years, so I know that you are well aware of the significance of this era." He paused for a few seconds and then added, "It should come as no surprise that the Department is concerned."

Now Wilson raised his eyebrows. The man had done his homework. Wilson wondered if the research was done in preparation for this visit. He felt no false modesty in the recognition Malleck gave him. He'd spent his adult life in the study of Abraham Lincoln and his times and he knew the era as well as his own. For the last five years it had been his all-consuming passion, and an oblation to exorcise the ghost of Colleen.

"I am aware of the Department's caution regarding the eras they classify as Time Nodes," Wilson said. "And this is one of those." He had always disliked that sobriquet. It sounded like bureaucratic technospeak, and it was imprecise.

"Caution?" Malleck stared at Wilson through narrowed eyes. "I also read your Doctoral dissertation, professor: The Quantum Reshaping of Historical Reality. Did I get it right?" He closed his eyes a little. Probably scanning a reference, Wilson decided. "I can quote from your abstract. 'The insertion of an observer from the future into the established circumstances of a given historical event is mathematically equivalent to a contemporary historical observer witnessing that same event for the first time. Each possesses the potential to influence its outcome. The extreme result is an abrupt fracture to the perceived reality of one or the other'." He looked at Wilson. "In layman's terms, everything we know could be replaced with something else. 'Caution' seems inadequate to describe the Department's attitude, wouldn't you agree?"

Wilson flinched again. I must be careful with this man. "You flatter me, Mr. Malleck," Wilson said, hoping he sounded less ruffled than he felt. "Yes, I quite agree that the influences of Lincoln and his times were significant. If you've read my work, you also know I need no convincing on the extraordinary caution required here." He lifted the trousers and held them before him, legs dangling, and balanced on one foot and stepped into them. "In fact, this particular time seems a heavy responsibility for one person to bear."

Malleck grunted. "I suppose it does."

"Ow, what the –?" Wilson dropped the trousers; they crumpled into a pile around his feet. He rubbed his hands up and down the length of his legs. Had he been attacked by ants?

Malleck responded with a humorless laugh. "I see you have made an acquaintance with wool."

"Wool? It's barbaric. It's like stepping into a hive."

"You'll get used to it. Time travel sometimes puts us closer to history than we might wish."

"Lord. Three hours in that?" He looked at the dark, bristling cloth, and then over at Malleck. The agent's eyes were closed.

Just like my own contemporaries – he can't take a breath without consulting his microcomputer. Apparently their conversation was now closed. Wilson cursed under his breath and scratched his thighs. He stepped into the trousers and lifted them to his knees, stopping every few inches like a bather testing the water. Malleck volunteered nothing more so Wilson finished dressing. He occupied himself with the view out the room's small window.

A fresh breeze, swept clean by spring rain and dusted with the aroma of new grass, danced with the delicate curtains. There was an unfamiliar hush to the noise drifting up from the street – the laughter of young people, the clip-clop of hooves on the dusty thoroughfare, a distant puffing from a brass band – the sounds of living things. Missing were the competing hums and clatters of the ubiquitous machine, the metronomes that forced the frenzied tempo of his own time.

How softly the days fall, he thought. I've arrived in the Age of Innocence on its final day. He smiled at the

thought. He had used that phrase over the years to describe this day. The final day. And where was Wilkes at this moment? In spite of the Department's seminars and class work, they could not answer that question with any certainty.

Wilson had resented the Department's training. He was far more knowledgeable of the events of this era than those the Department had selected to instruct him. He had, after all, been a well-compensated consultant to the Department for over fifteen years – but the instructions were compulsory nonetheless. In providing its unique service the Demeter bureaucrats left little to imagination.

The waiting period between application for an embarkation grant and admission to candidacy often took many months, sometimes years, and even so an applicant was frequently rejected, always without explanation. Though academia protested such cavalier treatment, their outcry always fell on deaf ears. From his years of secure access to Demeter, Wilson knew something of their methods. He knew, for example, that before anyone was granted access to the transportation facility, Demeter performed innumerable analyses on the consequences of inserting a new observer into a particular historical era.

As with every project the Department undertook, the modeling and simulation techniques were classified. Wilson had discovered that the Department relied in part on the work of Stoneking at the University of California at Berkeley on the use of human mitochondrial DNA as an indicator of genealogical preservation. Wilson had landed his first consulting assignment with the Department based on his own work in applying the Calculus of Variations to this indicator.

Competition among the scientific and research communities for use of the facility hardware was substantial and highly qualified; the pre-jump screening was mandatory and tedious. To those few persistent scholars selected, the Department granted up to three consecutive hours in a restricted number of periods accessible to the time-transporter field.

Considering the grudging reluctance with which his own candidacy had been handled, Wilson wondered why the Department bothered with the program at all. He had heard it had been instituted only because political pressure had been brought to bear, a sop to the voters in exchange for the use of public funds in this joint venture with a private institution. Even so, Wilson was certain that no researcher was ever admitted to the program unless Demeter found the subject of their research important to its own needs. The full range of activities in which Demeter engaged had always been zealously obscured from public view. Wilson recalled the period of his candidacy with something less than fondness.

He had applied for April 14, 1865. The objective stated on his lengthy application was to resolve an historical mystery associated with the assassination of Abraham Lincoln. He had requested entry to John Wilkes Booth's apartment early on the day of the assassination in an attempt to recover the murderer's memo book. Lincoln's War Department agents had removed the notebook-cum-diary from Booth's body after he was killed on April

26 and it had subsequently vanished. It reappeared several years later during the impeachment trial of Andrew Johnson in the possession of Lincoln's former Secretary of War, Edwin M. Stanton. Many of the pages leading to the day of the assassination had been removed. What remained were the notes of Booth's self-confession to the crime and two enigmatic references to some "evidence" that the government possessed which would "clear his name."

For three centuries historians had argued over the contents of those missing pages, and of their possible relevance to a putative conspiracy to the assassination by members of the Confederate Secret Service. A few historians even believed Stanton himself was involved. His vehement distaste for Lincoln's reconstruction plan was well documented, and the Secretary, after all, had kept the existence of Booth's diary undisclosed during the original trial of the assassins. Though he felt no great admiration for Stanton, Wilson gave that theory little credit. Stanton was fiercely loyal to Lincoln during the war, deeply grieved by the President's death, and merciless in his search for his murderers and their accomplices.

Reports of rediscovery of a few of the missing pages surfaced from time to time in later years, but none was authenticated. Wilson tried to convince Demeter that examination of the intact diary would represent not only a significant item of historical research but also could lay the secret details of any conspiracies to rest.

Booth had carried the diary with him from at least the day of the assassination until his own death twelve days later. But there was some evidence Booth didn't have the notebook on his person that afternoon but rather tucked it into his coat later when he left for the theater that night ... tonight. He sometimes tore pages from the book to use as notes – some believed that alone accounted for the missing pages – yet he had left a note for Andrew Johnson on a calling card that afternoon. Wilson believed his best hope for inspecting the intact journal lay in a search of Booth's quarters early on that fateful day. Today.

The Department consumed seven months in final consideration of Wilson's application and then turned him down. The date of the assassination, April 14, 1865, was far too critical to permit visitation, they said. He appealed and was rejected again.

His position as senior consultant had permitted him access to all but the most sensitive documents in the Demeter archives. He had used that access for fifteen years to support exhaustive research on the Agency's behalf into numerous historical obscurities. During one foray into the old, rarely visited physical records he discovered a single page of John Wilkes Booth's diary – a previously unknown fragment that was misfiled and unaccountably misclassified.

The page was dated April 13, 1865. Booth's mood was dark. He noted that he had spent the night in drink and despair. The South was lost. The war was lost. And he lacked both resolve and will to act against the President. But an odd-speaking and equally drunken man had confronted him inside the Star Saloon and berated him for trying to assassinate Lincoln. Booth was galvanized. Until then he had done no such thing, but surely this

was a sign he was to prevail. That very night he resolved to kill the tyrant.

Booth didn't name this annunciating angel – the man who had spurred him to action – but Wilson was hopeful other of the missing pages might. And he was suspicious too. If this fragment existed, was it outrageous to assume Demeter knew more of these missing pages than they'd let on? It was then that Wilson had determined to go back to that day and see for himself what was "real".

After his second rejection he went straight to the Director. He told him he'd discovered and hidden the fragment of Booth's diary and he implied it was inflammatory to the Agency's reputation, which was untrue. He threatened to make it public unless his application was approved, but would temper his attacks on the agency if he was accepted, a pledge he never intended to keep. And then he twisted the knife of the Director's tawdry role in Coleen's last days. The bastard's career would not survive that revelation.

The Director's reaction was predictable. He expressed outrage and then distain and dismissed Wilson from his office, but two days later his confirmation was announced. With it came restrictions on the method and timing of his entrance to Booth's apartment, and on the handling and subsequent dissemination of any additional information Wilson might obtain. Although the restrictions affronted him, he had conceded them. In the end his application was accepted, the appropriate legal waivers were signed, and the transportation facility was scheduled – an achievement that now found him dressed in an ancient suit and barely controlling the urge to scratch his legs.

He finished dressing in silence and awaited Malleck's attention. The agent paid him no notice, so he cleared his throat. Malleck looked up and then let his eyes slide over Wilson's attire. He said nothing at first, which Wilson took as an expression of dissatisfaction.

"You look ill at ease, Professor. Try to keep from scratching with both hands like that." Malleck stood up, came over, and undid the knot in Wilson's ribbon tie. He retied it and adjusted its fall on Wilson's shirt.

"I believe you will get by. There are many out-of-towners in the Capitol for the victory celebration. I'm sure most of them will look more disheveled than you."

He tugged the edges of Wilson's coat and straightened the upturned shirt collar. Wilson endured the attentions in silence. He would permit the Department its rituals if he could be on his way.

Malleck stepped back to perform a final inspection. Wilson found a gold pocket watch in his vest and withdrew it.

"Let's see, how to read this thing ..." Out of long habit, he closed his eyes to check the time. His inner eyelids were blank of course. He'd submitted to surgical removal of his microprocessor – another outrage imposed before his journey. He reopened his eyes and studied the round face of the watch with its archaic hands and

numbers. "Umm ... twelve and eight ... my God, 12:40. Is this watch correct?"

Malleck nodded.

Wilson looked at the window. "Mr. Malleck, could we finish here? I've already used more than thirty minutes of my time."

Malleck's heavy eyebrows compressed to a frown. "We're nearly through." He opened the top drawer of the dresser and withdrew a leather wallet. "Here is some money, and your identification. You are Geoffrey Wilson, a Maryland businessman, in town to purchase horses. The identification will withstand a reasonable inspection. I don't anticipate that you will need this, but we will be prepared."

Wilson took the wallet, flipped through it, and slipped it into his coat pocket. "Businessman? And how am I to explain if I am caught in Booth's apartment?"

"Well, I suppose you would not be here if there was any real chance of that," Malleck said. Disdainfully, Wilson thought. There was something else going on here, he decided. He nodded but didn't comment.

It was known that Booth had spent most of the morning and afternoon soliciting the support of his co-conspirators and feeding his courage with liquor. He would not return to his room until mid-afternoon. But there was always the possibility.

"You don't know for certain though, do you?" Wilson asked. "This is quite unbelievable. Why hasn't the Agency already followed Booth around today? What is the likelihood that Booth's notebook is in his apartment? What good is time travel if you can't even use it to predict the past? If I get caught in his room without –"

"We are envoys here, Professor, or ambassadors, if you will. We are not historians. In spite of your enthusiasm for this document, and the fact that the Director gave you permission to look for it, it is of little practical importance to me. I deal in events that are happening, not historical retrospective."

"All right, events, then. Is any moment of a day like this not important enough to study?"

"We do not have infinite resources at our disposal." Malleck's stare went cold. "As you have pointed out, professor, I shouldn't have to lecture you. Reality is a delicate fabric and is easily torn. Repeated or unnecessary probing at some event is like yanking at the loose thread of a sweater. It could unravel into a tangle of wool. Even a careless tug could transform the shape. It can be fingered, but it must remain intact. When we have finished, history's tiniest fibers must be smoothed."

"I know better than any man alive how significant this day is to become. I don't need to be lectured. But I do want you to be certain."

"I cannot be certain, I can be careful. While you perform your academics in Booth's room, I will remain in the lobby to intercept any visitors."

Wilson's heart sank. He had expected, unrealistically he realized, to be free to roam Washington at will for his allotted time. Malleck's sudden denial, pronounced so casually, made him feel foolish.

Malleck read his expression. "Professor, did you think I'd entrust this day to the bumbling of an amateur?" Malleck dropped his tone of forced courtesy. Wilson felt a combination of irritation and apprehension.

"I didn't authorize your coming here, and I don't agree with it, but it's done, so let's make the best of it, shall we. I'll be coming with you, though I've far more urgent business to attend." Malleck held Wilson's gaze. "But understand – whatever you do in Booth's room, you must leave everything as you found it. Nothing must be removed, nothing must be changed, and nothing left behind. Do you understand?"

"Don't patronize me, Malleck."

"Do you understand?"

He pressed on the last words and let them hang in the air. Wilson felt his throat tighten. He nodded and tried not to shy from the threatening eyes. I must be careful, he thought again. There was something else that bothered him, something that Malleck had said? It was hard to think in the presence of Malleck's unflinching threat. Malleck gestured to the doorway.

"Good. Shall we begin then?"

Wilson frowned. He followed Malleck outside, into the recaptured memories of a long-dead afternoon.

Malleck said little as they walked the narrow flagstone sidewalks under the noonday sun. Wilson paid him scant notice. They headed west from Malleck's apartment at 616 C Street, into what seemed to Wilson a magically animated Matthew Brady photograph. He could concentrate on little else. Even without the overarching dome that transformed the sky into a ceiling of triangular panels of glass, this city looked smaller than the Washington he knew. It was scaled to manageable proportions by the startling absence of all but a few of the marble-facade government buildings that choked the skyline of his time.

For all its importance to the Union, in this age Washington is still a simple city, he thought. It bragged of low, frame homes and of unpaved streets; of modest boarding houses joined shoulder to shoulder in rows of dark red brick; of hundreds of small shops and livery stables, perfumed by odors unknown to Washington three centuries hence. It was an unassuming town by Wilson's standards, that held the future in a fragile shell.

Today it was dressed for celebration. Red, white and blue bunting decorated the gas lampposts lining the streets, and Union flags fluttered in the wind. A small band trumpeted a brassy concert from a street corner. Wilson smiled at the preposterous mustaches and the once-colorful uniforms of the four sprightly men who stood sweating under the sun puffing on their horns.

Wilson and Malleck skirted the Capitol building. Its familiar, majestic rotunda stood incongruously amid the hundreds of lower-middle-class lodging houses. A large banner swept across the Capitol's western facade

proclaiming:

THIS IS THE LORD'S DOING.

IT IS MARVELOUS IN OUR EYES.

Wilson looked westward from the marble edifice toward the Mall, in this time a stretch of grassy fields and young trees, green with spring buds that extended to the distant sparkling waters of the Potomac. The flat parkland was mounted by the red sandstone towers of the Smithsonian, and beyond that, by the unfinished Washington Monument, truncated at a quarter of its planned height. Even from this distance, Wilson could make out the angular shapes of abandoned scaffolding that littered the top of the structure. The Lincoln and Jefferson Memorials, the Memorial Wall, and the Great Sphere of the Martyred, as well as the other landmarks familiar to Wilson, were, of course, missing. In the near distance, across the river on a nearby Virginia hill, Arlington house stood once more, though it was now a Union soldiers graveyard.

The Mall was busy with people who collected in small groups, talking, singing, and laughing. The air was lively, blending the innocent flirtations of young women, the raucous croaking of drunken soldiers, and an occasional victory salvo of gunfire. An enterprising huckster had seized upon the conviviality to turn a quick profit. He was standing on a chair hawking pictures of Lincoln and other war heroes. Two small boys ran by, chattering over a picture of General Robert E. Lee.

Colleen would have loved this. Wilson cherished the walks they had taken together over this very ground on the long summer afternoons of his younger years. His daughter held his hand as he transformed for her the cluttered landscape of modern Washington into this bygone city molded from his knowledge and imagination. They would pretend that she was a beautiful lady, and he her escort, a handsome colonel returned in triumph from Appomattox. In his dreams they had often lived the vision shimmering before him.

How many ages ago that was. He could almost hear her laugh, the sweet, soft sound of her calling out his name. He blinked as the grassy Mall misted in his eyes. It had been a time of innocence for both of them, when a father's hand was a young girl's strength, and a father's dreams her reality. He wanted to stand and absorb the moments of renewed time, to savor the miracle molded before him that had returned him to a world unstained by deeds to come. If only she could see this.

Malleck nudged him toward the Old City Canal. Its sluggish waters, congested with sewage, trickled toward the Potomac along the north edge of the park. Wilson saw the bloated carcass of a large animal floating amid small boats moored near the bank. A fetid odor drifted from that direction when the breeze shifted, and Wilson felt his already anxious stomach turn nauseous. Thankfully the Old Canal had not persevered to modern times. It reeked, as John Hay once phrased it, of "the ghosts of 20,000 drowned cats".

The city bells restored Wilson's purposefulness. One o'clock. He had already lost an hour of irretrievable moments. He picked up his pace as they passed over the high bridge that spanned the death-choked canal.

Malleck spoke again as they crossed Pennsylvania Avenue toward the broad, brick facade of the National Hotel. He pulled Wilson aside next to the small rise of steps that led into the building.

"Follow my instructions precisely." He locked his eyes on Wilson's again. Wilson heard the coiled restraint in Malleck's voice. "It distresses me to let you out of my sight for even a moment, Wilson, but my employer has left me little choice. The hotel clerk has been taken care of. Approach his desk and show him the calling card you'll find in your wallet. Say the words: 'Will Mr. Booth return before dark?' He will answer, 'I should expect him well before dinner.' Remember that. If he answers any other way, even a slight difference, return outside. Your visit will be terminated. Do you understand?"

Wilson stood stunned and silent. He had not expected the arrangements to involve such intrigue. The fulfillment of a life's ambition hung in the subtle phrasing of a desk clerk. He nodded his consent.

"If the clerk responds properly, say, 'I will wait in his room.' It is on the second floor, to the right near the end the hallway. Room 228." He paused again until Wilson nodded that he understood. "Let's check the time."

