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National Fantasy Fan Federation

History and Research Bureau

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Cover by Cat Caleb. Back Cover by Andrus Nagy.

Well, we're cruising along right merrily now with this, our 24th issue of Origin, that number representing two years of publication, during which time we've gotten ourselves well established within the N3F and been able to show some careful work in both history and research as well as the maintenance of our publication. We're not just there, we're active. We still lack a lot of interchange with the membership as a whole, though we hope this lack of interchange will come to an end, and while it doesn't, recollecting that we are, ourselves, some of the membership, we have an interchange with one another, as well as some of the people similarly connected with activities, so things are happening on an interpersonal level. And Origin gives us an output. To facilitate this, I have started an "interoffice memorandum" in which we communicate with one another in other than private correspondence. Our show's on the road and in good order.

The history and research we have done has helped us out, at least, for we are finding how to continue this organization in the manner it has been started and has been going on over the years. This continuity provides a solider organization and one which may be considered more comprehensively. The feedback is that we're doing something (to sound here like an interoffice memo) and it is always better to be doing something when one is wishing to. I am able to consider Origin in the light of fanzines I have seen in the past, thinking over in what ways it resembles them and in what ways it does not, and this gives me more substantial thinking to perhaps remark upon. A feeling of pride is a nice thing to have even if it is kept to oneself and has no opportunities of public exhibition; it contributes to the sense of self and to that sense being a more estimable one. Getting something from being in sf fandom? There it is right there. And this is added to by being on a right road to progressive development with interesting things ahead of us. I feel like I am influencing my own attitude for the better in writing this editorial. And I go from such work to reading the work of others, which is an interchange with others even if it is not correspondence. What is writing and reading

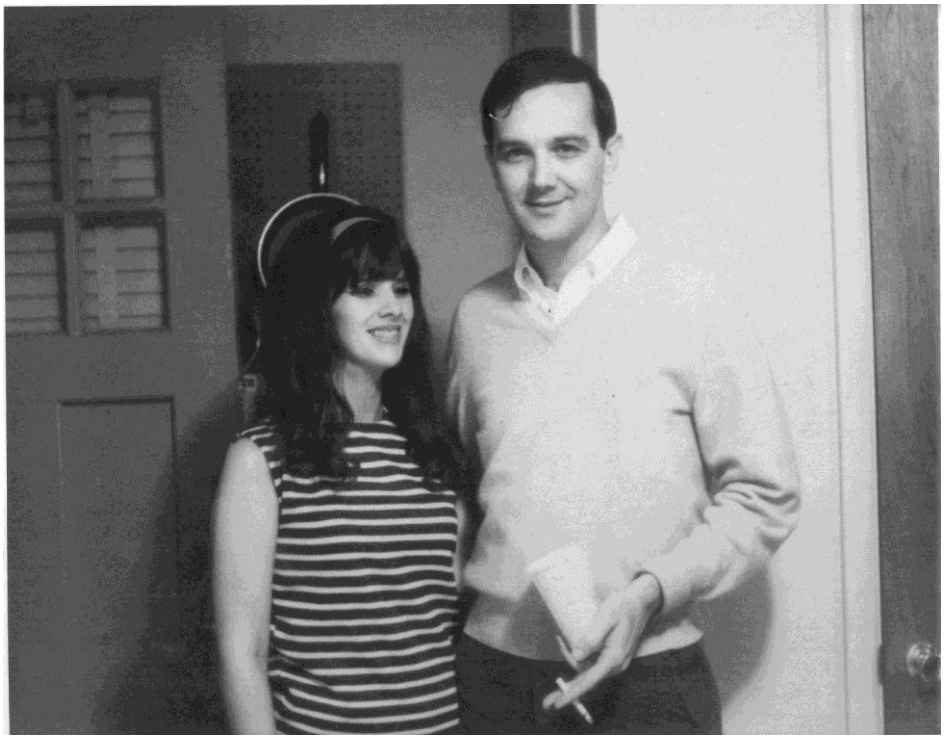
worth? We as readers of science fiction should be interested in this question. It is worth a lot more, I think, than a lot of other activities have to show.

Of course, this bureau is dedicated to considering the seriousness and importance of science fiction, and to considering the effects science fiction writing has on the culture and what relevance it has to events in the world. For instance, HG Wells' book WAR OF THE WORLDS considers the presence of war in the world and extrapolates a much larger war than even a world war, and thereby makes us mindful of considering war, which we might want to do as we are apt to have some desire to overcome the impulse toward warfare and to rectify some of the causes of it. Jules Verne's books call our attention to the exploratory sense and consider what may come of exploration. So we are seriously attentive to the world around us in our reading and discussing of science fiction. One of the purposes of getting together around science fiction is to analyze, interpret and speculate about what we are reading. There has not been much study of it of this nature lately, and we are wanting to promote further such study, perhaps evolve a place for discussion of science fiction literature which goes over what we have read more closely than is done by reviews. People usually want their voices to be heard in matters of concern, and lately politics has been discussed more than science fiction. But it would be good if we went back to having discussion of science fiction itself, not just short comments and quips about books but taking clear and considered looks at what authors are writing. As researchers of science fiction we have what science fiction writers have written in mind, and as N3Fers we want to promote discussion within science fiction fandom. Much fanzine writing now is about how people feel after a war or how they are making out under difficult living conditions. Writers are rarely referenced in these discussions, but it would be well and it would be more being present and active to discuss what writers have to say about such matters. There are science fiction books of a sociological theme. The ones most discussed now are about mass destruction, but why does this destruction occur? Many ideas are discussed in science fiction. Why not get back to a consideration of what we have read?

Of course we also want to evolve the science fiction field and its fandom back into good shape so that such discussions may be had. So we are presently interpreting the reading milieu in which we are involved and discussing how order may be achieved in the activity which surrounds science fiction.We'd like a wide scale resurgence of interest.

A look at an historic occurrence in the active involvement in fandom:

My Ackermansion Visit by Jon D. Swartz, N3F Historian



Carol and Jon at the University of Texas

It was in the early 1970s, and I was a faculty member at The University of Texas at Austin. A fellow faculty member was anthropologist and science fiction (SF) author Chad Oliver. He and I were friends and had lunch together every Wednesday at a local restaurant a block off campus, where a booth was always reserved for us by our favorite waitress. Frequently, my wife Carol and others joined us, especially friends who were interested in SF.

Chad and I were also sponsors of the University's SF Club, and my wife wrote her M.A. thesis in anthropology under Chad's direction.

When Chad learned that Carol and I were taking our kids to visit their grandmother in Burbank, California, he suggested we visit the Ackermansion while we were in the area. Forrest J Ackerman was his literary agent at the time, and Chad and his wife Beje had had their wedding (and wedding reception) at the Ackermansion in the early 1950s. Roger Phillips Graham, who wrote his SF as Rog Phillips, was Chad's best man, and Ray Bradbury was a member of the wedding party.

While working on his doctorate at UCLA, Chad had met several local SF writers, including Bradbury, Richard Matheson, Charles Beaumont, and William F. Nolan. Nolan later labeled them the West Coast Writers Group.

Chad provided us with a letter of introduction to Forry, and we set off to visit Carol's mother—who worked for years as a costume designer at Universal Studios—and to see the local sights, especially the Ackermansion. The drive took us almost two full days as we stopped frequently to address the needs of our two young kids.

Forry met us at the front door of the Ackermansion. We had called ahead that day to let him know we were coming, and I believe Chad had written (or phoned) him about us as well; I know we didn't need to show our letter of introduction. It was a Sunday afternoon when my wife and I visited, leaving our kids with their grandmother.

Both Ray Bradbury and A.E. van Vogt were at the Ackermansion that afternoon. The famous authors chatted with us, and autographed books of theirs that Forry had for sale. I still have the one van Vogt autographed for my wife. I don't know what happened to the Bradbury book we bought, but I already had an autographed copy of his THE GOLDEN APPLES OF THE SUN that I had found years before at an Austin bookstore.

My wife, whose father was a professional photographer, was an avid photographer herself and took pictures of Forry, Bradbury, and van Vogt. Both van Vogt and Bradbury were very gracious when asked to pose for photos. Forry then gave us a tour of the Ackermansion and flirted outrageously with my wife as he helped her be seated in a chair "that had once belonged to Lincoln". I still have the photograph of Forry and van Vogt that my wife took at the time. She kept it in the book that van Vogt had inscribed for her.

Ackerman at his front door

The front room of the Ackermansion contained bookcases on all four walls, and all the bookcases were filled with books. Forry explained that they were hardback first editions, and that he had read every last word of them. As we looked at the hundreds of books in amazement, he explained that that was a little joke he told when people came into the room for the first time. His "read every last word" actually meant that he opened each new addition to the room, read the very last word in the book, and then put it on one of the bookshelves.

Looking back on our tour of the 18-room Ackermansion, it seems to me that every room Forry showed us—including the bathrooms and kitchen—contained books, paintings, statues, awards, plaques, and film and TV memorabilia, and the walls were covered with posters and pictures (many of them related to Boris Karloff's movie role as the Frankenstein monster, and to the other movie monsters who appeared in movies made by Universal Studios over the years). Forry also had several file cabinets filled with paper genre treasures. Many of the movie memorabilia he had were from films in which he had either appeared or was associated with in some way. If I remember correctly, he had a replica of Robby the Robot (from the movie FORBIDDEN PLANET) on display in one of the rooms.

He told us at the time that he also owned (or perhaps rented) several garages that were themselves filled with SF, fantasy, and horror books, and other genre memorabilia.

My wife and I enjoyed ourselves very much that Sunday at the Ackermansion. It was undoubtedly the highlight of that particular visit to California, even though we were able to take our kids to Disneyland and Marineland; and my mother-in-law introduced us to several movie and TV stars when we toured Universal Studios with her.

Inside the Ackermansion. Photos from the John Coker collection.

Book room

Forrest J Ackerman

Forrest James Ackerman (November 24, 1916—December 4, 2008) was an American magazine editor, SF writer and literary agent, one of the founders of SF fandom, a leading expert on SF/horror/fantasy films, and at one time was acknowledged as the world's most avid collector of genre books and genre movie/TV memorabilia. During his career as a literary agent, Ackerman represented such SF authors as Oliver, Bradbury, van Vogt, and Isaac Asimov. For more than seven decades, he was one of SF's staunchest spokesmen and promoters. Ackerman was the editor and principal writer of the popular American magazine **Famous Monsters of Filmland** (1951-1983), as well as an actor in several movies. He was inducted into the First Fandom Hall of Fame in 1974.