Wilson fumbled for the gold chain and retrieved the timepiece. One-twenty. Malleck glanced at it and reset his own watch.

"You will have twenty-five minutes to finish your work."

Wilson's eyes widened. "Twenty-five minutes?" He felt betrayed. "But I was promised three hours. I'll barely have –"

"Professor." Malleck made the title sound contemptible. "In twenty-five minutes I'll come to Booth's room. We'll inspect it together to insure it is as you found it, and then we will leave. Those are the conditions. If you do not agree, we are finished here."

Wilson lowered his eyes. He slipped the watch back into his pocket. He fingered the chain like prayer beads through the fabric of his coat. He hadn't felt such pressure since his thesis defense.

This is outrageous. To expect anything of value to be discovered under these conditions is madness. He looked at the National's covered portico and then at Malleck's black eyes. He knew he'd find no sympathy here.

"What if Wilkes returns while I'm in there?"

"That's why we must separate. I'll station myself outside for ten minutes and in the lobby for the remainder of the time. If Booth comes back, I'll detain him. The desk clerk will come to signal you, and you must stop. Return the room to its original state and follow the instructions the clerk gives you. Understand?"

Wilson nodded. Malleck returned the nod and backed away from him. He walked down along the front of the sprawling, four-story building to the corner that housed the telegraph office. He leaned against the graying wall and stood with one leg bent and boot pressed against the concrete surface. He looked like someone

awaiting a telegraph. Wilson watched him for a moment then turned and ascended the broad, flat entrance porch. He felt he was acting out an empty role now, but the slim chance for success still tantalized him. He had come so far. Just to tread upon this vanished stage was exhilarating and it was this at last that propelled him forward.

The hotel lobby was bright and wide but it smelled of mildew. The floor was thick carpet with an elaborate weave and was threadbare in the areas of heavy use. A huge dining room, now crowded with noisy patrons and busy waiters, was visible through a double doorway that opened beside an ornate staircase. Wilson approached the maple reception desk and addressed the clerk, a middle-aged, balding man whose name he recalled was Merrick. He recited the litany he had memorized and held his breath. The man studied him and the card he had presented.

Is he suspicious? What was done to "take care" of him?

To his relief, Merrick replied with the prearranged phrase. Wilson completed the ritual and accepted the room's key with a silent thankfulness. He ascended the stairs, one hand clutching the key to Booth's secrets, the other fingering the pocket watch. He felt some of the tension disappear as he opened the door to the assassin's small apartment.

The room had the look of a museum exhibit. Wilson stood at the doorway, immobilized by the familiar surroundings. He was having difficulty accepting the reality of what he experienced. It was as if he had entered an elaborately detailed amusement park, tailored for his personal entertainment. He shook off the reverie and set to the search for that which had brought him here.

Wilkes's belongings were compulsively tidy. A riding outfit was arranged on the bed: black suit and close fitting trousers. The clothing had been fastidiously placed, and calf-high boots with new spurs were arranged in a straight line on the floor below them.

Wilson looked at the watch. Twenty minutes – he would have to hurry. He fought his vexation; this was not a time for self-indulgence. He closed the door and crossed to a heavy wooden trunk that was set, military-like, at the foot of Booth's bed. If he was to have any success, he must at least examine the obvious. He opened the lid and began his search, cautious to leave no trace of his intrusion. The trunk had several stacked compartments and Booth's clothes were arranged in neat piles within them. The man exhibited an orderliness to his personal affairs that had not been suspected.

It was unthinkable that Demeter had stationed a man like Malleck here and yet did not trouble to collect such historical data on their own.

He sifted the contents of each compartment before replacing it and moving onto the next. He felt tension creep back as he refolded and replaced the third stack of clothing.

If Wilkes has the notebook with him, this endeavor is pointless. Or perhaps he has hidden it somewhere else.

Wilson glanced at the bed, at the closet, at a small dressing table. It could take a half hour to exhaust the obvious possibilities in the room. He turned back to the trunk and lifted the bottom compartment. Half of it was filled by several large jars of stage makeup, plus a hand mirror, a long red wig, and two false beards. Wilson sorted through the tools of Wilkes's trade. A dark riding coat was folded into the other half. Wilson lifted a corner of the garment and discovered beneath it a rectangle of frayed, black leather. He had found it.

The instant of discovery burst over him. His hand shook as he lifted the small book from its resting place. He half expected it to crumble to ashes with his touch. He let himself rock backward until he was sitting, legs sprawled on the floor. He clasped the precious artifact between his hands.

The memorandum book. He had hoped against the impossible and he was not denied. He gave thanks for his outrageous good fortune. Booth had no reason to suspect a search of his room before his bloody act, and he had left the incriminating document in the safety of his trunk. It was just as Wilson had hoped.

He remembered the time and tugged at the pocket watch. The discovery had taken little more than five minutes. He would barely have time to examine his find and perhaps chip away some new nugget of insight into the long-hidden circumstances of the assassination. He swallowed against a dry throat and opened Booth's journal. His heart jumped. It was complete. Complete. No pages were removed. No jagged fragments mocked him. Wilson sat trembling and read through several passages.

What he found sobered him. Many powerful people had conspired against Lincoln, and Booth had been their tool. Not just agents of the Confederacy were engaged; the trail to Booth's deed ran through the Union as well. Here, in the damning script of Booth's own hand, was the list of connections to those politically influential – Northern and Southern – who operated out of Washington; documentation of trips to Canada to meet with secret agents of the Confederacy; late evening meetings with lower members in own Lincoln's War Department. Booth had help from both sides: prearrangement to receive shelter in the South and misdirection of the search from the North, in the crucial first hours following the deed. There was evidence paving a trail of collusion to the doors of both Jefferson Davis and of Lincoln's own government.

It was astonishing. Here beyond all expectation was concrete proof that, while Edwin Stanton himself was nowhere named, his War Department was involved in the murder of the President. The persistent allegations of those conspiracy-minded advocates of over three centuries were confirmed after all.

Wilson turned the pages like a man unearthing a long-interred corpse. He found it hard to believe. To think the old canard of the President's men's involvement was true. Not a few of his colleagues would be forced to eat crow over this – as would he himself. Amazing.

He skimmed past a familiar name entered on one of the pages when realization broke over him like a whitecap. His eyes jumped back to the paragraph and he studied the small script letters again. He was not

mistaken, and the truth of what he read jolted him like a physical blow. Booth had named his principal contact in the War Department and Wilson felt tiny beads of sweat break out on his neck. He read the name aloud to himself.

"Aaron Malleck."

He glanced over his shoulder at the door, half expecting his escort to burst in upon him.

Malleck? Demeter's man is involved? This doesn't make sense.

He studied the name, staring back at him in silent argument in Booth's handwriting.

Impossible. They are obsessed with non-interference. Wilson's disbelief flashed through him like a brush fire. He examined the page a third time.

Malleck? But then maybe he …? He paged forward to yesterday's entry, to the fragment that he had found in Demeter's vaults. He received his second shock – there was no mention of a meeting in the Star Saloon. He flipped back and forth a few pages, thinking he had missed it but it wasn't there. According to the book's blank testimony, Booth had not met anyone there; no one had sparked his resolve to assassinate that night.

"What is going on here?" Wilson asked aloud. "Have the bastards duped me then? Put a false fragment in the archives to put me off Malleck's trail?" His furor turned to panic. But Malleck must know what I'll find here now. He knows about the diary, and he's waiting out there. He's plotted against the President and now he knows that I know. His mind reeled. Why had the Director approved his application then? What would they do with him now that he knew?

He tried to steady himself, to devise a plan, but a single urge trumpeted in his brain – escape. He closed the diary and tucked it back into its hiding place in the trunk. He stood up and inspected the room. He struggled with his self-control while he satisfied himself that he room looked undisturbed. A part of him screamed that none of that made any difference now. But he was frightened and he needed time to think things out. He couldn't risk making things worse.

He crossed to the door, opened it a crack and peered out into the corridor. The hallway was deserted. He stepped out and edged to the top of the stairway. Malleck was seated downstairs with his back toward him, facing the hotel entrance. As Wilson watched from the shadows, Malleck withdrew his pocket watch, consulted it, and turned in his chair in the direction of the stairs. Wilson leaned back out of sight. In a few more minutes, Malleck would be coming for him. He looked back down the hallway. There was a window at its opposite end, open against the warm spring day. Wilson remembered that a smaller building adjoined the National on that side. Perhaps its roof was accessible from that window. He crept down the hallway toward it.

For several hours he wandered through the reborn streets of the Union Capitol, far too distressed now to appreciate their charm. He needed time to think, to clear his head.

History is a farce if people like Malleck can bend it to their petty needs. They're hypocrites. The self-styled "guardians at the gates" are the very ones who meddle like ancient gods. And for what – the Institute's version of truth? Malleck is helping Booth, for Christ's sake. How would Lincoln's last days pass if these villains did not intrude? Would he even be sacrificed to Booth's ego if not for Aaron Malleck?

He walked along 6th Street away from Pennsylvania Avenue, putting distance between himself and Aaron Malleck.

The Director must know about it as well. He must have ordered it, and yet he overrode the objections of his people to let me come here. Maybe he doesn't know; maybe Malleck is a rogue working his own agenda.

Wilson wrestled with his thoughts as the hours wore on him. He stayed away from the main thoroughfares, from public gathering places. By now Malleck was out there searching for him. All around him the city was celebrating, but its gaiety only punctuated his gathering despair. As he wandered he found himself drifting westward, led inexorably along F Street. Finally he stood in the rutted carriage tracks at the corner of 10th and F, staring at the white arches and imposing red face of Ford's Theater. Its blocky structure dominated the buildings that surrounded it.

He found that he was settling into a calming certitude. He had not willed it but it had formed nonetheless, taking substance from the current of emotions that eddied like dark smoke in his head. In her letter to her husband Helen Carr had said she'd stop Booth, stop the assassination of Lincoln, if she wasn't rescued. Her reason was different from his, but he saw now that her purpose was sound; each of them hated the Department for what it had done to them. He could finish what Helen Carr had planned; he needed only the courage to act in her stead.

He retreated back down F Street and turned into the darkened alleyway, called Baptist Alley, which blossomed with stable odors. He was behind Ford's. He entered the theater through a rear stage door and stumbled up to and across the great, darkened stage. It was nearly six o'clock. The large room and its several hundred wooden chairs were cast in heavy shadows. The sky had grown overcast with the passing of the day; the last rays of late afternoon sun filtered in through the theater's high front windows. He tried to move quietly. Historians disagreed on the exact time of Booth's last visit to Ford's on the afternoon of the fourteenth. It would be a terrible mistake to arrive before he did, or worse, to find the assassin still at his work. The theater was empty though. The stagehands were out for an early dinner before starting the evening's final preparations.

Wilson moved up the center aisle and pulled open one of the two tall doors leading to the lobby. It was empty as well. He slipped through and crept up the carpeted stairs to his right, to the level of the dress circle. From the back of the balcony he could look down at the varnished pine stage mounted between the fluted columns that supported the ceiling. To his right lay the Presidential box, decorated with flags and tapestry for the evening. Wilson moved along the semi-circular aisle behind the last row of seats, the same path Wilkes would

follow four hours from now. He arrived at the white door that opened into a short and narrow corridor behind the President's box. This was the dangerous place; he held his breath and listened but no sounds came from the other side. He twisted the broken knob and pushed open the door. The passageway was dark and empty. He stepped inside, closed the door behind him, and struck a match from a box in his pocket. In its flickering light he saw that Booth had already come and gone.

A short, straight stick was propped in a corner behind the door; it was the broken pedestal of a music stand. In the wall next to the door a small hole had been gouged in the plaster. Later that evening, once Booth slipped past the guard into the secluded passage, he would use the stick he had concealed there to wedge the door closed. The match burned down and he struck another. He turned away from the door and took three steps down the passage to the Presidential box itself. In the first of two doors leading into the box Booth had bored a small viewing hole in the wood. Wilson crouched to peer through it; he could see the back of the red Victorian rocking chair that Harry Ford had placed there for the President's use.

Wilson had the sensation of déjà vu. Many years in the future he would visit the restored Ford's and crouch in just this manner to squint through this same hole. Now he could almost see the angular head and unruly hair nodding above the back of the chair. He could see the rocker moving, back and forth, back and forth, in the slow rhythm of a dirge, while his own pulse beat with a nervous staccato. He could feel the cold metal of the derringer slip a little in the sweat of his palm while he waited to burst in upon the tyrant and strike a blow against the hated Union.

The match burned down. Wilson turned back to the darkness of the corridor. He reached the outer door and hesitated – the broken pedestal was there, awaiting Booth's hand. He reached for it in the darkness, felt its shape beneath his fingertips, and lifted it from its resting place. He clutched it like a bulwark as he stepped through the door into the dress circle. He stood gasping against the door, pressed into it by the weight of what he'd done.

How could he dare even this? Booth would be alarmed tonight when he entered here and found his wedge was missing. Would it stop him? Was the fear of apprehension enough? This change, even this change....

A patina of sweat covered his face and a chilling gust whispered past his soul. But Wilson gripped the stand and pushed away from the door.

No, it was not history that had happened here. It was their damnable work. He must not, and he could not, accommodate an obstruction to their downfall now.

He had reached the first landing, midway down the stairs, when he saw Malleck again. The Demeter agent had entered the lobby from the street side, pushing through the entrance doors. The fading daylight painted his long silhouette on the red carpet. Wilson halted and pushed against the wall of the stairwell.

Of course he knew I would come here. The theater is a magnet for both of us.

Malleck had not seen him though. He watched as Malleck took a few steps toward the inner doors, pulled one open, and stared at the deserted stage. Wilson pressed back further, hoping the shadows would conceal him. Malleck stood there for what seemed hours. He was looking for some movement, listening for an unexpected sound. Wilson feared that the hammering of his blood would betray him. Malleck closed the door and turned around and exited the lobby.

Wilson waited to be certain he was gone before he descended the remaining stairs. He entered the theater again, hurried toward the stage and climbed up on it. He crossed to the rear, hesitated, and dropped the music pedestal behind some cutout scenery. As he turned to leave he heard the lobby door open. He wheeled and saw Malleck there and this time he also was seen. He turned to run and Malleck shouted. He heard the clatter of his approaching boots.

"Stop."

He didn't.

"You're a fool, Wilson. You don't know what you're doing. You could ruin everything with your meddling."

Wilson was outraged and he stopped then and turned to face the man. His movement also halted Malleck. He started moving forward again as Wilson glared at him.

"You talk of meddling? You accuse me?"

"Yes."

"I read the diary. I know about you and Booth."

Malleck stopped again. "The diary? You've made a grievous mistake."

"No mistake. How does the saying go? 'Who watches the watchers?' Do you deny that you work for Stanton?"

Malleck had recovered. He inched forward, glancing around as he did so. "Keep your voice down."

Wilson stared at him, his fists clenched.

"Of course I am with the War Department," Malleck said. "It's a role that allows me effectiveness in this time."

"Effectiveness? You've used your position to help Booth."

Malleck glanced behind him and then at Wilson. "Of course I did, that's how we keep history whole. You're the scholar; don't tell me you don't understand that."

"Intact? It's because of you that Lincoln will die tonight. Have you not considered that Booth might fail without your help, or turn away a coward for fear of being caught? You talk of preserving history, but it's a history of your making."

Malleck approached the orchestra pit and Wilson started a slow movement backward, toward the stage door.

Malleck edged along the rim of the pit until he reached a point closest to Wilson and then extended his arms and leaned against the stage.

He lowered his voice when he spoke again. "Doctor Wilson, I know what you are planning. Believe me when I say, I will not let you do it." His eyes were flat as a reptile's. "You dream of seeing Lincoln live, but what else will change if he does? Everything will be different? Better, you think? Perhaps, or maybe far worse. People yet unborn will never be. Scientists. Leaders. Scholars. And that's if we're lucky; if not, perhaps the chaos of the void will remain."

"I comprehend the implications of Lincoln's death far better than you, Mr. Malleck. It's been my life." Wilson lowered his eyes. "Who knows what our country could have achieved if he'd lived to direct its next steps? If you hadn't killed him."

"I'm not his killer, Wilson. The murder will be Booth's act alone. He doesn't require my support for that. It was done, and will be done, whether I contacted him or not"

"But why help him? Why interfere at all?"

Malleck's tone was flat. "Do you imagine you're the first to want to interfere? The first to try to impose your solution to history? There are many others, from all the times ahead of us, and compared to them you're a bumbling fool. They are ingenious, devious, invisible, and nearly undetectable. They invade us like a virus, like a cancer that passes unseen into the body to spreads. That's what I face. That's what I work against."

Wilson's resolve began to bend. "But how can you? You are one man –"

He thought he could receive no further shocks. He was mistaken.

"One? No, not one, but nearly that. We are little more than fifty in this time. We've been placed at many levels of society and government and yet we are still far too few. Our enemies outnumber us by magnitudes. Still we wait and watch for the clues that an intruder has arrived and then stop them, prevent or correct their interference. We've worked for a generation and we've been successful thus far. But the crucial moment is now hours away. "

Wilson's mouth dropped open. "Fifty? And you spent your time today escorting me on a search for a worthless document."

"It was not my plan or desire, I assure you. Your self-righteous meddling has cost me valuable hours. You are an inept blunderer who nonetheless has become as grave a danger as any scheming intruder. Come on now, Wilson. Come back with me. You're not ruthless enough to play at this game."

"But ... but you are helping Booth."

"Yes, and what reason would be grave enough to do so? Because he did his deed the first time without us.

History has to close on itself."

Wilson was battered; his head reeled. "In his diary Booth said he decided on assassination instead of abduction today, Malleck. You must have been the catalyst that spurred him to it. You provided him a guarantee of safe passage. Without your support, he might not have acted."

"That's the point, Wilson. How many times must I repeat it? Booth will assassinate Lincoln tonight. That was history when time travel was still a dream. We preserved what has already happened."

"How can you know that? Fifty of you – mingling, interacting and carrying the knowledge that you possess. You've polluted history."

With a fluid motion Malleck vaulted onto the stage. Wilson had let Malleck's words pull him closer to the man. He turned and bolted to the rear of the stage with the hard rap-rap of Malleck's boots behind him. He pushed open the stage door and stumbled out to the alley. The cobblestone was dark, shadowed by the press of buildings on both sides and by the overcast evening sky. He knew this alleyway as if he was raised on it. It had received extensive attention by the popular press of the day and by later historians because it was Booth's first route of escape after the murder.