Ray Bradbury

Raymond Douglas Bradbury (August 22, 1920—June 5, 2012) was an American author, poet, essayist, dramatist, and screenwriter. He worked in a variety of genres, including SF, fantasy, horror, and mystery fiction. He was also an editor of genre fiction collections. Predominantly known for writing the dystopian novel FAHRENHEIT 451—and for his SF and horror story collections DARK CARNIVAL, THE MARTIAN CHRONICLES, THE ILLUSTRATED MAN, and THE OCTOBER COUNTRY—Bradbury was one of the most celebrated SF/fantasy writers of his day and was nominated for—and subsequently won—many awards for his work, including The National Medal of Arts in 2004. He was inducted into the First Fandom Hall of Fame in 2012.

Chad Oliver

Symmes Chadwick Oliver (March 30, 1928—August 9, 1993) was an American anthropologist and SF and Western Fiction writer. When he was young he suffered from rheumatic fever and spent some time as an invalid, during which he became interested in SF and wrote many LoCs to the SF prozines. Two of his most popular SF novels were SHADOWS IN THE SUN and THE SHORES OF ANOTHER SEA; two of his Western novels won national awards. He spent most of his life at The University of Texas at Austin, where he was twice chairman of the Department of Anthropology and won several awards for his teaching. He was also one of the founders of the Turkey City Writers' Workshop.

A.E. van Vogt

Alfred Elton van Vogt (April 26, 1912—January 26, 2000) was a Canadian-born SF and fantasy author. His unique narrative style influenced later SF writers, notably Philip K. Dick. He was one of the most popular and influential practitioners of SF in the genre's so-called Golden Age, and one of the most complex. His most popular novels were SLAN, THE WORLD OF NULL-A, THE VOYAGE OF THE SPACE BEAGLE, THE WEAPON SHOPS OF ISHER, THE BOOK OF PTATH, and THE WEAPON MAKERS. His first wife was E. Mayne Hull, who was also a SF/Fantasy writer. Their book, OUT OF THE UNKNOWN, that they dedicated to Ackerman, was a collection of six fantasy stories first published in the magazine **Unknown,** three stories written by van Vogt and three by Hull.

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Bathroom of the Ackermansion. Photo by Walter Daugherty, from the John Coker collection.

What Is Science Fiction? by John Thiel

Science fiction is a new form of literature originating primarily in the 20th Century and having few literary antecedents. It is a specialized form of fiction relating to science. The new interest in science may be related to the Industrial Revolution in Europe and the technological speedup occurring in America beginning with such new scientific wonders as the telephone and telegraph, the camera and the motion picture camera, the recording machine, the automobile, the airplane, and television, as well as negative wonders such as dynamite and missiles. It was a time of invention and cultural speedup. This tended to be apocalyptic, and science fiction is generally an apocalyptic literature. Those interested in what is new like to keep up with it via science fiction.

Science fiction has the scientific attitude toward things as its basis and the combination of the speculative science with fiction makes it interesting and entertaining reading with a wider range than technology. All of the sciences are to be found represented in science fiction—sociology, anthropology, biology, psychology, physics, and many another, all of them having in science fiction the reaction of the imagination to their presence in the public consciousness. The imaginative content found in science fiction led to its being coupled with fantasy, which is certainly something opposite to science, but which is interpreted in fantasy fiction by its proximity to science fiction. (Amazing had a companion fantasy magazine, Fantastic, Astounding had Unknown as a companion magazine, Galaxy had Beyond as a companion magazine.)

The readers and writers of science fiction pride themselves on looking to the future, and being in touch with what is progressive, new and different. They show discontent with the mundane world as it exists. Science fiction allows anything—it may be the only form of writing of which it may be said "anything goes"—and its readers feel a sense of freedom in reading these stories, which are often outrageous by the usual literary standards. As for fantasy, it's not quite true that anything goes in that—there are often taboos and curses in the stories themselves, but anything may be found in them. Unlike science fiction, the plots are often a no-go with the characters in them, and the stories might involve exorcisms, manhunts and arrests and trials. The fiction in Weird Tales often showed an extreme dissatisfaction with what was going on in them. Science fiction usually looked for a new solution to unusual problems, and would have them solved by

the end of the stories. Both forms of writing were radically different from other kinds of writing, but both will continue to be liked for the expanded consciousness they show.

A highly influential post New Wave best-selling science fiction writer

KURT VONNEGUT **by Jeffrey Redmond**

The literary world has recently lost a truly great man with Kurt Vonnegut, and a famed writer often compared with Mark Twain. One of Vonnegut's favorite expressions was "So it goes", which he frequently included in many of his best-selling novels. So much of his own life was so fully reflected in his works.

Kurt Vonnegut, Jr. was born on Armistice Day on November 11, 1922, in Indianapolis, Indiana. He was the son of a successful architect, Kurt Sr., and his wife, Edith Sophia. Edith was the daughter of millionaire and Indianapolis brewer Albert Lieber. The junior Kurt's great-grandfather, Clemens Vonnegut, was the founder of the Vonnegut's Hardware Store chain.

Vonnegut was raised along with his sister, Alice, and brother, Bernard (whom he spoke of frequently in his works). Fourth-generation Germans, the children were never exposed to their heritage because of the anti-German attitudes that had spread throughout the United States after World War 1 (1914-18). It had been a world war in which many European countries, some Middle Eastern nations, Russia, and the United

States fought against Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Turkey.

During the Great Depression (the severe economic downturn of the 1930s), the Vonneguts lost most of their wealth and the household was never the same. Vonnegut's father fell into a severe depression, and his mother died after overdosing on sleeping pills the night before Mothers' Day. This attainment and the loss of the "American Dream" would become the theme of many of Vonnegut's writings.

Kurt, Jr., went to Shortridge High School, where he was editor of the **Echo**, the daily student newspaper. It was at Shortridge in Indianapolis that Vonnegut gained his first writing experience. During his last two years there the Shortridge Daily Echo was the first high school daily newspaper in the country. At this young age Vonnegut learned to write for a wide audience that would give him immediate feedback, rather than just writing for an audience of one, any teacher.

After graduating from Shortridge in 1940, Vonnegut headed for Cornell University. His father wanted him to study something that was solid and dependable, like science, so Vonnegut began his college career as a chemistry and biology major, following in the footsteps of his older brother, Bernard, who was to be eventually the discoverer of cloud seeding to produce rain. While Vonnegut struggled in his chemistry and biology studies, he excelled as a columnist and managing editor for the Cornell **Daily Sun.**

By this point Vonnegut's parents had given up on life, being unable to adjust to and accept the fact that they were no longer wealthy world travelers. On May 14, 1944, his mother committed suicide. His father was to remain a fairly isolated man the rest of his days, in full retreat from life, content to be in his own little world until his death on October 1, 1957.

In 1943 Vonnegut was going to be expelled from Cornell because of his below average academic performance. He quit college, enlisted in the army, and was sent to France as a part of the U.S. 106th Infantry Division. This unit was new and so was stationed along a supposedly quiet part of the lines, in the Ardennes region of Belgium. Its ranks were filled with school drop-outs, parolees, and whatever else the draft boards could find by 1944.

World War 2 and its many major battles was occurring throughout Europe, Asia and North Africa. The Allies once again were especially fighting against the powerful forces of Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan. After the Allied invasion of Normandy and liberation of France, it seemed as if Hitler would be easily beaten. However, the sudden German counter-offensive in December caught the Allies completely by surprise.

On December 14, 1944, Vonnegut became a German prisoner of war after being captured in the Battle of the Bulge. He was sent to Dresden, an open city that produced no war machinery. Thus it was off-limits to allied bombing. He and his fellow POWs were to work in a vitamin-syrup factory. On February 13, 1945, however, Allied air forces bombed Dresden, killing 135,000 unprotected civilians. Vonnegut and other POWs survived the bombing as they waited it out deep in the cellar of a slaughterhouse, where they were quartered.

Vonnegut was freed by Soviet troops and repatriated on May 22, 1945. Dresden was virtually destroyed by the intense Allied bombing campaign, ordered by the British air commander Harris (as a retaliation for the Nazi Luftwaffe's destruction of Coventry in England). Vonnegut would later write about the experience in what many consider his masterpiece, SLAUGHTERHOUSE FIVE.

Vonnegut was honorably discharged and returned to the United States in 1945. On September first of that year he married Jane Marie Cox, a friend since kindergarten, for he thought "Who but a wife would sleep with me?"

He spent the next two years in Chicago, attending the University of Chicago as a graduate student of Anthropology, and working for the Chicago City News Bureau as a police reporter. When his master's thesis was rejected, he moved to Schenectady, New York, in 1947, to work in public relations for General Electric. It was here that his fiction career began. On February 11, 1950, **Collier's** published Vonnegut's first short story, "Report on the Barnhouse Effect". By the next year he was making enough money to quit his job at GE, and move his family to West Barnstable, Massachusetts, on Cape Cod, in 1951.

He worked full time on his writing. PLAYER PIANO, Vonnegut's first novel, was published in 1952. It depicts a fictional city called Ilium in which the people have given control of their lives to a computer.

THE SIRENS OF TITAN (1959) takes place on several different planets, including thoroughly militarized Mars, where the inhabitants are electronically controlled. The fantastic settings of these works serve primarily as a metaphor (comparison) for modern society, which Vonnegut views as absurd to the point of being surreal (irrational and dreamlike), and as a backdrop for Vonnegut's central focus, the hapless human beings who inhabit these bizarre worlds and struggle with both their environments and themselves.

By the time The Sirens of Titan was in print he'd also had dozens of short stories

published. He had also worked as an English teacher at a school for emotionally disturbed students, and run a Saab automobile dealership. He'd seen his father die, and witnessed the death of his 41-year-old sister, Alice. This had occurred less than forty-eight hours after her husband had died in a train accident. Vonnegut adopted three of Alice's four children to add to his own three offspring.

The sixties were filled by the publications of four more novels, a collection of short stories, and a two year residency at the famous University of Iowa Writers' Workshop. The decade culminated with the publication of his sixth, and still best, novel, Slaughterhouse Five, in 1968. This particular work was finished in Iowa City, when Vonnegut taught at the writers' workshop between 1966-68. By 1969, after Slaughterhouse Five had become a best seller, he gained national attention and respect.