Wilson ran down the narrow concourse, hugging close to the wall of a livery stable. The air was filled with the smells of straw and manure. He heard the theater door bang open and he didn't stop running. He raced past the alley's first exit leading off to his left, knowing that would be the route Malleck would expect him to take. He slowed down then, shuffling, trying to muffle the sounds of his boots on the stones underfoot. It was dark now and he was pretty certain he couldn't be seen. He pushed through the open doorway of a stable and crouched in its shadows. He heard the footsteps behind him slow to a jog as Malleck reached the first exit.

"Wilson, come back now and I'll send you home." The voice echoed in the silence. "If not, you'll not leave here alive."

The boots shuffled, stood still for a moment, and then clattered away, up the exit from the alley. Wilson stood up and ran in earnest the other way. He came to a second crossing that led to the right and hurried down it. He stumbled once and almost fell, and then he reached the safety of the thoroughfare.

It was sparsely filled with people hurrying home from work. A covered Hansom moved down the rutted street; across the street a lamplighter was removing colored streamers from a post so that he could fire the gaslight inside. Wilson turned and ran. He weaved between pedestrians, dashed across the street, dodged the spoked wheels of a carriage, and ran on. He stopped when he was many blocks from the theater. He leaned, wheezing, against the brick wall of a boarding house and stared back along the sidewalk. The glances of passersby set him on edge.

Where are you now, Malleck? Waiting at Ford's? You know I'll come back, don't you. Know I must go back.

Maybe I am like you after all, trying to have your actions justify mine. And maybe my first sin is already echoing into its future.

He collapsed against the building and covered his face with his hands.

You've murdered history and now the rest of us are drowning in your corruption. You're right, I'm not ruthless enough. I'm just looking for something to cling to, something untainted to believe in, and I know who that is. It's not your world that should have been saved here, it's his.

He brushed his eyes with his sleeve and straightened and looked around. This section of street was empty. Parallel rows of decorated lampposts stood vigil, like mourners at a funeral of state. Further down, two soldiers were weaving in the yellow light. They sang a tuneless song and were searching for a tavern. He reached for his wallet. Perhaps his "horse" money, and the festivity in the air, would be enough to persuade one of them. He stepped out of the shadows to meet them.

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Wilson fidgeted in the hard wooden chair. He pulled out the pocket watch, now tucked beneath a blue belt trimmed in red piping. Seven-thirty. He put it away and drummed his lap with white-gloved fingers. A woman was sitting next to him. She wore an evening dress made of white silk that was cut over her bare shoulders. She sighed.

"How long before this play-actin' starts?" She yawned and cast a look at the empty seats that surrounded them.

"Another half-hour," Wilson told her. He continued to face forward, staring at the stage.

She sighed again and fidgeted in her chair. "You sure you wouldn't rather go back to the house and spend the evenin'?"

"No," Wilson sighed.

"I'm very good, Lieutenant. All the men say so."

"Just sit quietly." He glared at her then. "Please." She seemed to have an innocent youthfulness in the dim light of the bordello. Now he saw her eyes were pinched with crow's-feet; her neck was drawn and wrinkled. Even her caked makeup, which she wore like wall plaster, couldn't deceive in the theater's gas houselights. When she smiled, she exposed the ragged edge of a broken tooth. Thankfully, she was pouting now. Wilson felt the anxiety and fatigue of the last hours overcome him, and he directed his frustration at her.

"It's my money and my time. Lord knows I've paid enough to have you sit there and be quiet, so please do so. And stop squirming."

She lowered her eyes and folded her hands, childlike, in her lap. He watched her a moment more and started to apologize but the words caught in his throat. He looked away and surveyed the theater.
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It was half-filled. The audience was mixed, largely civilians, but interspersed with a number of Union officers and their female companions. In his newly acquired uniform, and with this rented consort, Wilson hoped to blend in. Now if time just wouldn't drag so, he thought. He drummed on his lap again.

"Don't think I'm not grateful for this beautiful dress." She leaned into him and rested her hand on his arm. He resisted the urge to draw away. There was an exasperating squeakiness in her voice too. "I mean, I don't know the last time I felt so lady-like."

She smiled and Wilson watched the broken tooth bob like an insect. For this I had to nearly break down the shop door to get the owner to open? This was a mistake; there was so little time to think it through.

The idea of attending the play as a Union officer seemed perfect. After negotiating with the drunken soldier for his uniform, Wilson asked directions to a brothel. He went in there seeking the first live woman to enter his life since his daughter had gone out of it. And when he saw this woman in its flattering light all the pain and memories came flooding back like a tide, stripping bare the wounds he'd believed long since healed. She had the same long and gleaming hair, the same petite frame, and the same brown eyes. He had even called her Colleen once during their carriage ride to the theater.

He realized she was still talking to him. "It reminds me of when I was a little girl. My mamma used to get her 'n me fixed up to go out walkin' on the Mall. Mamma was real pretty and I was proud she'd take me walkin'." He watched her now; her face had been open and smiling but now it clouded up like a summer storm. "We had good times 'til Pa got home. He'd come in drunk and lookin' for us, stinkin' of whiskey and swearin' a streak." She was looking down at Wilson's sleeve but he knew she wasn't seeing it. "One night he got back early and found ma with one of the boys from the park. Killed 'em both."

Dear God, Wilson thought. He averted his eyes but she continued on.

"I ran off and ain't never seen him again. Don't care to neither."

He turned away; he needed to stay alert, not get dragged into her self-pitying tale. She went silent then, lost in her own past days, he hoped. He looked around at the theater and vowed not to listen if she started in again.

He was sitting in a hard-backed chair all the way to one side of the balcony and several rows back from the railing. The dress circle was a semicircle that spanned the rear and back side walls of the theater and extended above half of the lower-level seating area. The seats in the balcony followed the semicircular pattern so that, from the far end where Wilson sat, he had a view of both the stage and of the comings and goings to the dress circle. The only stairway to it lay opposite him on the far side of the circle, behind the last row of seats. To his right and behind him was the small white door that led to the President's box. His seats were suited to his purpose; he'd used his uniform with the ticket clerk to get so close. The box opened over the stage and was flanked by several American flags and a portrait of George Washington in honor of the evening's special guests. A Treasury Department flag was draped over the balustrade.

Wilson knew that flag was the flaw in Wilkes's otherwise perfect plan. Booth wore spurs in anticipation of his hasty flight, and he snagged one of them on the flag during his leap to the stage. A broken ankle resulted. The fracture retarded the assassin's flight into the Confederacy, allowing his capture in twelve days and sixty miles from the Capitol.

Or will.

Twelve days. After the assassination, Stanton will grab the reins of power, and because of the substantial confusion, or bungling, or the duplicity of his staff, he'll grant Wilkes twelve days of freedom. And in spite of this, those in the War Department who are abetting Booth's escape, Aaron Malleck and his kind, will see their plans undone by a spur and a flag. But Malleck must know about the broken ankle; that's history at least, isn't it? Wilson shook his head, bewildered.

He squinted past the flag to the inside of the box, now lit by two large gas chandeliers that hung over the stage. Because of his angle, Wilson couldn't see much but he knew that the box was empty. The President will not arrive until after the play had begun, around eight-thirty. The theater seats were filling and the laughter and the conversation and the orchestra tuning were competing with the now droning voice of his companion. A large crowd had turned out on Good Friday evening, unusual for a holy day. But revelry was in the air. The war was ended less than a week. The orchestra began to play a popular patriotic tune. Several people in the audience sang along. Those who were here were less interested in Laura Keene and her benefit performance of Our American Cousin than in catching a glimpse of the President, now a lionized hero, and of his expected guest, General Ulysses S. Grant.

Wilson knew the audience would be disappointed on that account. Grant had little taste for the theater, and that, in addition to Mrs. Grant's intense dislike of Mary Todd Lincoln, had convinced him to decline the invitation. And though assassination was a constant threat, Stanton had assigned John Parker to attend to the President as his guard, a man with a prior record of negligence to duty. Parker's negligence would allow Booth to enter Lincoln's box unchallenged.

How much of that is your doing, Aaron?

Wilson sat upright. A familiar dark mane had appeared at the top of the dress circle stairway. Malleck, dressed in the same gray wool suit and ribbon tie he had worn that afternoon, stood craning his neck and examining faces in the balcony's audience. Wilson turned to present a partial profile to him. He smiled at his companion. She had been talking to herself for several minutes and his sudden attention caught her short. She stared at Wilson, mouth open in mid-sentence.

"Don't stop now, please," Wilson said, trying to hold his smile. "This is what I've paid you for." He gave Malleck a sidelong look. The man was still searching.

The woman hesitated at first and then giggled. "Lordy, you're a strange one. Are you ready to go back to the

house?" She fluffed of her hair with one hand. "I knew you couldn't hold out all night."

"Just sit still and keep talking."

Wilson made his voice low and menacing sounding, like Malleck had, though he continued to smile at her. The woman frowned. Wilson tried to look casual as he placed his hand on her arm and squeezed hard.

"Smile."

"Hey, you're hurtin' me." She whimpered through her clenched teeth. "All right, all right, I'm smilin'."

Malleck was looking right at them. Wilson saw him shift to one side to get a better view. Wilson propped his chin on his hand and tried to cover his face. He agonized for several seconds until Malleck turned to inspect other faces. After several more minutes of this, Malleck seemed satisfied and disappeared down the stairway. Wilson released the woman's arm and looked over. Had Malleck recognized him? He couldn't be certain.

"Look, mister, I don't know what you are up to, but money or no money, I don't have to take this." She glared back at him. "If you want to sit in this dreary place and twist people's arms off, that's your business. But it ain't gonna' be mine." She gathered her dress and started to rise. Wilson caught her arm, gently this time.

"I ... I'm sorry. I'm in a bit of a fix here and it's got me upset. Ellen. That's your name, isn't it? Ellen? I need you with me now very much. I can't explain it, but there is no danger to you. Just stay with me, please. I promise that before tonight is over you'll have a lifetime's worth of stories to tell your friends."

"Humm. Will we see President Lincoln?"

"And more, Ellen. Much more."

She studied him and Wilson watched her deciding. She sat back in the chair again. Her face puckered and she scrutinized the people surrounding her.

"What kind of a fix?"

"Someone is looking for me and you're part of my disguise."

"What...?" She looked around a second time, now poring over each face as if she expected one of them to leap at her. "I don't want to be part of no disguise."

Wilson patted her arm. "I told you, you are in no danger."

"I don't care. You're a peculiar one and this is makin' me upset. I want to leave."

"Uh ... you're right, Ellen, I guess I am a bit peculiar." He gave her his biggest smile. "That was just a joke. I'm not in any trouble at all. I'm ... I'm an actor myself, and I was just trying out for a part I'm working on."

Her look told him she thought he was either lying or crazy. "I don't know," she said.

He was rescued by the first appearance of an actor on the stage.

"Look, the play's going to start. Let's watch."

The gaslights dimmed and the theater hushed. Ellen stared at Wilson for a while but he pretended to be absorbed with the actors. She stopped twisting in her seat and peering at the audience; in spite of herself, she was drawn in to the action on the stage. She didn't know it yet, but what was to be the last performance in Ford's for more than a century was beginning.

Wilson looked at the dress circle stairs; they were empty. He relaxed a little and gave some attention to the actors. He had only passing interest in the unfolding of the broad farce itself. But this play was so embroidered into the fabric of this fateful night; it held a certain fascination for him. He'd been immersed so long in the study of Lincoln and his times that by now he knew the words of the play by heart. How queer it seemed to watch Laura Keene and her company walking through the familiar lines. They seemed exaggerated, even amateurish, compared to several of the Presidents' Day performances he had seen at the restored Ford's in his own time.

Disconnected thoughts, like wind-driven clouds, scudded across his mind. Just a little longer, Aaron. Just long enough to see it happen. Let me witness the assassin's leap, and maybe help bear the dying President's body across the street. Why do I torture myself? I'm watching all of this and yet I'm powerless. I sit and let it happen. What will happen to the future, to my future, if I did interfere? Would Kathryn have left me if Lincoln had lived? And Colleen. Would Booth's act left undone give me more time with you? You grew up so fast. The drugs, the thieving; I had to send you away. Why didn't you give me another chance? Why take it out on me with Henry Madison? Oh, I'm so sorry, Colleen.

The chattering brought his thoughts back to the theater. People were talking in hushed tones, their attention diverted from the stage. The actors were fumbling their lines, distracted by the noisy commotion in the audience. Wilson saw several people on the main floor below stand up. They turned from the stage, looking toward the rear of the theater. There was a lot of pointing and murmuring. The orchestra conductor, annoyed, turned to the audience, straining to locate the cause of the disturbance. The actors stood motionless on the stage; they squinted over raised hands, shading their eyes from the footlights.

The conductor turned back to the musicians and called out something to them. There were several moments of shuffling sheet music, and on the conductor's command the orchestra struck the electrifying first notes of "Ruffles and Flourishes". With this as a cue, a great roar went up from the audience; most applauded, men stood on their seats, whistling and cheering. The houselights came up and the play was temporarily forgotten. Wilson saw some people at the back of the dress circle lean over the stairway railing, trying to catch a glimpse of the late-arriving President. Before he came into view, they pulled back, as if pushed like the sea from the bow of a great ship. They fluttered and smiled to one another as Lincoln ascended the stairs. When the

familiar shock of unruly hair came into view, the murmur in the dress circle swelled to a crescendo. Wilson found himself caught up in it, a loud cheer rose from his throat. He saw the tired face break through the waves of people that strained to see him.

Lincoln stood almost a head above those who surrounded him, and Wilson could see his craggy features, worn by years of anguish and the toll of a sensitive conscience embroiled in a fratricidal war. He smiled, but his eyes were weary. The heavy lines of his cheeks were drawn into gaunt slashes that made him look disfigured. His eyes were dark and heavy-lidded; folds of wrinkled skin surrounded them. His smile was an upward twist at each end of his firm lips. He held his ubiquitous stovepipe hat in one hand and reached out with the other to squeeze some of the hands outstretched to him. He made his way along the aisle behind the dress circle seats, pausing to speak a few words to one or another of the acquaintances he spied there. Mary Lincoln, plump, homely, and smiling proudly, trailed to one side of her husband. Behind them were their last-minute guests, Henry Rathbone, dressed in Union blue, and his fiancée, Clara Harris. John Parker, of the Metropolitan Police and on special assignment to the White House, trailed behind.

Lincoln touched many of the hands that reached to him. He senses it, Wilson thought. This outpouring is a catharsis for the anguish the war has wrought upon his beloved nation. He knows they need to touch him, to say, "Thank God, it's over," and he can't deny them that.

As the Presidential party moved closer to the small white door, Wilson found himself on his feet. The theater faded around him. The cheers of the audience, the stirring rhythms of the orchestra, became a whisper on the edge of reality. The universe was filled to overflowing with that gaunt and tragic face. Each movement, each gesture, each twist of the mouth and nod of the head was slowed to dreamlike motion and amplified as though projected on a gigantic screen. Wilson was lost in the face, in the immensity of the moment he had lived in his imagination for more than thirty years. He was adrift on the confluent tides of love and impending loss that rushed over him.

Oh Captain! My Captain! Our fearful trip is done.

His thoughts reached out to the face. Have you borne us through the fire only to lose the dream on this wretched night? How your country will suffer for the assassin's deed. If you could live to shepherd the strays back to the Union, to hold in check the forces of hatred and retribution that profane the halls of Congress. If you could stay to win the peace for us, as you have so lately won the war. Will a madman's bullet end your country's last hope for leadership and moral council? The degeneration of our national will, the rise of petty regionalism, the subjugation of our brothers beyond the bloody conflict that was to have settled the issue, and all of the decay of our once-proud civilization will spread through time, like your blood upon the carpet, when Booth performs his deed tonight.

Wilson let the presence of the man close about him like the sea, submerged his personality in the sublime

sensuality of the event. He was helpless before the undertow that drew him to that face and drained him of energy and will, save that derived from nearness to the man.

Lincoln is alive.

Wilson throbbed with a single, irrepressible thought. How can I let him die again?

When at last the President gave a small bow and disappeared behind the white door Wilson's eyes were blurred and wet. He was transfixed, staring at the spot where Lincoln had stood, until Ellen tugged at his trouser leg. He glanced around in confusion and allowed the theater and its people to flow back into the vacuum. He didn't know how long he'd stood there, but everyone was seated, the theater was dark, and the play had resumed. He dropped into his chair and for a long time could only stare at the fluted gothic column and bit of tapestry that blocked his view into the Presidential box.

A roar of laughter brought his attention to the play. He felt a disorienting shock. The actors were walking through the third act. Harry Hawk was convulsing the audience with his portrayal of the outrageous American backwoodsman. How long had he sat daydreaming? He must stay alert. He pulled out the watch and looked at it. Ten o'clock. He looked at the Ellen. She was involved in the comedy's broad humor.

Enjoy what is left to you, he thought.

He looked at the stairway. In a few minutes Booth would appear and start his journey around the dress circle. Wilson twisted to see where John Parker had positioned himself. The wooden chair provided for the bodyguard was empty. The man would later testify that he had moved down a few rows to get a better view of the play. Wilson searched but could find no evidence of the man. He scrutinized the stairway again. Could he do it? His timing must be perfect. If he acted too soon, Booth would accuse him of assaulting an innocent actor. Too late and the President would be dead. Again.

The thought struck him that maybe whatever he did here tonight could make no difference. Maybe his role in the event was like that of the audience of Our American Cousin. He could watch it unfold; engage his emotions in its outcome, but the event itself was foreordained. He was viewing the replay of what was once reality but now was re-creation. Like a video cycling endlessly through the projector of history.

No. That must not be the case. He could change the ending of the night.

A strong hand gripped his left shoulder. He turned toward Ellen, but she was staring, mesmerized, at the stage. He turned his head the other way to look at the intruder, knowing who he would discover there. Aaron Malleck's black eyes stared down into his. Malleck squatted behind Wilson's chair and Wilson gave a start that turned heads in his direction.

"Come with me." Malleck whispered. The command was cloaked in an unchallengeable threat.

"Pardon me, sir?" Wilson forced a gruff voice and let it carry. "Are you addressing one of your country's

officers in that tone?"

Several people turned toward him, annoyed. Ellen went stiff in her chair; she was wide-eyed and silent. She too had discovered the dark man.