The early seventies were an interesting and hectic time for him. Much in demand as the voice of the college-aged generation, he spent time teaching creative writing at Harvard. He wrote a mildly successful off-Broadway play, got divorced, and saw his son Mark suffer a schizophrenic breakdown. By the time BREAKFAST OF CHAMPIONS was published in 1973, his life was starting to slow down just a bit as he dropped from his pinnacle in the national spotlight. The critically attacked SLAPSTICK appeared in 1976, which was followed by 1979's JAILBIRD.

Vonnegut combined science fiction, social satire, and black comedy in his novels, which won a wide following during the 1960s. His themes spring from his contemplation of 20th Century horrors. Dehumanization in a technological society in Player Piano (1952) and Cat's Cradle (1963), and the random destructiveness of modern war in Slaughterhouse Five (1969; film 1972). He especially focused on the role of technology in human society in Cat's Cradle (1963), widely considered one of his best. More recent works include GALAPAGOS (1985), BLUEBEARD (1987), and the autobiographical FATES WORSE THAN DEATH (1991). Although his work has been criticized as simplistic, it has equally often been praised for its comic creativity.

Kurt Vonnegut will remain one of the most influential writers of his generation. Known for his dark humor, pessimism and sharp edge, he was the author of fourteen novels and other works of fiction and nonfiction. His stories of human folly and cruelty have been assigned reading for at least two decades in college literature classes around the world.

On July 9, 1999, he was honored by the Indiana Historical Society as an Indiana Living Legend. He was 75 when TIMEQUAKE was published in 1997, and he stated it would be

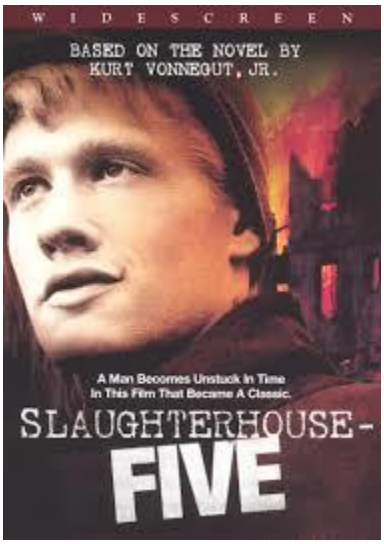
his last novel. In May 2000, he was named to a teaching position at Smith College in Northampton, MA.

Vonnegut had married Jane Cox, a childhood sweetheart, in 1945. But they separated in 1970 and were divorced in 1979. In November 1979, Vonnegut married photographer Jill Krementz. In 1991, he and she filed for divorce, but the petition was later withdrawn. He had seven children, three from his first marriage and three of his nephews and nieces. He and Jill Krementz also adopted a daughter.

Vonnegut's Works

Novels: Player Piano, 1952; The Sirens of Titan, 1959; Mother Night, 1961; Cat's Cradle, 1963; God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater, 1965; Slaughterhouse-Five, 1969; Breakfast of Champions, 1973; Slapstick, 1976; Jailbird, 1979; Deadeye Dick, 1982; Galapagos: A Novel, 1985; Bluebeard, 1987; Hocus Pocus, 1990; Timequake, 1999.

Short Fiction and Essays: Canary in a Cathouse, 1961; Welcome to the Monkey House, 1968; Wampeters, Foma and Granfaloons, 1974; Palm Sunday, 1981; Fates Worse than Death: An Autobiographical Collage of the 1980s, 1991.




VCR of Slaughterhouse Five and scenes from the movie

In Mother Night (1961) there is a serious study of the dark and sinister side of Nazism, and the effects of the war on the psychology of the survivors. An American journalist infiltrates the German propaganda radio program, while secretly being a spy for the Allies. He discovers that all of his broadcasts mistakenly prolonged the war by encouraging the German people to continue fighting.

The American journalist even encounters Adolf Eichmann, the Nazi official in charge of transporting all Jews to extermination camps, in an Israeli prison after the war. Mother Night ends with the journalist unable to live any longer with his trauma and guilt, and hanging himself with (of all things) his typewriter ribbon.

His 1963 novel Cat's Cradle recounts the discovery of a form of ice, called ice-nine, which is solid at a much lower temperature than normal ice, and is capable of solidifying all water on Earth. Ice-nine serves as a symbol of the enormous destructive potential of technology, particularly when developed or used without regard for the welfare of humanity.

Vonnegut's reputation was greatly enhanced in 1969 with the publication of Slaughterhouse Five. It was an antiwar novel which appeared during the peak of protest against American involvement in the Vietnam War (1955-75). Vonnegut described Slaughterhouse Five as a novel he was compelled to write, since it is based on one of the most extraordinary and significant events of his life. One of the few to survive the destruction of Dresden, Vonnegut was ordered by his captors to assist in the grisly task of digging bodies from the rubble and destroying them in huge bonfires.

Because the city of Dresden had been filled with German refugees fleeing the Soviets, and was of little military value, its destruction went nearly unnoticed in the press. Slaughterhouse Five is Vonnegut's attempt to both document and criticize the event..

Like Vonnegut, the main character of Slaughterhouse Five, named Billy Pilgrim, is

deeply affected by the horrible experience. His feelings develop into spiritual uncertainty that results in a nervous breakdown. In addition, he suffers from a peculiar condition, of being "unstuck in time", meaning that he randomly experiences events from his past, present, and future. The novel is therefore a complex, non-chronological (in no order of time) narrative in which images of suffering and loss prevail.

After the publication of the book, Vonnegut entered a period of depression during which he vowed, at one point, never to write another novel. He concentrated, instead, on lecturing, teaching, and finishing a play, HAPPY BIRTHDAY, WANDA JUNE, that he had begun several years earlier. The play, which ran Off-Broadway from October 1970 to March 1971, received mixed reviews, perhaps because it was somewhat too "unusual" for its time.

In it a Hemingway-like macho writer returns to visit his wife, along with one of the men who felw an atomic bombing mission against Japan. She believes her writer husband to be dead, and is engaged to marry a symphony musician (who lives in the same building with his mother). The entire tale is narrated by a little girl named Wanda June, who got killed in a car accident. She lives up in Heaven with many dead soldiers, including a former Nazi SS officer, himself killed by the macho writer during World War 2. There's even her birthday cake, no longer needed, and hence the title of the play.

There were several factors which could be interpreted as the cause of Vonnegut's period of depression, including, as he admitted, the approach of his fiftieth birthday and the fact that his children had begun to leave home. Many critics believe that, having at last come to terms with Dresden, he lost the major inspiration for much of his work. Others feel that Slaughterhouse Five may have been the single great novel that Vonnegut was capable of writing. Whatever the cause, Breakfast of Champions marked the end of his depression and a return to the novel.

In Breakfast of Champions, as in most of Vonnegut's work, there are very clear autobiographical elements. In this novel, however, the author seems to be even more wrapped up in his characters than usual. He appears as Philboyd Sludge, the writer of the book, which stars Dwayne Hoover, a Pontiac dealer (Vonnegut once ran a Saab dealership) who goes berserk after reading a novel by Kilgore Trout, who also represents Vonnegut. Toward the end of the book, Vonnegut arranges a meeting between himself and Trout, whom Robert Merrill calls his "most famous creation", in which he casts the character loose forever. By this time the previously unsuccessful Trout has become rich and famous, and is finally able to stand on his own.

Breakfast of Champions and Slapstick, or Lonesome No More (1976) both examine the widespread feelings of despair and loneliness that result from the loss of traditional culture in the United States; Jailbird (1979) recounts the story of a fictitious participant in the Watergate scandal of the Richard Nixon (1913-1994) administration, a scandal which ultimately led to the resignation of the president; Galapagos (1985) predicts the consequences of environmental pollution; and HOCUS-POKUS, or, WHAT'S THE HURRY, SON? (1990) deals with the implications and aftermath of the war in Vietnam.

In the 1990s, he also published Fates Worse Than Death (1991) and Timequake (1997). Before its release Vonnegut noted that Timequake would be his last novel. Although many of these works are highly regarded, critics frequently argue that in his later works he tends to reiterate themes presented more compellingly in earlier works. Nevertheless, he remains one of the most beloved of American writers.

As the author of at least 19 novels, many of them best-sellers, as well as dozens of short stories, essays and plays, Vonnegut relished the role of a social critic. Indianapolis, his home town, declared 2007 as "The Year of Vonnegut"—an announcement he said left him "thunderstruck".

He lectured regularly, exhorting audiences to think for themselves and delighting in barbed commentary against the institutions he felt were dehumanizing people.

"I will say anything to be funny, often in the most horrible situations," Vonnegut once told a gathering of psychiatrists.

A self-described religious skeptic and freethinking humanist, Vonnegut used protagonists such as Billy Pilgrim and Eliot Rosewater as transparent vehicles for his points of view. He also filled his novels with satirical commentary and even drawings that were only loosely connected to the plot.

In Slaughterhouse Five he drew a headstone with the epitaph: "Everything was beautiful, and nothing hurt." But much in his life was traumatic, and left him in pain. Despite his commercial success, he battled depression throughout his life. In 1984 he attempted suicide with pills and alcohol, joking later about how he botched the job.

"I think he was a man who combined a wicked sense of humor and sort of steady moral compass, who was always sort of looking at the big picture of the things that were most important," said Joel Bleifuss, editor of **In These Times**, a liberal magazine based in Chicago that featured Vonnegut articles.

"The firebombing of Dresden explains absolutely nothing about why I write what I write and am what I am", Vonnegut wrote in Fates Worse Than Death, his 1991

autobiography of sorts. But he spent 23 years struggling to write about the ordeal, which he survived by huddling with other POWs inside an underground meat locker labeled Slaughterhouse Five (Schlachthaus Funf in German).

The novel, in which Pvt. Pilgrim is transported from Dresden by time-traveling aliens fom the planet Tralfamadore, was published at the height of the Vietnam War, and solidified his reputation as an iconoclast.

"He was sort of like nobody else," said Gore Vidal, who noted that he, Vonnegut and Norman Mailer were among the last writers around who served in World War 2.

"He was imaginative; our generation of writers didn't go in for imagination very much. Literary realism was the general style. Those of us who came out of the war in the 1940s made it sort of the official American prose, and it was often a bit on the dull side. Vonnegut was never dull."