"We're finished here, Wilson," Malleck said. "Let's go."

Wilson was paralyzed. He couldn't leave now; Booth was due at any minute. Beneath his overcoat, a French Perrine revolver waited for his command. He'd purchased it from the drunken officer along with the uniform. Though he had acknowledged its need, he feared its use. He glanced at Malleck's hands. One was thrust in a coat pocket and an object bulged there as well.

Wilson's will deflated. He nodded at Malleck with a gesture that meant defeat, not agreement, and stood up. Ellen sat in her chair and Malleck ignored her. He backed toward the aisle and Wilson followed him. On stage the actors were leading into the lines of scene two. Downstairs in the lobby Booth would be beginning his move. He would time the deed with a particular line from this scene. Wilson looked at Malleck, his eyes pleading.

"Please," he begged, "I –"

Malleck cut him off with a shake of his head. He was angry. "We're leaving now."

Wilson led the way around the circle. I can't save him. I must be content to have seen him, and to return to my own time with his face before me. He turned to Malleck and whispered, "Let's hurry then."

They started to descend the stairs. "I ... I'm sorry, it seemed so –"

He was interrupted when a small man in a black riding coat bumped into him. The man was looking down at his own feet, preoccupied, as he ascended the stairs. When they bumped together, the man looked up, angry at the intrusion. He glared at Wilson and his young, handsome face drew back in a scowl. The stranger noticed Malleck next and Wilson saw the man's fiery black eyes widen. He lowered them and continued up.

Wilson listened to Wilkes' spurs jangle and all doubt drained from him. He deliberated furiously as he and Malleck descended to the lobby. There was a small crowd of men there standing to one side engaged in some animated conversation. Two of them were soldiers. Wilson wheeled around and shouted.

"You dare insult a Union officer, sir? Are you yourself a traitorous rebel?"

Malleck was nonplused. He stared at Wilson for an instant and then realizing his intention, looked around. He saw two soldiers glaring at him and he smiled. His threat came through bared teeth. "So help me, if you do that again, I'll drop you. Now move."

Wilson played out his hand. "Is that a threat, sir?" The group of men drifted over. "I believe you are up to no good here," Wilson added, even more loudly. "I may be forced to have you arrested."

Malleck was seething; he dropped the smile. "Wilson –"

He snipped the words when one of the soldiers, a burly sergeant, grabbed his arm.

"Is this reb bothering you, Lieutenant?" His eyes were bloodshot with whiskey but he looked like he was nasty even when sober.

"Sergeant, take this man into your custody. I believe he is one of Jeff Davis's agents. He made a personal threat against my life."

The sergeant leaned into Malleck, twisting his forearm in his mallet-sized hand. Malleck's muscles bunched. They were teetering on the edge.

"I caught him nosing around the President's box upstairs," Wilson added.

Malleck stared hard at Wilson. His nostrils flared and he spoke through compressed lips. "Take your hands off of me, soldier, or I'll have you court-martialed. This officer has no pass. I am with the War Department."

The group of men surrounded Wilson and Malleck. Wilson let the men flow around him and then he was standing outside the circle of bodies.

"And I wipe the president's arse," the sergeant growled. The circle closed.

Wilson knew he must act quickly. He looked at Malleck, who was disappearing behind an ever-widening crowd of spectators. Several theater employees had joined in on the confrontation. Wilson turned to the door that led outside and opened it to the chill night air. From somewhere behind him, he heard Malleck shout his name. He pushed past a doorman and jumped down into the gas-lit darkness.

Once outside he turned left and entered a closed passageway that separated Ford's from the Star Saloon adjoining it. Access to the passage was through a narrow door. He let the wooden door slam closed, plunging the narrow corridor into blackness. He fumbled for a match, struck it, and raced down the length of the covered alleyway. Near the end was a second entrance to the theater. Through that door was the backstage. The President's box was just above him then. He opened the door and went inside. An open trapdoor led down to a flight of stairs on his right. The stairs led to a basement level underneath the theater.

He took the stairs two at a time and reached the first of several interconnecting storerooms. He pushed through them, pausing to relight his matches, and protected the flame with his cupped hand as he ran. The rooms were cluttered with packing crates and stage props and scenery. He tripped once and fell sprawling in the dirt and darkness. He scrambled to his feet and struck another match. He came to a corridor; its space was more cramped than the storerooms had been. It was dimly lit from the gaslight that filtered through the floorboards overhead. He was beneath the stage. He heard the boards creak as the actors moved through their impersonations. Their hollow voices echoed in the passageway and the laughter of the audience peeled like distant thunder.

"What, no fortune?" a woman was saying.

"Nary red." That was Harry Hawk. "It all comes to their barking up the tree about the old man's property."

The thunder rumbled.

Wilson's heart pounded. Those were the lines just before Wilkes cue. He scrambled through the corridor and found a second flight of stairs. He raced up them and out another trap door on that side of the stage. It was also open; Booth had used both trapdoors earlier.

"Augusta, dear, to your room," the woman said.

"Yes, ma, the nasty beast!" came a younger woman's voice.

Wilson rushed to the wings on stage left.

"I am aware, Mr. Trenchard," the older woman spoke again, "that you are not used to the manners of good society." The woman turned to leave.

Behind her, Harry Hawk waited for her exit. He was thinking aloud to the audience. "Don't know the manners of good society, eh?"

Wilson jostled a stagehand who tried to restrain him. He pushed the man aside.

"Well, I guess I know enough to turn you inside out, you sockdologizing old –"

Wilson burst from the wings opposite the President's box and into the full light of the stage. He pointed up into the darkened box and shouted.

"Mr. President, behind you!"

There was a commotion in the box and a larger one in the audience. Wilson saw shadows wrestling in the darkness and heard a single gunshot. It reverberated through the shocked stillness of the audience like the tolling of a great bell, and it was followed in a heartbeat by a scream so anguished it had to have been Mary Lincoln. The audience gasped, and then as realization crested over them, disintegrated into a cacophony of shouts and screams. Wilson locked his eyes on that curtained box, ten feet above the stage. His heart squeezed in his chest and seemed to stop. He sucked in his breath and held it.

The scuffling shadows disappeared and a handsome man in a dark riding coat appeared at the balustrade. In an instant he was over the edge. In his leap to the stage, his spur caught in the blue Treasury Department flag and he fell hard, his full weight crushing onto his left foot. His face twisted, but he pushed himself to his feet and shuffled across the stage, thrusting Henry Hawk aside. When he reached midstage he turned to the audience and lifted both arms over his head.

"Sic semper tyrannis!" he shouted, his arms raised like a romantic statue.

The orchestra director grasped for the assassin's leg but Booth slashed him with an already bloody hunting knife. The director fell back into the orchestra.

The action shook Wilson from his trance. As Booth turned toward the wings, Wilson fumbled with his long military coat. Booth was staring at him now and Wilson was horrified by the wildness in his eyes. Booth hobbled toward him, the wicked knife gleaming in the gaslight. Wilson pulled the Perrine free,

He aimed with both hands and pulled the trigger. Booth's eyes opened in disbelief and he took a few halting steps. Wilson fired again and again. The assassin fell, the full length of his body dropped at Wilson's feet. Wilson was screaming too and he continued firing into the unmoving figure until the metallic clicking of the hammer and the echo of the gunshots punctuated his sobs. He dropped the pistol. It rebounded from Booth's back with a thump and then clattered onto the wooden stage.

The theater was in bedlam. Most of the people were scrambling for the lobby doors. Some were hurrying up the dress circle stairs and others still stood by their seats, staring in uncomprehending horror at the bloodied stage. But Wilson's eyes were raised to the dark box. A strong hand moved there; it gripped the balustrade in an effort to lend support to a gangling body. The hand became an arm, then a chest, and a face.

Lincoln was standing. Standing.

He leaned on the rail. A wet stain enveloped his left coat sleeve but his face was clear.

"We are all right," he called above the confusion of the crowd, in his throaty, backwoods accent. "We need a doctor for Major Rathbone."

The pinched, sad eyes drifted across the stage to where a Union Army lieutenant stood, shoulders slumped, above the body of a dead assassin. The President and Wilson locked eyes. Lincoln nodded to Wilson and gestured with his right hand. Wilson's own hand rose without volition and the President disappeared back into the box.

Wilson came aware of the confusion around him. Actors and stagehands hurried onto the stage, and all of them gave Wilson a wide berth. When he sought their eyes, they looked away. He stared at the body at his feet. Booth was dead. He lay in a widening pool of blood. A young woman stood near the body; tears streamed down her makeup.

"You killed him," she sobbed. She was looking at Wilson. Wilson looked at her and then at the still figure. Wilkes' outstretched hand was inches from his boot.

"Murderer!" the woman screamed. "Assassin!" Again, a wail echoed in the theater.

Wilson turned away, hesitated, and then turned back again. He crouched over the prostrate Booth and fumbled in his red-stained coat. He groped for a moment and withdrew his hand. In it he clutched the leather bound notebook. He slipped the book into his pocket, but couldn't focus just then on why it seemed important.

He saw smears of blood that streaked the fingers of his white gloves. He wheeled and ran to the rear of the stage and out through the stage door. Outside in the alley a young boy lay on a bench holding the reins to Booth's horse. Wilson grabbed the reins from him and swung up into the saddle. He was crying when he shouted at the boy.

"Get back inside and forget you saw this horse – or me."

He kicked the horse's flanks and turned it around in the alleyway. The hooves clattered beneath him on the cobblestones as he raced down the narrow side passage that led out onto F Street. He had the horse in a full gallop as he turned south. He must leave Washington before Malleck could pick up his trail. Both he and Malleck were trapped now, trapped in the history that Wilson had created. He was sure Malleck would not rest until he found him. Lincoln lived, but his life had been purchased at what terrible cost.

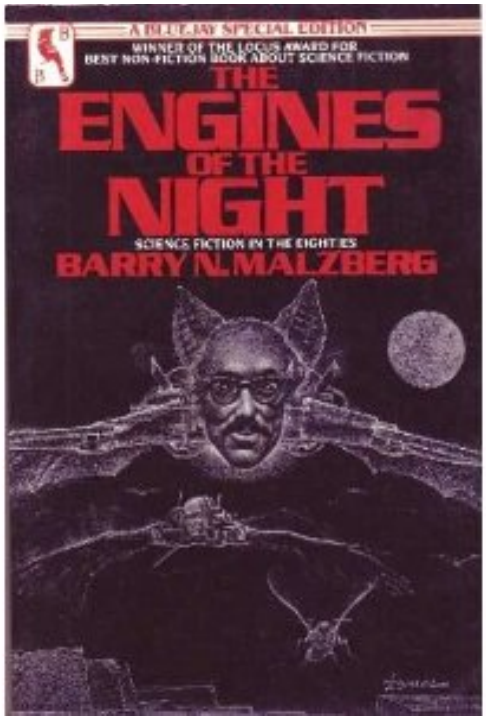
Geoffrey Wilson would become an enigma to history, little noted and unremembered. A shadowy figure with no past who appeared in time to save the President's life. Now he must disappear again and, like the future he had fathered, begin anew.

A light rain fell as he turned the assassin's horse in the direction of the Naval Yard Bridge that led across the Anacostia River and south into the Confederacy. He knew the bridge should be lightly guarded.

PERSPECTIVES

Three personal takes on the history of Amazing Stories by former editors and staff writers

(The following two essays originally appeared in Engines of the Night: Science Fiction in the Eighties *by Barry N. Malzberg (Doubleday, 1982). Kindle Edition and is reprinted here by permission of the author.)*



I Could Have Been A Contender, Part One

Revisionist canon now holds that science fiction would have had a different -- and superior -- history if Hugo Gernsback, by creating Amazing Stories in 1926, had not ghettoized the genre, reduced it on the spot to a small asylum plastered with murals of ravening aliens carrying off screaming wome

n in wondrous machines from a burning city and thus made it impossible for serious critics, to say nothing of serious writers, to have anything to do with it. After all, in the early part of the century novels of the speculative and fantastic were part of the literature; the Munsey magazines ran futuristic adventure serials all the time, and Hawthorne and Melville were writing fantasies or absurdist speculation without any damage to their literary credibility.

It simply could have gone on that way, the revisionists suggest; science fiction would not have been thrown into a charnel house which it would spend four decades trying to escape, seeking that respectability and acceptance it had possessed before Gernsback defined it and made it live by its worst examples and most debased audience.

The argument has a certain winsome charm -- I believed it myself when I was but a wee lad, and some of our best or better minds hold to it right now -- but is flawed. At the risk of aligning myself with Hugo Gernsback, a venal and small-minded magazine publisher whose reprehensible practices, long since detailed, were contemptible to his contributors, partners, and employees, I think that he did us a great service and that were it not for Gernsback, science fiction as we understand it would not exist. We would have -- as we do -- the works of fabulation in the general literature -- Coover, Barthelme, Barth, and DeLillo -- but of the category which gave us *More Than Human, The Demolished Man, Foundation and Empire, Dying Inside, The*

Dispossessed, and *Rogue Moon* we would have nothing, and hence these works would not exist. It is possible that some of these writers, who were inspired to write science fiction by a childhood of reading, would never have published at all.

Photo Credit: Ellen Datlow. Used with permission.

"Science fiction builds on science fiction," Asimov said once, and that truth is at the center of the form. Before Gernsback gave it a name (he called it "scientifiction," but close enough; Ackerman a few years later cast out a syllable), the literature did not exist; before he gave it a medium of exclusivity, its dim antecedents were scattered through the range of popular and restricted writing without order, overlap, or sequence. It was the creation of a label and a medium which gave the genre its exclusivity and a place in which it could begin that dialogue, and it was the evolution of magazine science fiction -- slowly over the first decade, more rapidly after the ascension of Campbell -- that became synonymous with the evolution of the field.

Only the rigor and discipline of the delimited can create art. Musicologists considering Bach, who worked within desperately restrictive format, will concur as will those considering the sonata form. The sonnet and the eight-bar chorus of almost all popular song and operetta give similar testimony. It was the very restraint with which science fiction was cloaked from the outset which gave the genre its discipline and force. Without the specialized format of the magazines, where science fiction writers and readers could dwell, exchange, observe one another's practices and build upon one another's insight, the genre could not have developed.

The first-generation science fiction writers -- those whom Gernsback, Harry Bates, and F. Orlin Tremaine brought into Amazing and Astounding after their small stock of recycled Wells and Verne had been used -- worked under the most generalized influence and without canon: their work showed it. The second generation -- those identified with Campbell -- was composed of people who had grown up reading the early science fiction and were prepared to build upon it. The third generation, coming in the nineteen-fifties, was composed of writers who had correspondingly more sources and possibilities (and also a larger stock of ideas

already proved unworkable or exhausted), and the increasing subtlety and complexity of the form through their years testifies once again to, as it were, the influence of
influence . . . upon influence.

Science fiction, as John W. Campbell once pointed out expansively, may indeed outdo all of the so-called mainstream because it gathers in all of time and space . . . but science fiction as it has evolved is an extraordinarily rigorous and delimiting medium. Like the canon and the fugue, the sonnet and the sonata, like haiku, it has its rules, and the control of those rules is absolute. Extrapolative elements, cultural interface, characteriological attempt to resolve the conflicts between the two: this is science fiction.

The fact pervades all the decades after about 1935: no one could publish science fiction unless exposed to a great deal of it; virtually everyone who has ever sold a story has a sophisticated reader's background in the form, usually acquired just before or around adolescence. At the underside, this has led to parochialism, incestuousness, and the preciosity of decadence (and there has been too much). In the end it may even be these qualities which finish science fiction off, make its most sophisticated and advanced examples increasingly inaccessible to the larger reading audience. But whatever happens to science fiction, it would not exist at all if it had not been given a name and a medium and for this, if we are not led to praise Gernsback, we must entomb him with honor. He was a crook, old Hugo, but he made all of us crooks possible.

Memoir From Grub Street

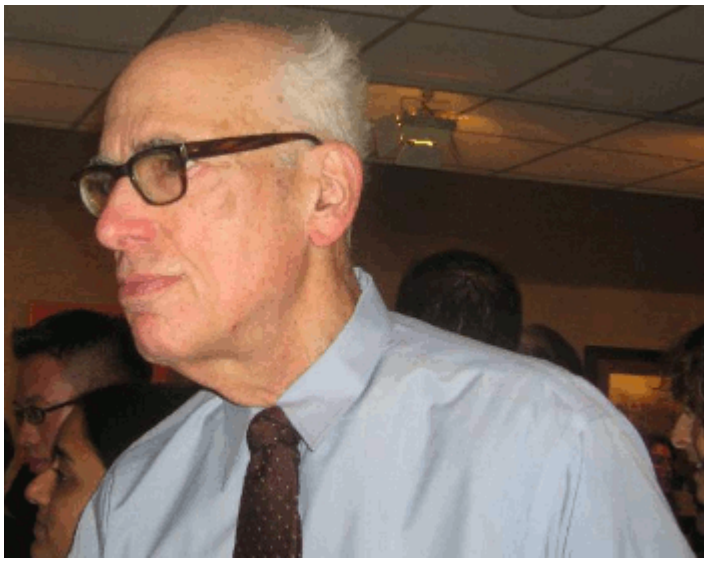


Photo by Ellen Datlow. Used with permission.

I edited Amazing Stories and Fantastic Stories, bimonthly science fiction magazines, from April 1968 to October 1968; it was not the best of times but was hardly the worst either (although in my youthful exuberance I then thought it was). I was the magazines' only employee, edited them from my bedroom, delivered the copy-edited, blurbed manuscripts to the printer, proofed the galleys. Art and layout were handled by the publisher from his home, the publisher assuming more expertise in these areas (he had to be right) than I. Eventually, a dispute over control of the art -- I commissioned a couple of covers but the publisher did not want to use them and I threatened to quit if he didn't -- caused me to be fired by telephone on a Sunday afternoon just as the Giants were about to score a touchdown (prophetically they did not), but that is not the subject of this essay nor is my salary ($100 a month to start, merit increases up to $150 right before the end), nor is my self-

image at the time as the logical successor to Hugo Gernsback, T. O'Conor Sloane, Raymond Palmer and Paul Fairman. I was quite young.

Amazing, after Ziff-Davis publishers precipitately dumped it and its miserable sister in 1965 because of declining sales (although their last editor, Cele L. Goldsmith, was certainly the best magazine editor extant then), had fallen upon desperate times; the publisher had acquired it, if not for a song, at least for a medley, and it was his hope to float it along by access to the magazine's backlist (Ziff-Davis had purchased all serial rights, granting unlimited reprint). Joseph Ross was his first editor, Harry Harrison unhappily the second and I ambivalently the third: only when Ted White began his ten-year stewardship and commenced to make real inroads on the publisher's obduracy did the publication or its companion have any impact again.

No, my editorship was of little moment and although I was able to find and publish some expert work (Lafferty's *This Grand Carcass, Yet,* Wodhams' *Try Again*, Richard C. Meredith's first novel, *We All Died at Breakaway Station*), I never thought of myself as much more than an adequate editor. I was able to separate good from bad and publish the better; this seemed the minimum requirement but I have subsequently learned that in contemporary publishing it is the last. My tenure was obviously too short to matter and the circulation of the magazines -- possibly 24,000 -- would guarantee that whatever I did would be at the margins of a marginal field.

The real point of this reminiscence has to do with the submissions I faced and how they were handled, and it is this which might have relevance now. Consider the situation: Amazing and Fantastic were magazines at the bottom of the extant market. Unlike all the others, they paid on or after publication and, with a single exception (Tom Disch's literary agent fought like a trooper), paid a top rate of two cents a word. They were necessarily perceived by any writer at any level as publications to be placed on the absolute bottom of the list; I would see only what Playboy, Analog, Galaxy, Worlds of If, Fantasy and Science Fiction, Venture, and New Worlds had rejected.**1**

Nonetheless, the magazines which at that time were publishing only 12,000 words of original material an issue -- three stories of average length or a long novelette and a short one -- received through the six months of my tenure an average of one hundred manuscripts a week. The scripts came from unknown and unpublished writers in preponderance, of course, but at least 25 percent of them, week after week, were signed by recognized names: some of them, like Leiber or Lafferty, at the top of the market as then constituted; others, like Wodhams, Koontz, Meredith, or David R. Bunch, well in the middle range. Most of the manuscripts were, to be sure, not publishable, but 15 percent of them (and more than half of those turned in by the professionals) were, and at least a third of that 15 percent, or five manuscripts a week, were outstanding. It is no exaggeration to recall that I received throughout my editorship sixty stories a month which by any standard I could ascertain were as good as or better than anything published in the competing magazines.

I was only able, because of space limitations, to buy perhaps twenty of those stories and perhaps another fifteen which were of lesser standard, which means that I rejected consciously about forty stories which were better than some I bought.**2** The word rate in all cases but that of Leiber and Disch was a penny a word on publication or shortly thereafter and all of the writers, every one of them, were glad to accept the terms. The stories were published, one of them (the Lafferty) was in a best-of-the-year collection and a couple more wound up in author collections.

The remainder vanished.

I think of this now and then, think of it in a time when the magazine market is even more constricted and when there are close to a thousand (instead of the five hundred) writers eligible for membership in the SFWA and at least some definition of professionalism. If sixty publishable short stories a month were of necessity being rejected by a bottom-line, penny-a-word market at that time, exactly what is going on now? Worlds of If and Galaxy are gone, Amazing under a new ownership is producing six issues a year (Fantastic is gone), Venture is gone, Playboy no longer does science fiction. Omni and Isaac Asimov's have appeared, of course, but the overall market is still in debit and there are almost twice as many professional writers, to say nothing of the hordes of creative-writing majors of the seventies
driven toward science fiction because the quality lit market no longer exists. And there are the usual host of science fiction fans/readers led naturally through their experience to attempt to write.

What is being lost now? How many stories in oblivion, how many careers unable to begin?

What can there be for all of these writers? The field needs --

Forget the field for the moment. We owe the field little at this point. What is the cost to these people of all of that failure and bitterness?

NOTES:

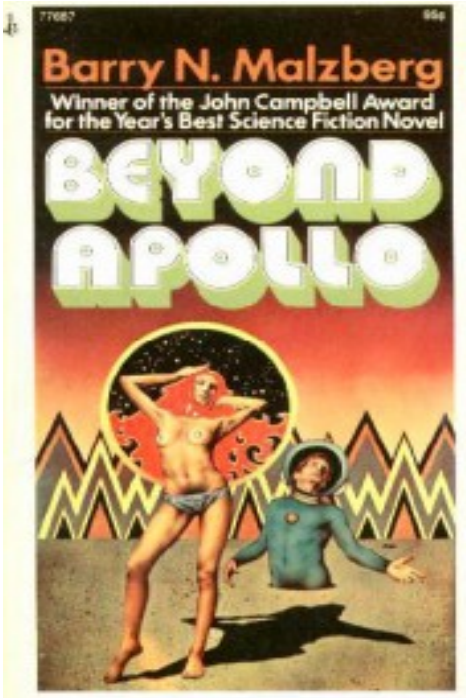
1. Neither writers nor stories are machinery, of course, and it can be presumed that Amazing preempted in certain cases some of the markets on the list, but certainly I was seeing nothing on first submission.

2. You know the perversity of editors -- or at least I do. The others, for the record, were Robert Heinlein, Isaac Asimov, A. E. van Vogt, and L. Sprague de Camp.

Barry N. Malzberg is an award-winning author with the distinction of having edited Amazing Stories (and Fantastic) for less than a year. He filled the position after Harry Harrison left and before Ted White assumed the helm.

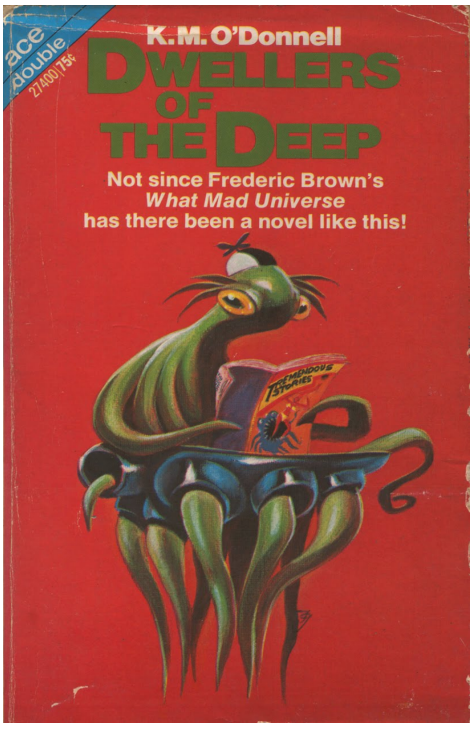
Prior to that, Barry's novel - *Beyond Apollo* - shook the field up with its negative portrayal of the space program and America's future in space. Space travel, colonization of the solar system and beyond were

fixtures of the SF field one might almost say its reason for being. *Beyond Apollo* contended that our race for the manned Moon landing was nothing but political grandstanding and – despite Barry's own stated belief that SF is non-predictive in nature – *Beyond Apollo* correctly portrayed the United States' abandonment of manned space flight (and largely for the very same reasons Malzberg had proposed in his novel).



Barry and *Beyond Apollo* were to become the first recipients of the John W. Campbell Memorial Award for best novel, presented (now) by the J. Wayne & Elsie M. Gunn Center for the Study of Science Fiction. The selection of this novel for the award was somewhat controversial, as Barry's themes in the novel were (and are still) considered anti-Campbellian in nature. (Though can you think of a better way to make a statement about the changing nature of science fiction?)

Many readers may not realize how prolific Mr. Malzberg has been due to his use of pseudonyms; while working as an agent for the Scott Meredith Literary Agency, Barry thought it best to sell his own work under the K. M. O'Donnel byline (the name derived from the names of Henry Kutter, C.L. Moore and one of *their* collaborative pseudonyms – Lawrence O'Donnel).



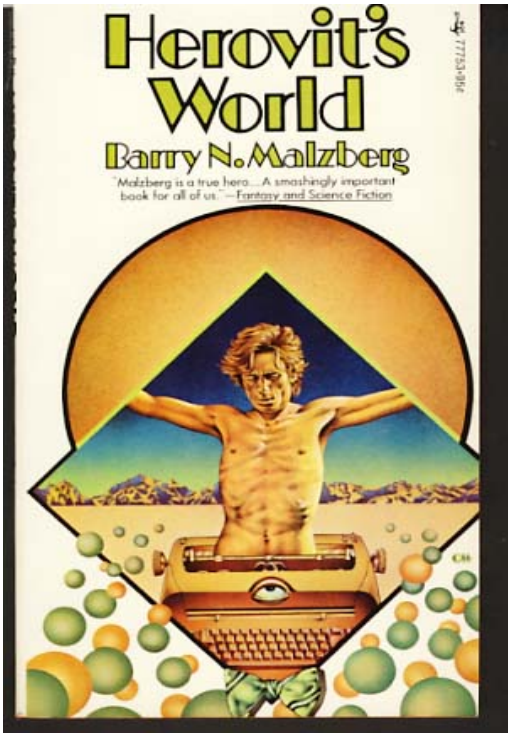
The last of the stories sold under that name went to Harlan Ellison's *Again, Dangerous Visions,* its presence there proof once again of Mr. Malzberg's talent. It is a talent that has been identified with the 'new wave' and, while one could make a case for that, it is really work that post dates most of the new wave and creates one of its own – a bare, raw,self-referential and recursive look in the mirror that entangles both the real and the fictional. Ellison would blurb his work with the following *"Malzberg makes what the rest of us do look like felonies!"*

My first acquaintance with Malzberg's works were two SF comedy novels written under the K.M. O'Donnell byline – *Gather in the Hall of the Planets* and *Dwellers of the Deep* – send ups of the science fiction field, its fans, editors, authors and publications.

I would later discover his other works, including *Herovoit's World, Beyond Apollo, SCOP*, all of which I highly

recommend. Barry has an economy of style second to none and a very biting and emphatic viewpoint.

Additional details of his background are well covered in Wikipedia and the Science Fiction Encyclopedia. Of late he has been working on various projects including the Galaxy reprint series and serving as a judge for the Cordwainer Smith Rediscovery Award (given out each year at the Readercon convention "for authors who display unusual originality, embodies the spirit of Cordwainer Smith's fiction, and deserves renewed attention or 'Rediscovery'").



Editors Special Note: Mr. Barry N. Malzberg was the first professional in the field to contact me following my announcement of the acquisition of Amazing's trademarks and has given enthusiastically and generously of his time, insight and experience, for which I am eternally grateful. The two pieces presented below were originally published in Mr. Malzberg's collection of essays *Engines of the Night: Science Fiction in the Eighties*, which won a Locus award, was later incorporated into the collection *Breakfast in the Ruins*, itself a Locus award winner and Hugo Award finalist.

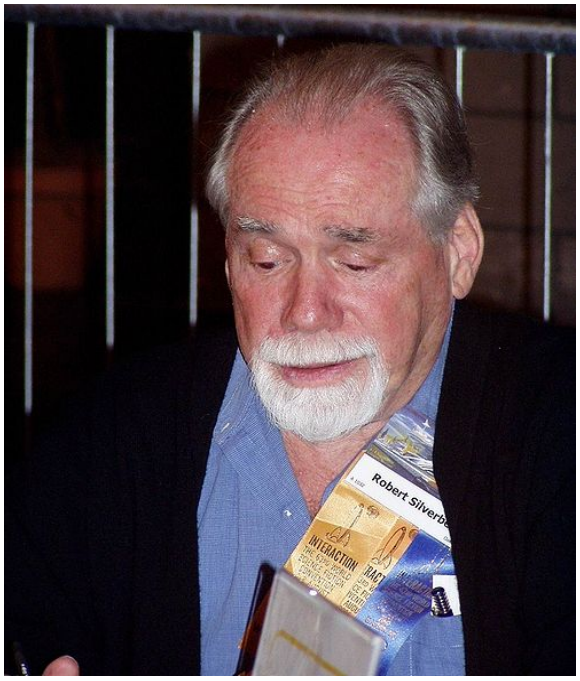
Additional information on Mr. Malzberg, including interviews, excerpts of interviews and bibliographies can be found here (Locus Interview), here (Baen – profile) and here (SF Encyclopedia entry) and here (SFSignal interview); one of his latest projects can be found here (Galaxy Project).

And according to this website, *Beyond Apollo* is heading for the big screen. You can also listen to Barry describing fifteen of his favorite issues of Astounding Science Fiction magazine – one of Amazing's rivals – in this Youtube video.

(A big thank you to Ellen Datlow for the generous contributions of her photos of Mr. Malzberg. Please visit Ellen at her site.)

August, 1928: Perhaps THE most famous Amazing Stories issue. Phillip Francis Nowlan's *Armageddon: 2419 A.D.* – that introduced Buck Rogers – and E. Everett 'Doc' Smith's *The Skylark of Space* – the progenitor of all space opera – both appeared in this issue.

The following essay was originally written for Amazing Stories during its Wizards of the Coast phase and while under the editorship of Kim Mohan in November 1998 and was published in the magazine in 1999. It is reprinted here by permission of the author. (Mr. Silverberg requested that the dates herein be updated from the original. I've chosen to only do so twice - once at the very beginning to set the time frame - because I felt that the edits would interfere with enjoyment of the piece.)



The Observatory
by Robert Silverberg

It is, I am somewhat appalled to realize, just about fifty years this month since I first bought a copy of AMAZING STORIES. *(Ed Note: 63 years now.)* In that half century the magazine and I have both gone through more than a few significant changes of format and policy, and yet here we still are, AMAZING and I. It was the great ambition of the small boy who managed to scrape together 25 cents in December of 1948 to purchase the issue of AMAZING dated February, 1949 to succeed, someday, in having a story of his very own published in that magazine. Well, and so he did; and how I wish I could drop him a line, back there in what now seems the Pleistocene, and tell him how thoroughly he was going to see all his pre-adolescent hopes and dreams fulfilled!

Fifty years. Gone in an eyeblink.

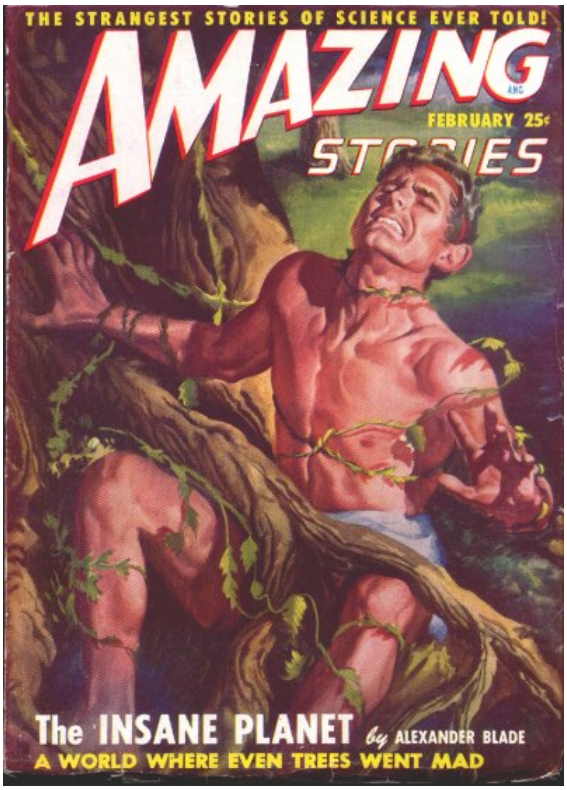
I had been reading science fiction in book form for about three years before I discovered that the stuff was published also in magazines. I began when I was about ten -- with Jules Verne's 20,000 Leagues Under the Sea -- moved on quickly to Wells' The Time Machine and Twain's Connecticut Yankee, and then to the primordial s-f anthologies, Wollheim's *The Pocket Book of Science Fiction* and the Healy-McComas *Adventures in Time and Space*. The copyright pages of those two books gave me my first clue to the existence of publications called AMAZING STORIES and ASTOUNDING SCIENCE-FICTION and such, and in the spring of 1948, insatiably hungry now for more of this wondrous kind of fiction and only mildly repelled by their garish names, I began to look around for them.

AMAZING was not actually the first such magazine I bought. That distinction goes to WEIRD TALES, whose July, 1948 issue I picked up because of its marvelous cover painting (a unicorn pursued by two winged serpents across a psychedelic sky) and because its lead story, Edmond Hamilton's *Twilight of the Gods*, was a retelling of the good old Odin-Thor-Loki stuff that had given me my first taste of the fantastic years before. I loved it, but the rest of the issue was taken up with vampire tales, ghost stories, and other things not much to

my taste. A few weeks later I peered into an issue of ASTOUNDING, but it seemed very sober stuff indeed, with a feature article full of wiring diagrams, and I decided to hang on to that month's disposable income. (A quarter was a lot of money in 1948, especially if you were completely dependent on your father's largesse for each one you got.)

But then -- then -- near the end of the year –

There was the February-dated AMAZING blazing out of the magazine rack in the candy store across the street from Junior High School 232. Its cover, illustrating a story called *The Insane Planet*, by Alexander Blade, showed an agonized loincloth-clad man writhing in the grip of a leafy bough. A World Where Even Trees Went Mad, cried the cover caption. There were stories as well by Rog Phillips, Craig Browning, and three other writers, none of whose names I had encountered in the handful of anthologies I had read thus far. I put down my quarter and gleefully tucked the magazine in my briefcase.



Amazing Stories 02/49: Image courtesy Galactic Central Press

That night, when I should have been doing my Latin homework, I reveled in the big, rough-edged, cheaply printed magazine I had bought. The Blade story was quite fine, I thought. But the true masterpiece of the issue was Rog Phillips' short novel *M-Bong-Ah*. It took place on Venus: mysterious tropical Venus, much like steamy Africa only ever so much stranger, inhabited by a race of eight--foot-tall blue-skinned hairless humanoids with voracious libidos. My own pubescent libido was heating up nicely that year, and the illustration on page 31 of Gretta, a gigantic Venusian woman in a nearly topless harem costume, was an overwhelming sight. Gretta wished to impart the folkways of her people to our spaceman hero. "She began her dance. It was a slow, rhythmic movement with short steps. 'This is the dance of M-bong-ah,' she explained. 'It is the dance of the temple girls to the Gods of Venus....' Suddenly, she fumbled with the buttons on her dress. Then she pulled it off in a hasty motion, revealing her wonderful, lithe body. 'I cannot dance with clothes on," she said."

By page 33, where we got to see a good deal more of that wonderful, lithe body, I was in love with Gretta. And with AMAZING STORIES.