Critics ignored him at first, then denigrated his deliberately bizarre stories and disjointed plots as haphazardly written science fiction. But his novels became cult classics, especially "Cat's Cradle" in 1963, in which scientists create "ice-nine", a crystal that turns water solid and destroys the earth.

Many of his novels were best-sellers. Some also were banned and burned for suspected obscenity. Vonnegut took on censorship as an active member of the PEN writers' aid group and the American Civil Liberties Union. The American Humanist Association, which promotes individual freedom, rational thought and scientific skeptisism, made him its honorary president. His characters tended to be miserable anti-heroes with little control over their fate. Vonnegut explained that the villains in his books were never individuals, but culture, society and history, which he protested were making a mess of the planet.

"We probably could have saved ourselves, but we were too damned lazy to try very hard…and too damn cheap", he once suggested carving into a wall on the Grand Canyon, as a message for flying-saucer creatures.

He retired from novel writing in his later years, but continued to publish short articles. He had a best-seller in 2005 with A MAN WITHOUR A COUNTRY, a collection of his non-fiction work, including jabs at the Bush administration ("upper-crust C-students who know no history or geography") and the uncertain future of the planet. He called the book's success "a nice glass of champagne at the end of a life".

In recent years, Vonnegut worked as a senior editor and columnist at **In These Times**. Bleifuss said he had been trying to get Vonnegut to write something more for

the magazine, but was unsuccessful. “He would just say he’s too old and that he had nothing more to say. He realized, I think, he was at the end of his life,” Bleifuss remembered.

Vonnegut himself once said that “Of all the ways to die, I would prefer to go our in an airplane crash on the peak of Mount Kilimanjaro”. He often joked about the difficulties of old age.

“When Hemingway killed himself he put a period at the end of his life; old age is more like a semicolon,” Vonnegut told the Asssociated Press in 2005. “My father, like Hemingway, was a gun nut and was very unhappy late in life. But he was proud of not committing suicide. And I’ll do the same, so as not to set a bad example for my children.”

Vonnegut also taught advanced writing classes at Smith College, and in November of 2000, he was named the State Author of New York.

Vonnegut was critically injured in a fire at his New York City brownstone January 30, 2000. He often marveled that he had lived so ling despite his lifelong smoking habit, also suffered brain injuries after a fall at his Manhattan apartment home in march 2007. The satirical novelist who captured the absurdity of war, and questioned the advances of science in darkly humorous works, died on Wednesday, April 11th, 2007. He was 84. Oh, Kurt Vonnegut. We will miss you, old warrior. Rest in peace. And so it goes.

N3F Over the Years by Judy Carroll

I first joined the N3F many years ago, having heard about it from several relatives who painted beautiful pictures of life within its boundaries. I dived in, and after a short period of time I was actively involved in the following bureaus: Birthday, Correspondence, Welcommittee, Round Robins, Writers Exchange, Blind Services and Special Publications.

There were few members with home computers so club publications were printed and sent to members by postal mail. I enjoyed receiving TNFF, but sometimes it was hard to read. The printing looked a bit blurred as if the words were hovering over light grey smudges. The covers were colored paper with art work in black. Unlike today, they couldn't show the real beauty of the picture.

The first page listed Club Officers—President, Directors (now called Directorate), Secretary, Treasurer, Publication Editors, and also Bureaus and Activities. There were so many choices to choose from. At one point there were twenty-nine listings for Bureaus and Activities, many of which we still have. The Bureaus stretched further than those we have today including—Convention Coordinator, Filk Singing, New Ideas and Information, Overseas Bureau, Personal Concerns, Singles Looking, and Youth Bureau. As today, many of the members who were officers and bureau heads were also involved in other aspects of the club.

Other publications periodically appeared in the mailbox. I don't recall if they had set deadlines. Unlike TNFF, that had limited space, these zines seemed to go on for many pages. The one that always comes to mind had Star Trek characters on the light blue cover—Spock, Kirk and McCoy, I believe. The stories were by various members and were copies of the original typed stories. They came in large manila envelopes. I enjoyed reading the original stories and it was exciting if a story was written by someone I knew in the club.

When I was the Bureau Head of Special Publications I decided I wanted to put together stories that didn't stem from one area or theme. I wanted science fiction, fantasy and horror to be represented. Hoping to interest many members, I set about explaining what I was looking for and what I was trying to do. I asked for original stories and art work by members. Unfortunately, I was unable to complete my task. I didn't receive enough material to publish and couldn't get the funding for printing.

I fell in love with Round Robins. I joined several and eagerly awaited their arrival in

my mailbox. They usually arrived in groups. I read them as soon as I could but wasn't always able to respond and send them off right away. There were so many round robins available dealing with science fiction, fantasy and horror in general and in books, movies and TV. Other categories were also available such as Dreams, Love and Romance, Telepathy, Norse Folklore, Occult and Magic. There were also many dealing with authors.

To join the correspondence Bureau a form needed to be filled out listing interests. Since the list of people who were seeking"pen-pals" was never released, to protect a member's privacy, the Bureau Head would pair people with others of like interests. I enjoyed a correspondence with the member I was paired with.