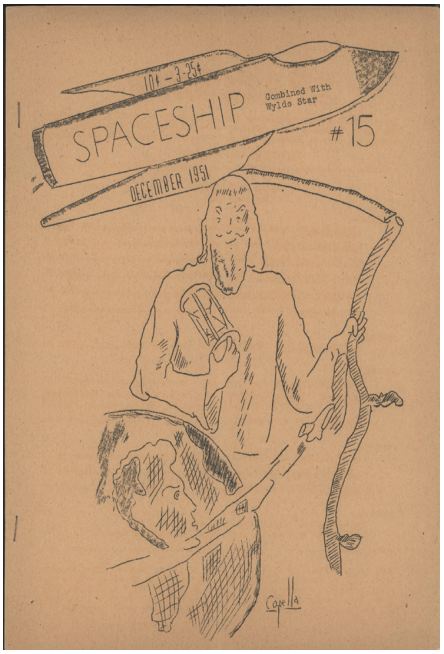
Though *M-Bong-Ah* left such a mark on my imagination that I began writing my own sequel to it that very night -- not on paper, but in my mind as I lay in bed, for how could I sleep after such an experience? -- there was another section of the issue that caught my interest the next day, a column called "The Club House," written by the very same Rog Phillips who had penned that masterly story. The column dealt with science-fiction fandom -- a world of people who shared my newfound enthusiasm for the fantastic, and actually got together in conventions to talk about science fiction, and published their own little magazines, things called "fanzines," with tantalizing names like Chronoscope and Kotan and Ploor. Fascinating! Entrancing! Irresistible! For an investment of two bits I had changed the entire direction of my life.

I bought the next issue of AMAZING, of course (*The Chemical Vampire*, by Lee Francis, and the unforgettable novella *The Swordsman of Pira*, by Charles Recour) and I ran over to Jackson's Book Store -- where in an earlier phase of my life I had bought armloads of back issues of THE NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC MAGAZINE to further my studies of exotic lands -- and purchased from that grubby and sinister merchant a thick stack of old AMAZINGs at three issues for a quarter. Here was *Titan's Daughter*, by Richard S. Shaver, which the cover caption told me was A

Smashing Sequel to the Sensational 'Gods of Venus', and Arthur Petticolas's *Dinosaur Destroyer*, The Story of Daarmajd, the Strong -- Mighty King of the Prehistoric World, and Alexander Blade again with *The Brain*, (A Giant Calculating Machine Decides to Rule the World!) and -- and –

Images courtesy Galactic Central Press. Issues Sep & Oct 1948 and Jan & Mar 1949

Well, I was lost. I collected all the AMAZINGS I could find, back unto the immensely thick issues of 1942, and then the archaic-looking ones of 1934, and the large-format ones of the late 1920s. Those cherished magazines seemed incredibly ancient to me, although the oldest of them dated back only fifteen or twenty years. The Jimmy Carter presidency is more distant in time from our era than those old magazines were then to mine.



Spaceship December 1951

Yearning to become a science-fiction writer myself, I began feverishly to scribble little stories and send them to the editor of AMAZING in Chicago. (I got them back with the speed of light.) I subscribed to a few fanzines, and by the fall of 1949 I was publishing my own, an execrable and illegible little thing called Spaceship. I started to read AMAZING's virtually identical companion magazine, FANTASTIC ADVENTURES, and then ASTOUNDING and STARTLING and all the other s-f magazines of the day. Gradually, as I ripened into a worldly-wise 15-year-old, I began to see that Rog Phillips and Alexander Blade and Charles Recour and my other literary heroes of 1948 and 1949 were mere penny-a-word hacks, and stories like *M-Bong-Ah* and *The Brain* were the veriest crude junk, suitable only for impressionable children like my own self of two years before. But I forgave myself for my youthful lack of discrimination.

The home office of AMAZING and FANTASTIC ADVENTURES had moved from Chicago to New York late in 1949, and Ray Palmer, the magazine's long-time editor, did not choose to go along. His place was taken by shrewd, hard-boiled Howard Browne, a well-known mystery novelist who had written some decent adventure stories for Palmer's magazines. Browne dutifully maintained AMAZING's juvenile tone for a couple of years, since the magazine had attained the highest circulation in the s-f field by serving up action fiction for boys. But his heart was in publishing more sophisticated material, and in 1952 he killed off FANTASTIC ADVENTURES and began an

The "NEW" Amazing. Cover credits for Heinlein & Bradbury in place. Image courtesy Galactic Central press.

Fantastic Vol 1 No 1 Summer 1952

elegant-looking companion simply called FANTASTIC, with slick paper and stories by the likes of Ray Bradbury, Isaac Asimov, and Theodore Sturgeon. The following year he converted dear old pulpy AMAZING to the same handsome format, banished the high-volume hack writers, and added Robert A. Heinlein and Arthur C. Clarke to his new list of high-octane contributors.

It sounded good, but I wondered if Browne could really deliver the goods. The wide-eyed pre-adolescent of 1948 was now the suave college kid of 1952; my *M'Bong-Ah*phase was over and I believed (wrongly) that Browne's previous predilection for simple-minded adventure tales showed him to be unqualified to edit an s-f magazine for mature readers like me. I said so, quite acidly, in one of the fanzines to which I was now a regular contributor.

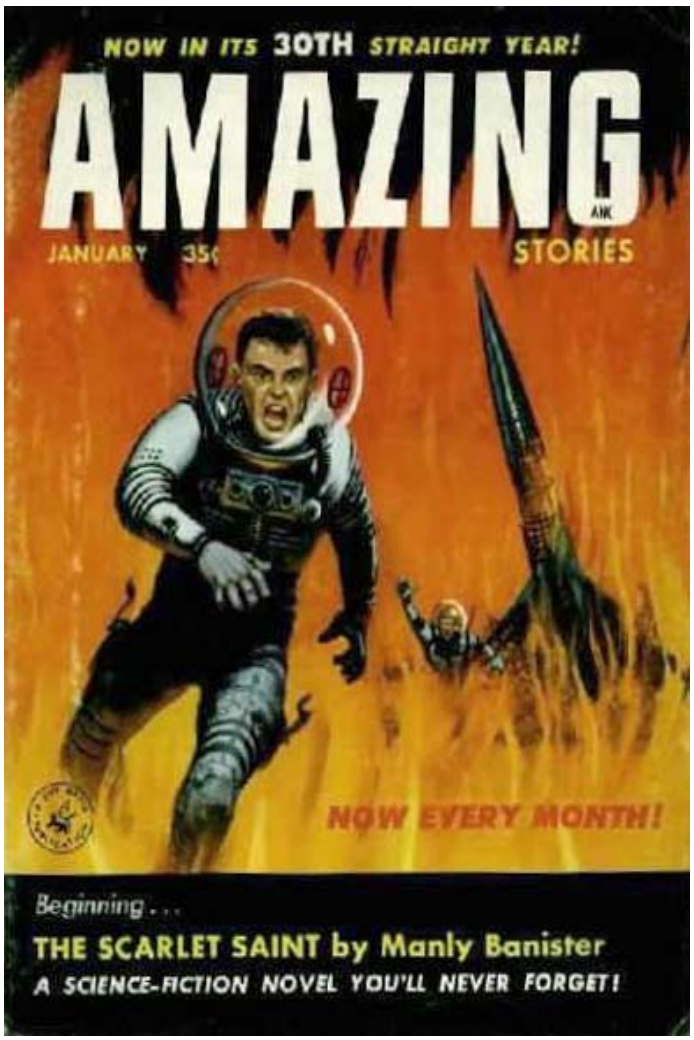
Browne actually replied with an essay of his own, remarking, "These jackals grow too bold," and going on to refute every point of my attack. I was surprised that he had even deigned to notice.

We jump now three years. I was as eager as ever for a career as a science-fiction writer; I was turning out stories at a steady pace despite the distractions of college life and had actually begun getting a few of them published. By the spring of 1955 I had sold my first novel and acquired a literary agent. But progress was slow; sales were few and far between.

That year a well-established s-f writer named Randall Garrett turned up in New York and rented a room in the same apartment building near Columbia University where I was living. "You won't get anywhere in this field unless you know the editors personally," he said, and took me downtown to introduce me to them.

Among those we visited was Howard Browne of AMAZING STORIES. "This is Bob Silverberg," Garrett said. "He's one of the hottest new writers around. You need to be publishing him." And I handed Howard a story called *Next Door*, from the e.e. cummings line, "There's a hell of a good universe next door -- let's go!"

It wasn't a great story. My own agent had declined to market it, calling it too thin and elementary to be salable. Even after I rewrote it for him, he sent it back and advised me to put it aside, saying the idea "lacked strong story possibilities." But Howard Browne glanced quickly through it as Garrett and I sat there in his office that August afternoon. "Sure," he said. "I'll buy it. Forty bucks." It ran in the January, 1956 issue of AMAZING under the title of "Hole in the Air." It had taken me just seven years to make the transition from wonderstruck new reader to cool, calculating professional.

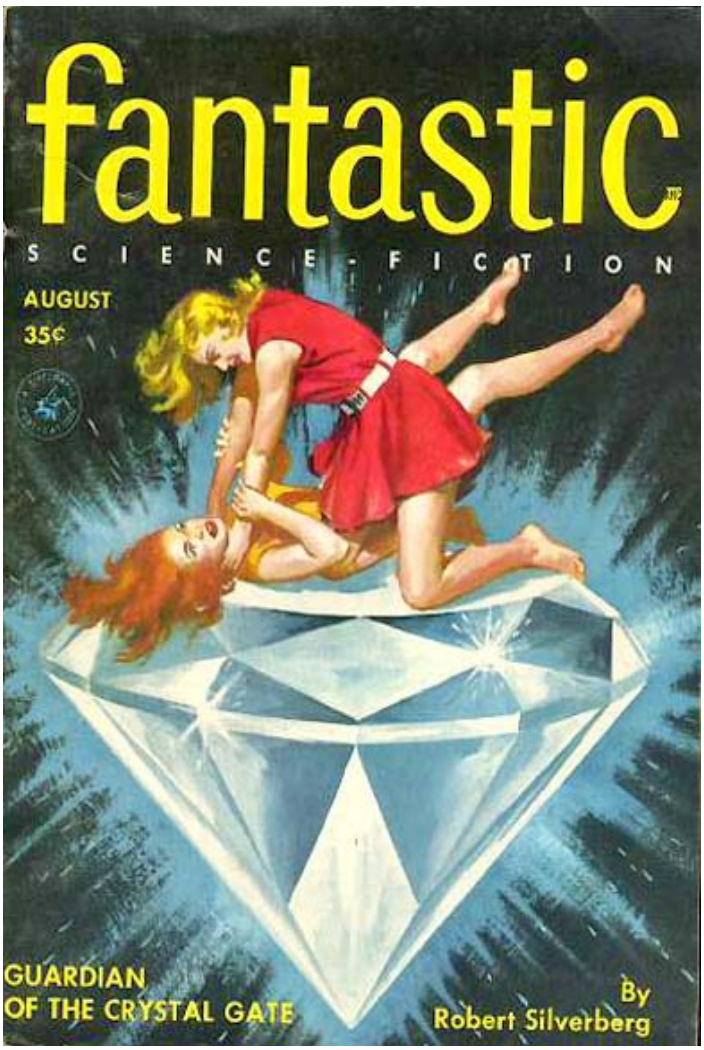


Bob makes "the transition from wonderstruck new reader to cool, calculating professional.", with his first sale to Amazing Stories of the story Hole in the Air. Image courtesy Galactic Central Press

To my own great flabbergastation I discovered that I had moved right into the sort that had been occupied, in AMAZING's Chicago days under Ray Palmer,

by the men who wrote under the names of "Rog Phillips," "Charles Recour," and "Alexander Blade." For Howard Browne, after a couple of years of trying to run a quality s-f magazine and seeing circulation drop sharply, had stopped publishing Heinlein and Bradbury and that ilk, and had gone back to the old policy of two-fisted adventure fiction, written (I now knew) by a staff of hired hands who turned in their stories on a quota system, so many thousands of words a month, everything bought sight unseen and published virtually without editing.

Instead of reconstructing the old Chicago stable of writers, Browne was busy gathering a New York-based staff of high-volume writers about him who would show up every Monday with the previous week's output, collect their checks, and go home to get busy on the next undying masterpiece. With the aid of Randall Garrett's sponsorship of me, I landed a place in that crew. One cent a word, $50 for a 5000-word story, $150 for a 15,000-word lead novelet, a guarantee of 50,000 words purchased every month, nothing rejected so long as I did a decent job within the confines of the basic story formulas.



The (nearly) 'All Robert Silverberg' issue. Image courtesy Galactic Central Press

I was in my senior year at Columbia, about to get married, and the offer of a steady, predictable income stream was a Godsend. Each week, without fail, I brought Howard a story or two, the very same sort of straightforward hero-villain stuff that had hooked me on AMAZING in the era of Alexander Blade. Once in a while I craftily slipped in a manuscripts from the pile of those I had unsuccessfully tried to sell to the higher-grade s-f magazines over the past couple of years, stories of rather greater literary aspiration than the ones I was doing for AMAZING now, but Howard didn't object to their lack of pulpiness, since in fact I don't think he read the stories we delivered at all.

Because just a handful of writers were producing all the copy for both AMAZING and FANTASTIC (submissions that came in from unwitting outsiders were returned unread), pseudonyms were a necessity. The June, 1956 issue of AMAZING contained Robert Silverberg's *Entrance Exam*, but also a Garrett-Silverberg collaboration called *Gambler's Planet* under the

byline of Gordon Aghill. July saw another Aghill opus, *Catch a Thief*, plus *Run of Luck* by Calvin Knox -- me -- and *Stay Out of My Grave* by Ralph Burke. (I could not tell you today, even at gunpoint, what those stories were about. But the three of them paid a whole month's rent with something left over.) The August issue gave the world the memorable Garrett-Silverberg novella *The Beast With Seven Tails*, which we wrote as Leonard G. Spencer, and I'm in the issue as Silverberg and Knox as well.

And so it went, month after month, a ton of stories, Garrett and I writing all of AMAZING practically singlehanded, with some help from the veteran pro Milton Lesser and a new kid named Harlan Ellison. I hit one big high point -- or, perhaps, a low one -- with the August, 1956 issue of FANTASTIC, in which four of the six stories were my doing, led off by my dazzling tale, *Guardian of the Crystal Gate*, in which stylistic echoes of *M-Bong-Ah* can readily be detected. Some months later came another great moment when something of mine appeared in print under the name of Alexander Blade --for, as it happened, old Alex was nobody in particular, simply a house name that the editor hung on stories that needed pseudonyms in a hurry. And so I came full circle: the little boy who had been dazzled by those great Alexander Blade stories of 1948 had within the space of nine years turned into Alexander Blade himself.

After I had been a staff writer for Howard Browne's AMAZING for a year or so, Howard pulled a lovely little surprise on me. I came into his office to deliver my latest batch of stories and he pulled from his desk the issue of the fanzine in which my younger self had denounced him so cuttingly in 1952. "Remember this?" he asked. He had known all along, of course, that the Robert Silverberg whom he had taken into his editorial bosom was the very same viper who had attacked him with such vitriol a few years before. I muttered something sheepishly about the impetuousness of youth, but of course he had long since forgiven me for my adolescent indiscretion, and he went on buying stories from me by the carload for the rest of his editorial career.

All that was forty years ago. Howard resigned eventually and went back to writing mystery novels -- he's still doing it, I hear, at the age of ninety or so *(ed. note: Howard Browne died 10/28/1999)* -- and by 1959, when Cele Goldsmith had become editor, the policy of having the magazine entirely written by a staff of three or four hired hands had given way to the more orthodox arrangement of seeking contributions from any qualified writer. Which is why the July, 1959 issue has stories by Robert Sheckley and Ray Bradbury in it, and quite a good one, not hackwork at all, by Randall Garrett, and -- yes -- the short novel *Collision Course* by Robert Silverberg. For I had survived the transition and was still submitting -- and selling -- stories to AMAZING.

Formats, policies, even publishers have come and gone for AMAZING many times since then. Cele Goldsmith's regime gave way to that of Joseph Ross, who was replaced by Harry Harrison and then Barry Malzberg, and after him Ted White. Eleanor Mavor followed White and George Scithers followed her, and then came Pat Price and now Kim Mohan, who has guided the magazine for two different publishing houses.

And, decade in and decade out, through thick and thin, there's never been a time when I haven't been a

contributor to AMAZING. Some virus got into me, I suppose, that wintry day in 1948 when I found myself staring at the issue that was to bring Rog Phillips' *M-Bong-Ah* and Alexander Blade's *The Insane Planet* into my life, and I will never be able to rid myself of it. Even now, old and weary and white-bearded as I am, I find myself beginning to sketch out yet another story for AMAZING, the new and shiny incarnation of it that Kim Mohan is operating. This magazine and I have been together, somehow, man and boy, for fifty years: why stop now?

I had a lot of fun reading Bob's piece. My own story took place a couple of decades after his, but with the exception of the 7 year interlude between fan and pro, they are so very similar it was uncanny.

Perhaps even more so when I mention that Mr. Robert Silverberg himself contributed greatly to my evolution as a fan.

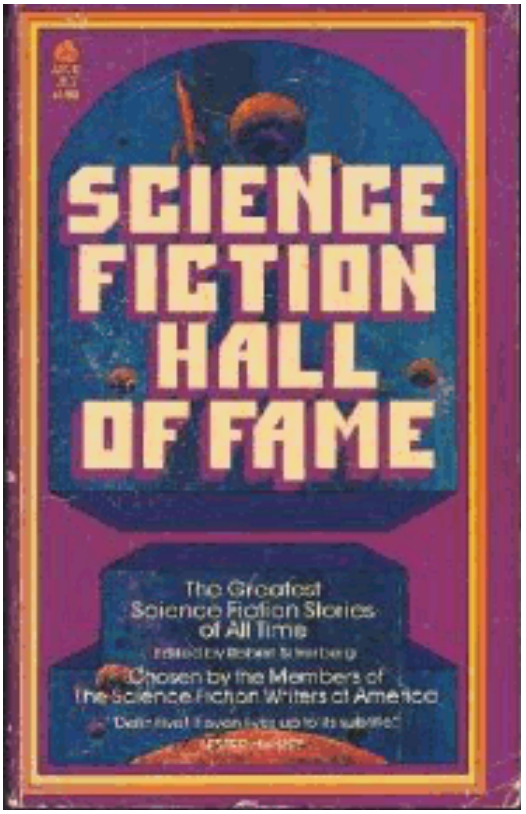
One of the very first anthologies I picked up was the original The Science Fiction Hall of Fame, edited by Robert Silverberg.