One of my most rewarding "activities" was as the Bureau Head of Blind Services. I needed to get readers for our one blind member. A nice gentleman, whom I spoke to on the phone a few times to see if his needs were being met. I started a collection of books on tape available from my home which I could send to him if needed.

As much as I liked the N3F of the past, I also enjoy the N3F of today and I anticipate still enjoying the N3F of tomorrow.

Northern Lights

Letters to Origin

HEATH ROW: This is a letter of comment on **Origin #22**, the December 2019 issue. I sat down to read the zine—my first as a reader again despite being a member for some time—intending to write before I'd even read your editorial. I love letter columns. And I do not believe they are unnecessary or uninteresting. But then again, I read them, and I write to them.

Letter columns have served a historic function that is differently relevant today in comic books, at least, my understanding is that at least two pages of text were required to qualify for some postal service rate preference—so comic books included text stories and letter columns.

They also served an important networking function. Be it including the names and addresses of fellow fans to aid correspondence—or to help people meet face to face like Forrest J. Ackerman as you mention in "Fandom Recap"—they have helped people find like-minded friends and professionals, become acquainted through correspondence (or even just reading each other's letters in print), and even form friendships in the real world off the printed page.

I think that Judy's right. The immediacy and brevity of comment culture online means that people say less, communicate even less, and share less about themselves—even if they feel like we're reaching out or responding to others more frequently. Judy's advice is excellent: "Slow down. Stand back and look at it from a distance."

But letter columns also serve another function. They communicate to readers that other readers are engaged readers. True, you need actual examples of that to share with

other readers, but be it a joke page with reader submissions in a comic book, hair styles and fashion designs submitted by readers like those in Bill Woggon's mid-80s comic book **Vicki Valentine** and its predecessor **Katy Keene** , or even superheroes developed by readers *a la* **Dial H for Hero,** there's no better way to show a publication has active, smart, and thoughtful readers than to showcase their activity, intelligence, and consideration. Comment culture might get you a ton of responses, but sometimes read those comments on, say, YouTube. Does anyone really say anything? In letters of comment, we are perhaps likely to say more, even if we say things less often.

Jon, thank you for indexing the first year of **Astounding Stories**. I've been working on a similar project, cataloging scanned back issues I have on CD-R and DVD-R, mindful that others have done so already (for example, Frederick Siemon's SCIENCE FICTION STORY INDEX 1950-1968, Terry A. Murray's SCIENCE FICTION MAGAZINE STORY INDEX, 1926-1995, and even The Locus Index to Science Fiction online), and it's a lot of fun. A couple of things struck me about the 1930 Astounding index. One, they split the year into four three-issue volumes, which seems counter to the more often used year per volume approach. I wonder what their logic was. And, two, many of the repeated author names—Captain S.P. Meek, Ray Cummings, Victor Rousseau, Harl Vincent, Sewell Peaslee Wright, and Hugh B. Cave among them—are largely unknown to me almost ninety years later. Only Murray Leinster's name was previously known to me.

To Jeffrey Redmond's point, where are the women in that first year? Without cross-referencing for potential pen names, 1930 brought us perhaps Sophie Wenzel Ellis, Lilith Lorraine…and that's it. Granted, I'm only guessing at perhaps female-identified names and neglecting many initialed authors whose names don't signal, but that's not a lot.

But is Redmond actually contending that Mary Shelley didn't write FRANKENSTEIN? It's unclear whether words were left out of that piece's text, and who is actually contending that point. The remarks by Joanna Russ further confused me. Did someone say Shelley didn't write the book, or is he actually making that case himself (which makes the Russ follow up even more confusion)? If there is such a controversy, I will have to learn more.

My favorite part of Jon's index, however, were the story descriptions. Were those cribbed from the tables of contents or are they your own synopses, Jon? They are fun in and of themselves: "a catastrophe is connected to a mad musician", "plot behind the president's eye trouble", "an outlaw world is a leper of space". It's too late for the 2019 short story contest, but any one of us could pick any of those descriptions and craft our

own story without any further inspiration from the original work. I've chosen my inspiring description and will start my story soon. I challenge you to do the same!

An awesome issue, ably capturing the subversive and spirited aspects of our fandom. Thank you, to all involved.

Yes, I think we're doing good N3F work here, in the traditional mode of the organization.

I think back at that time, women were more present in ***Weird Tales*** *than in other magazines, and remained more frequent in fantasy fiction. With* ***Famous Fantastic Mysteries*** *a female editor, Mary Gnaidinger(sp?), came into being, which may have rocked the developing field. That's a lot of early female presence in the field.*

You've said it all in the discussion of letter columns, and I hope they come back into being more than has been so; as I have often pointed out or had pointed out, they're an important source of the existence of science fiction fandom.

Your own letter here gets things going considerably, I think.

WILL MAYO: I especially appreciated the article on Frazetta in the latest issue of Origin. As a boy, I would often buy paperbacks more for his art than for the stories inside. Something about those pictures got me to wondering…

I was seeing him on out of the way publications and comics and he always seemed to be at a distance from the mainstream SF field. The magazines were missing a score. It seemed they were suffering a hiatus with this artist and I wondered if he were suffering from it too. He seemed to come in from the side somehow. He was a very good artist with an authentic sense of wonder to his paintings.

Northern Lights *Hind page*