It is a nicely thick volume and it arrived right on time (1970). Just a few years before I'd started buying books at the Bookmobile.

It was and remains one of the best and most influential anthologies in the field. Short stories all, slightly more than half were selected by the members of the Science Fiction Writers of America from works that had been published prior to 1965, the first year that the Nebula Awards (themselves presented by SFWA) were offered.

Bob himself chose the remaining eleven stories. I've listened but haven't heard a single complaint over the past 40+ years. (I'm proud to say that I still have my well-worn first edition copy, and four or five newer ones as well.)

If you have not acquainted yourself with this volume, you must do so. It covers the field from Stanley G. Weinbaum's *A Martian Odyssey* (1934) to Roger Zelazny's *A Rose of Ecclesiastes*. (1963). This span represents more than time. It represents just about every theme, style, trope, plot and character you will ever run into in science fiction. Every single one written masterfully by a master. It is a veritable indispensable guide for both writer and fan. (Someone, sometime, somewhere will hunt you down and do



The Science Fiction Hall of Fame - 1970. (Note: no 'Volume 1' on the cover.) It ended up that about half the contents were chosen by SFWA members, while the remainder were chosen by Bob. This is a MUST read for any SGF fan

horrible things to you if you dare call yourself a fan without having read this anthology. Seriously.)

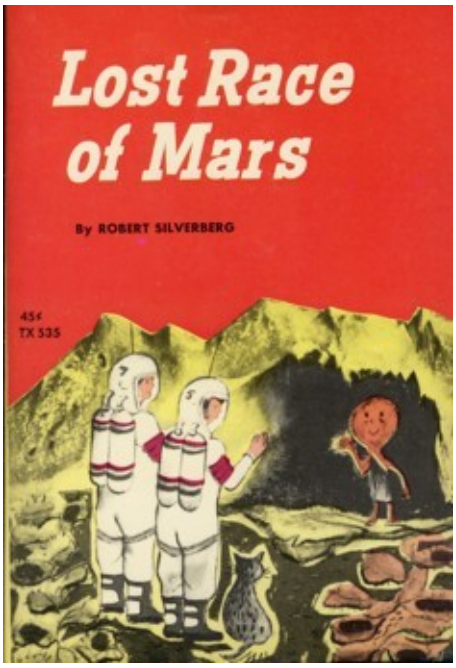
It was this book that set my relationship with Mr. Silverberg for the next several years. He'd put together a fine collection and written a very informative introduction, so I continued to pursue his editorial and anthologizing persona through a number of one-shots and series with titles like Alpha (1 thru 9), New Dimensions (1 thru 12),Tomorrow's Worlds, To The Stars and more.

A few years on and I had the pleasure of meeting and working with (to use the phrase loosely) the man himself. I'm sure he doesn't remember it, but like many Worldcons before it and for many Worldcons to follow, Bob as going to be the Toastmaster at the 1977 Hugo Awards Ceremony and I was managing it for the convention.

I actually got to coordinate with Bob Silverberg! The science fiction author who was so highly regarded and respected by the best in the field that year after year they selected him to say nice things about them and hand them their awards. Occasionally they let him hand one to himself.

It's unfortunate, but I don't remember much about our encounter – I was awfully busy and stressed. I do know that I explained how the slide show presentation was going to work, what his cue would be and that all he had to do was ask if he needed anything. We'd shaken hands upon introduction and as I walked away I vowed that when I'd grown up enough to grow a beard and mustache, I'd have one just like his – a natty goatee. (I do, but it isn't nearly as natty as Roberts'. Not nearly as white either, though I am catching up.)

It took me a while but I finally realized (back then) that Robert Silverberg had been one of the very first science fiction authors I had ever read. He'd sold a couple to the Scholastic Book Service – *Lost Race of Mars* and *Revolt on Alpha C*. Yep – still have them.

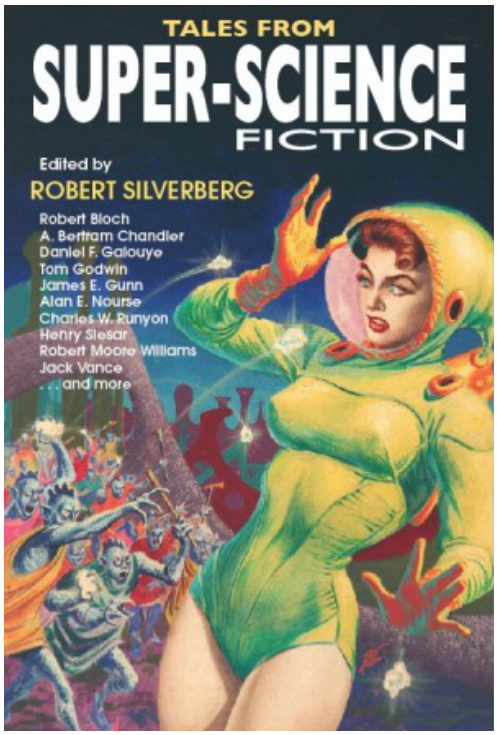


from the Scholastic Book Service

Bob readily admists (and lays out in some detail above) that there were two distinct phases to his career. The first half when he penned a monstrous number of stories per month and the second half, during which he has received a great deal of critical acclaim. Two from the latter half are perennial favorites – Up the Line (a wonderful time travel story) and Dying Inside (nominated for the Hugo, Nebula and Locus awards).

And so much more; I remember the anticipation when *Shadrach in the Furnace* was being serialized in Analog; *Thorns, Nightwings* that seemed to elevate his reputation to even greater heights; *The Stochastic Man, A Time of Changes, The Book of Skulls* – all published within less than a decade and ALL of them nominated for either the Hugo, Nebula or Locus Awards (and frequently all three).

I'd be remiss if I didn't mention both *Lord Valentine's Castle* and the Majipor series. Perhaps his most enduring and popular series, the first novel (*Lord Valentine*) would win the Locus Award and be nominated for a Hugo for Best Novel. Begun in 1980, it has been a steady presence in the field since,



Bob would ultimately become SFWA's 21st Grand Master, an honor much deserved, gathering up three Hugos and five Nebula awards along the way.

Bob is still going strong. His 'Official Unofficial" website can be found here at Majipoor.com and – coming full circle (at least for me) – amongst his latest efforts is the retro anthology Super Science Fiction, a collection of hand-picked stories from the pulpy pages of that 1950s era rag of the same name, now out from Haffner Press, (where Bob unwittingly does me yet another favor by reprinting a story by A. Bertram Chandler).

Thanks for it **ALL**, Bob!

A Talk with Patrick L. Price

Patrick L. Price edited Amazing Stories from September, 1986 until March, 1991, following a stint as Managing Editor while working under George Scithers (who would later go on to edit Isaac Asimov's SF Magazine). At the time, Amazing Stories was owned and published by TSR, the creators of the Dungeons & Dragons role-playing game. Patrick also edited Dragon magazine, TSR's signature gaming publication. Today he works in non-profit fields and is a member of the Amazing Stories Editorial Advisory Board.

A.S :Can you describe the time when you first discovered Amazing Stories? (If you remember the issue, please tell us a little bit about it – the cover, the contents, particular authors listed who made an impression)

It wasn't until I was a sophomore in high school that I discovered *Amazing Stories* magazine. In fact, my good friend and classmate John "Mike" Ford was the person who showed me his copy of the magazine. I had never seen a pulp-fiction magazine of any genre—mystery, horror, science fiction, etc.—until that time.

Prior to that I had been reading many of the then-recent novels of Isaac Asimov, Arthur Clarke, Robert Heinlein, and their peers, as well as the works of Jules Verne (in the original French as I grew up in a multilingual home). And during my childhood, quirkily enough, my maternal grandmother (French herself) who attended to my brother and me when our parents worked the night shift, felt that the only television programming legitimate for viewing was "Rocky & Bullwinkle" (for its satire) and "The Outer Limits" (for its morality).

In addition, as an Ojibwe two-spirit, I have generally perceived that the genre of science fiction generally presents a future where humanity is often united by its diversity, not divided by it. For those of us who are a minority, this is an extremely healing perspective, particularly during adolescence when being outside the norm is a point of ridicule by one's peers. But I digress…

The copy of *Amazing Stories* that Mike Ford gave me to read was the September 1971 issue. I don't remember

the cover art, but I do remember that Ted White had a story in it as did Robert Silverberg.

AS: What were your first impressions? How did it make you feel, what were your first thoughts about it?

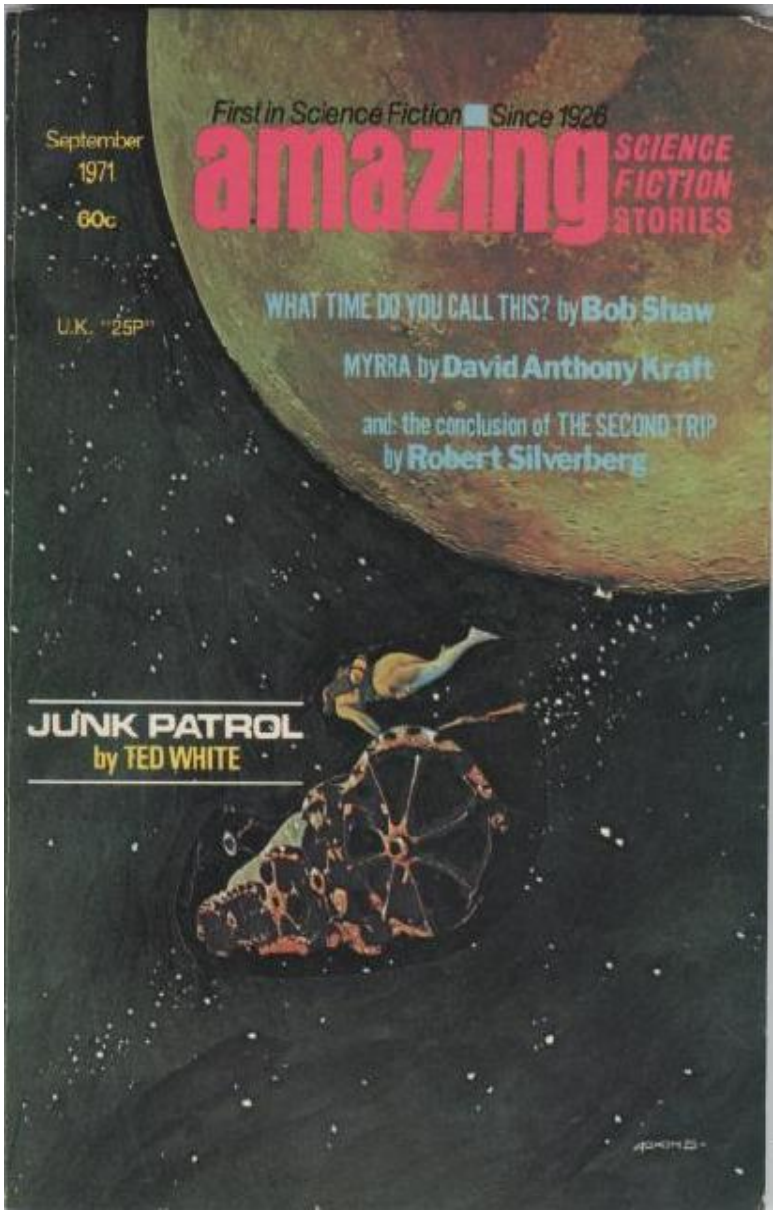
What was most fascinating for me was that, up until the issue of *Amazing Stories* Mike Ford had loaned me, I had no idea that a venue for some really great genre short fiction existed. I have always enjoyed short fiction, for the challenge both to the author to present a salient issue in a very concise storytelling fashion and for the reader to embrace the lesson shared. I find it all very intimate, much as I do when one of my tribal elders gifts me with a creation myth or other tale.

This may or may not relate to your experiences with Amazing: Had you ever met Hugo Gernsback? If so, could you provide a brief sketch of your impressions of him (as well as some time-frame context)

I never had the pleasure of meeting Mr. Gernsback.

AS: Was getting the job exciting for you, just a job, something in-between?

Has an association with the magazine helped, hurt or had no visible impact upon your career?



Amazing Stories, September, 1971. (Edited by Ted White)
Image courtesy Galactic Central Press

Wow! Having traveled more than a quarter of a century further down my life's journey since I served as editor of *Amazing Stories*, here's what I cannot claim:

- I became a renowned science-fiction editor, writer, and/or columnist.
- I became a devoted fan of everything science-fictional.
- The science-fiction community will remember my contributions to the genre.

In fact, none of this I find to be of particular importance. Nonetheless, here are truths that I value that I

embraced during my time at Amazing Stories and beyond:

- *I have the gift of helping others crystallize their creative visions.* Just last year writer Sheila Finch and poet Jason Marchi mailed me copies of their respective story/poetry collections that honored how my editorial skills and insight had helped them in their respective careers.
- *I have strived to say what I have to say from a place of discernment, not from an egotistical or narcissistic stance.* In the editorial field, not to mention others, I quickly discovered how easily one could reduce someone to emotional rubble or engender anger by speaking from a place of arrogance or self-importance. That helps no one! That burns proverbial bridges! Who needs that, and yet I'm amazed at the editorial responses some of my writer friends (both new and seasoned) receive.
- *I have learned that, as I can guide, so must I allow myself to be guided by others.* And wherever the spirit of Martin H. Greenberg now resides, I cannot express my gratitude enough to him for this lesson. Marty was one of my greatest yet subtlest teachers, not just as an editor and anthologist, but as a friend throughout my tenure as *Amazing's* editor.

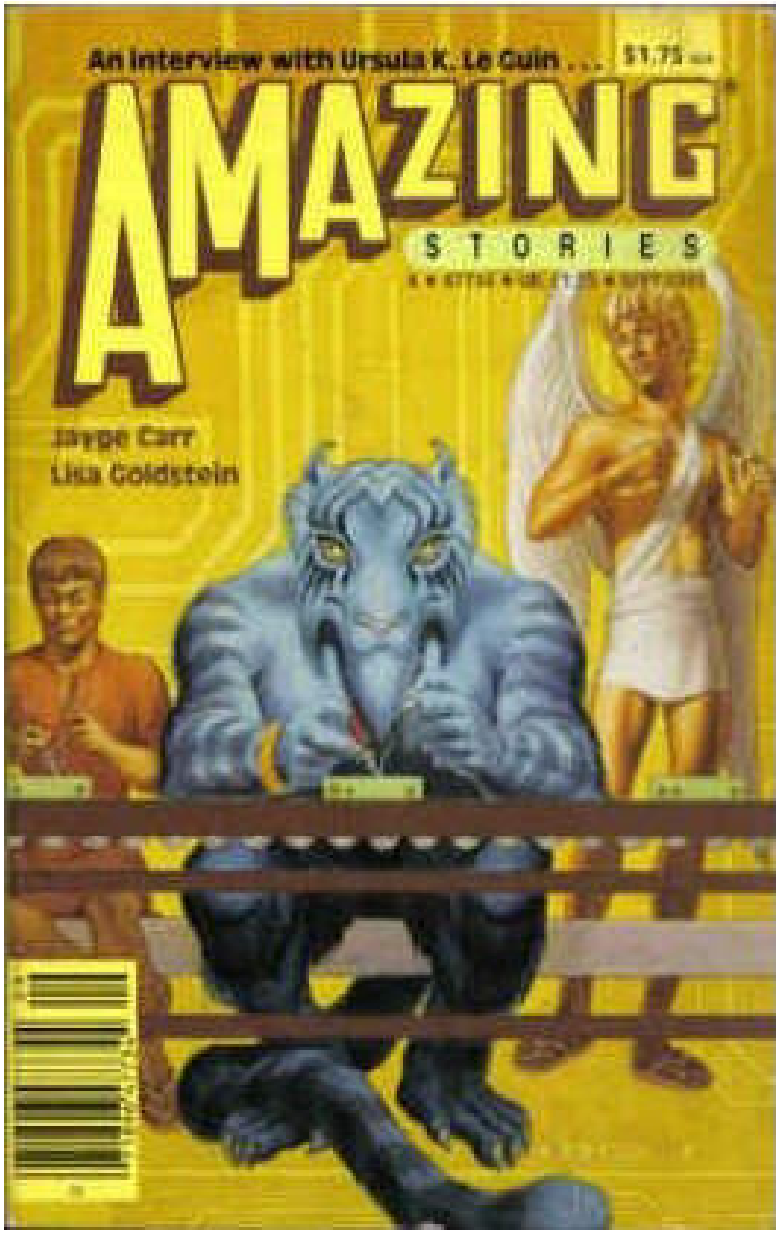


Illustration 1: Patrick's first issue - Sept. 1986 - the 15th anniversary of the first issue he ever read.

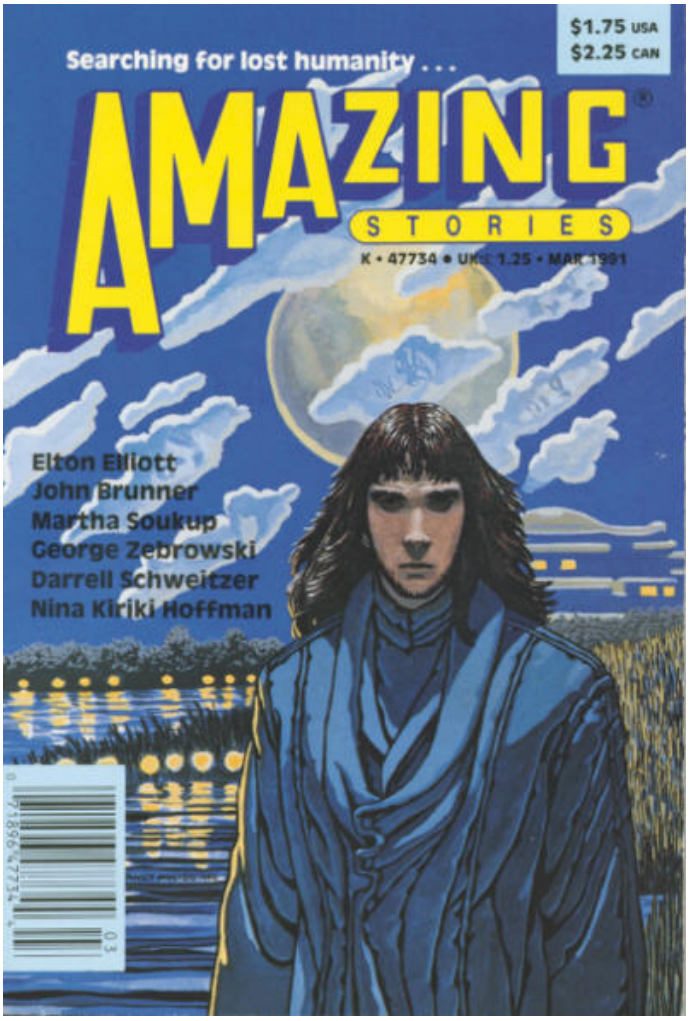
AS: Do you think that Amazing Stories was important to the development of science fiction, or was a 'first magazine' inevitable? Did it take the magazine and a "Hugo Gernsback" to make things happen, or are those just the incidences in our particular universe?

For me, it's not an issue about whether it would have happened but that it happened.

So, yes, I do believe that the emergence of *Amazing Stories* was significant not only to science fiction but also to the whole cultural development of pulp fiction from its predecessor the dime novel. Its appearance on the newsstands certainly helped to focus the voice of those American readers who desired to understand the future possibilities and/or current realities to which science alluded or created during a time when America was becoming a more science and technology-driven nation.

As a cultural development, pulp fiction (which certainly includes *Amazing Stories* and later its buddies) became an important form of public entertainment, hence the emergence of about a dozen different genres.

All pulp magazine were cheapo to produce, and during the Great Depression, some sold a million copies (sadly, that was not the case for Amazing). During this era, pulp fiction was to the literary entertainment of the masses what Hollywood films were to their visual entertainment—sheer escapism.



Patrick's last issue - March 1991. Image courtesy Galactic Central Press

CONTRIBUTORS

There have been many people who have expressed their support, enthusiasm, excitement and best wishes for the return of Amazing Stories.

To all who have done so, my deepest and most heartfelt thank you. There will be a place for each and everyone of you here.

In this particular issue, the relaunch prelaunch, there are several people who deserve particular thanks and mentions:

First to thank are the members of the editorial advisory board. **Barry Malzberg**, **Joe Wrzos**, **Patrick L. Price**, **Ted White** and **Robert Silverberg**: this project would literally not have gotten off the ground if you had not been generous beyond measure by allowing your names to be associated with my work. I hope that the progress being made provides some small measure of compensation.

Matt Staggs, Mike Glyer, John Ottinger, John Denardo, Keith Graham, Mike Brotherton, John Whalen, Michael Burstein, Cheryl Morgan, Michael Walsh, Victoria Blake, Kevin Standlee, Gary Farber, Heather Massey, Daniel Kimmel, Neil Clarke, Bud Webster, (and those I have erroneously forgotten to include here) thank you for the support and for allowing things to be bounced off of you.

Joe Zitt, Joe Zavorski, Steven Hart, Doug Woods, Ron Fisher old, old, old friends who have always hoped that *something* would happen ~~to~~ for me.

The Chums for letting me join their group (wow!)

And as they say, last but certainly not least, the folks who contributed to this particular issue in a bit more detail:

Maya Bohnhoff

Maya became addicted to science fiction when her dad let her stay up late to watch *The Day the Earth Stood Still*. Mom was horrified. Dad was unrepentant. Maya slept with a night-light in her room until she was 15.

She started her writing career sketching science fiction comic books in the last row of her third grade classroom. She was never apprehended. Since then her short fiction has been published in *Analog, Amazing Stories, Century, Realms of Fantasy, Interzone, Paradox* and *Jim Baen's Universe*.

Her debut novel, *THE MERI* (Baen), was a *Locus Magazine* 1992 Best First Novel nominee (now available as a trade paperback from *Sense of Wonder Press*). Since, she has published ten more speculative fiction novels, including collaborations with Marc Scott Zicree and Michael Reaves..

Maya lives in San Jose where she writes, performs, and records original and parody (filk) music with her husband and awesome musician and music producer, Chef Jeff Vader, All-Powerful God of Biscuits. The couple has produced five music albums: RetroRocket Science, Aliens Ate My Homework and Grated Hits (parody), and the original music CDs Manhattan Sleeps and Mobius Street. To top it off, they've also produced three musical children: Alex, Kristine, and Amanda.

Jack Clemons

Had two stories published in an earlier incarnation of Amazing Stories and has offered them both up to help get the ball

rolling again. Jack is a former Steely-Eyed Missile Man, having worked on both the Apollo and NASA Space Shuttle programs, his forte being re-entry procedures (kind of important, huh?); he's appeared on television in a Science channel series on the Moon program. He has retired from being a rocket scientist and now writes full time.

Brenda Clough

Brenda has been writing professionally since 1984, with the publication of her first novel, *THE CRYSTAL CROWN*. She has had 9 novels out in various formats, and many short stories and non-fiction pieces. A version of her novel *REVISE THE WORLD* was a finalist for both the Hugo and the Nebula awards. her latest novel, from Book View Cafe, is *SPEAK TO OUR DESIRES*, a dark fantasy set in New York in 1969.

Chris Dolley

Chris Dolley (www.chris-dolley.com) is an author, a pioneer computer game designer and a teenage freedom fighter. That was in 1974 when Chris was tasked with publicising Plymouth Rag Week. Some people might have arranged an interview with the local newspaper. Chris created the Free Cornish Army, invaded the country next door, and persuaded the UK media that Cornwall had risen up and declared independence. As he told journalists at the time, 'It was only a small country, and I did give it back.'

Now he lives in rural France with his wife and a frightening number of animals. They grow their own food and solve their own crimes. The latter out of necessity when Chris's identity was stolen along with their life savings. Abandoned by the police forces of four countries, who all insisted the crime originated in someone else's jurisdiction, he had to solve the crime himself. Which he did, and got a book out of it – the international bestseller, French Fried.

He's currently working on a series of Wodehouse Steampunk stories featuring the gentleman's consulting detective, Reggie Worcester, and his automaton valet, Reeves.

The first book, *WHAT HO, AUTOMATION!*, can be found here.

Katharine Eliska Kimbriel

Katharine Eliska Kimbriel reinvents herself every decade or so. It's not on purpose, mind you – it seems her path involves overturning the apple cart, collecting new information & varieties of apple seed, and moving on. The one constant she has reached for in life is telling stories.

"I'm interested in how people respond to unusual circumstances. Choice interests me. What is the metaphor for power, for choice? In SF it tends to be technology (good, bad and balanced) while in Fantasy the metaphor is magic – who has it, who wants or does not want it, what is done with it, and who/what the person or culture is after the dust has settled. A second metaphor, both grace note and foundation, is the need for and art of healing.

"A trope in fantasy is great power after passing through death. Well, at my crisis point, I didn't die. That means that I'm a wizard now. Who knows what I may yet accomplish?"

Her most recent FIRES OF NUALA is currently on sale at the Book View Cafe

Daniel M. Kimmel

is the Hugo Award nominated author of Jar Jar Binks Must Die...and Other Observations About Science Fiction Movies, (reviewed here) is an award winning reviewer and critic. His work has appeared in Variety, the Sci Fi Movie Page, the Jewish Advocate, The Internet Review of Science Fiction and others. He currently writes for Clarkesworld and Space and Time.

Sue Lange

Sue Lange is a founding member of Book View Cafe. Her 2003 novel, TRITCHEON HASH, was released by BVC as an ebook and included in Kirkus' Best of 2011 list. Her novella, *WE, ROBOTS* was included in io9.com's "Thirteen Books that Will Change the Way You Look at Robots," and one of "Ten Best Reads of 2007" at sfsignal.com. Her collection of previously published short stories is available in the *UNCATEGORIZED* anthology at BVC as well as her BVC exclusive, *THE TEXTILE PLANET*.

Sue Lange's story, *TIGE IS THE MAN*, will be appearing soon in the Futures section of Nature.

Barry N. Malzberg

is the winner of the first John W. Campbell Memorial Award (Center for Science Fiction Studies, University of Kansas) for his ground-breaking novel *BEYOND APOLLO*, which is currently being made into a film. Mr. Malzberg has worked as an agent (Scott Meredith Literary Agency) and as an editor, most notable here for Amazing Stories and Fantastic in 1968.

Vonda N. McIntyre

…writes science fiction.

She is participating in this summer's Clarion West Write-a-thon, during which she intends to finish her current novel, *THE CURVE OF THE WORLD*.

Linda Nagata

Linda Nagata grew up in a rented beach house on the north shore of Oahu. She graduated from the University of Hawaii with a degree in zoology and worked for a time at Haleakala National Park on the island of Maui. She has been a writer, a mom, a programmer of database-driven websites, and lately a publisher and book designer. Linda is the author of nine novels including *THE BOHR MAKER*, winner of the Locus Award for best first novel, and the novella *Goddesses*, the first online publication to receive a Nebula award. She lives with her husband in their long-time home on the island of Maui.

Linda's most recent books are *THE DREAD HAMMER* and *HEPEN THE WATCHER*, a duet of short, gritty, fast-paced fantasy novels collectively titled *STORIES OF THE PUZZLE LANDS*. Both are independently published through her company Mythic Island Press LLC and are available in ebook and print editions.

Pati Nagle

Pati Nagle was born and raised in the mountains of northern New Mexico. An avid student of music, history, and humans in general, she has a special love of the outdoors, particularly New Mexico's wilds, which inspire many of her stories. Her fiction

has appeared in Asimov's Science Fiction, The Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction, Cricket, Cicada, and in anthologies honoring New Mexico writers Jack Williamson and Roger Zelazny. Her fantasy short story "Coyote Ugly" was honored as a finalist for the Theodore Sturgeon Award. She has also written a series of historical novels as P.G. Nagle. She is a founding member of Book View Café.

Patrick L. Price

worked as editor and managing editor of Amazing Stories (working with George Scithers) during the TSR years, from 1986 through 1991.

Irene Radford

Irene Radford started writing stories when she figured out what a pencil was for. A museum trained historian, Irene was raised in a military family and grew up all over the US. Her interests range from ancient history, to spiritual meditations, to space stations, and a lot in between.

New release from DAW Books, May 1, 2012 *CHICORY UP, PIXIE CHRONICLES #2*, The continuing adventures of Thistle Down, the fallen Pixie who is cursed to live as a human, and her friends as they help Chicory, a young Pixie with dreams of forming a tribe of his own, defend the Ten Acre Wood from incursion by their nemesis, the half Faery-half Pixie Haywood Wheaton.

Deborah J Ross

Deborah J. Ross: I have been writing science fiction and fantasy professionally since 1982, served as Secretary of Science Fiction/Fantasy Writers of America, and have taught writing and led writer's workshops. She is a member of SFWA and the online writers' collective, Book View Cafe.

As Deborah Wheeler, she wrote 2 science fiction novels, *JAYDIUM* and *NORTHLIGHT*, as well as short stories in *Asimov's, Fantasy and Science Fiction, Sisters of the Night, Star Wars: Tales from Jabba's Palace, Realms of Fantasy*, and almost all of the *Sword & Sorceress* and Darkover anthologies. Her most recent projects -- writing as Deborah J. Ross -- include Darkover novels with the late Marion Zimmer Bradley (*HASTUR LORD* 2010, *THE CHILDREN OF KINGS* 2013), and an original fantasy series, *THE SEVEN PETALED SHIELD*. Two of her short stories (*MOTHER AFRICA* in *Asimov's* 1997 and *THE PRICE OF SILENCE* in *F & SF* 2009) were awarded Honorable Mention in *Year's Best SF*. She has also edited a number of fantasy anthologies.

Deborah lives in the redwood forests near Santa Cruz with her husband, writer Dave Trowbridge. In between writing, she has lived in France, worked as a medical assistant to a cardiologist, revived an elementary school library, studied Hebrew, classical piano, and yoga, and has been active in the women's martial arts network community.

Robert Silverberg

is a multi-award winning author and SFWA Grandmaster (2004), a perennial toastmaster for the World Science Fiction Convention and the only member of the Editorial Advisory Board who is not a former editor of Amazing Stories - although there were several years during which he was responsible for authoring most of the magazine's contents.

Jennifer Stevenson

Jennifer Stevenson would never say the sky is falling, although she finds it occasionally rains anvils. She lives and works in the Chicago area, exercises on roller skates, and always has fun. Read her new sexy paranormal romantic comedy series, *SLACKER DEMONS*, beginning July 13 from Musa Publications with *IT'S RAINING MEN*.

Judith Tarr

Judith Tarr is completing the edits on a Kickstarter project--a cross-genre YA novel (sf, fantasy, and historical), which exceeded its funding goal and achieved the lovely round number of 256 backers. The novel, *LIVING IN THREES*, will be published in ebook form by BVC in November. It will be edited, designed, and formatted by the members of the co-op.

Her main blog is dancinghorse.livejournal.com, and she blogs regularly at Book View Cafe as well (the Horseblog has already spawned *WRITING HORSES: THE FINE ART OF GETTING IT RIGHT*, and an ebook about worldbuilding with horses is in the works.

Dave Trowbridge

Dave Trowbridge has been writing high-tech marketing copy for almost thirty years. This has made him an expert in what he calls "pulling stuff out of the cave of the flying monkeys," so science fiction comes naturally. He abandoned corporate life in 2007—actually, it abandoned him—but not before attaining the rank of Dark Lord of Documentation, a title which still appears on his business card and serves to identify clients he'd rather not work with (the ones who don't laugh). He much prefers the godlike powers of a science fiction author (hah!) to troglodyte status in dark corporate mills, and the universe is slowly coming around to his point of view.

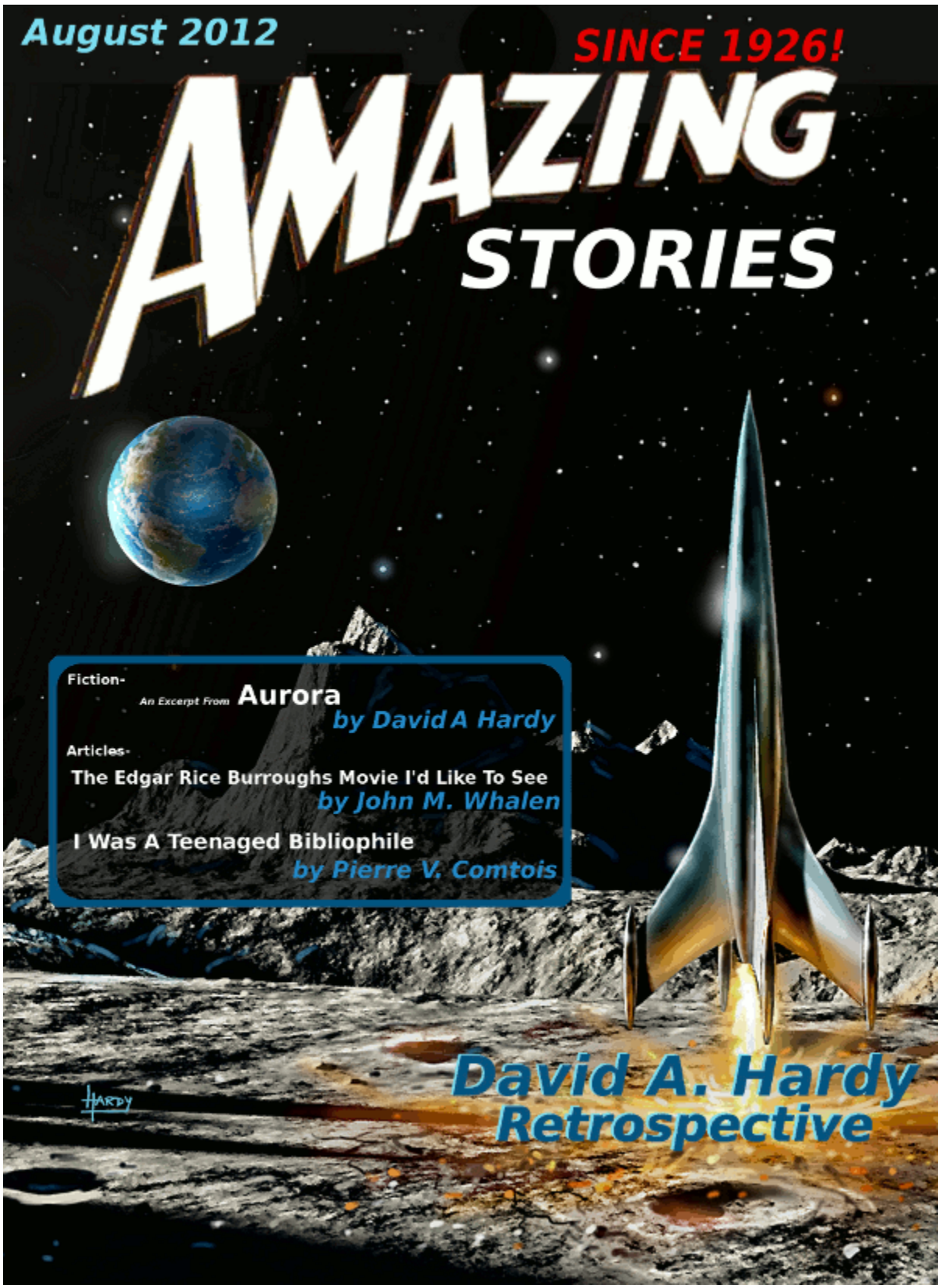
Dave is currently laboring over the second edition of the space-opera series *EXORDIUM* with his co-author Sherwood Smith, and looking forward to writing more stories in that universe. He lives in the Santa Cruz Mountains with his writer wife, Deborah J. Ross, and a tri-lingual German Shepherd Dog responsible for three cats. When not writing Dave may be found wrangling vegetables—both domesticated and feral—in the garden.

Dave's Blog: http://www.davetrowbridge.com

Book View Cafe

is an author's collective; members are professional writers who have combined talents to publish their backlists and to offer new works in e-book format(s).

Hugo Gernsback would found and publish three more SF magazines after Amazing Stories: *Air Wonder Stories* & *Science Wonder Stories* in 1929 and *Science Fiction Plus* in 1953.



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