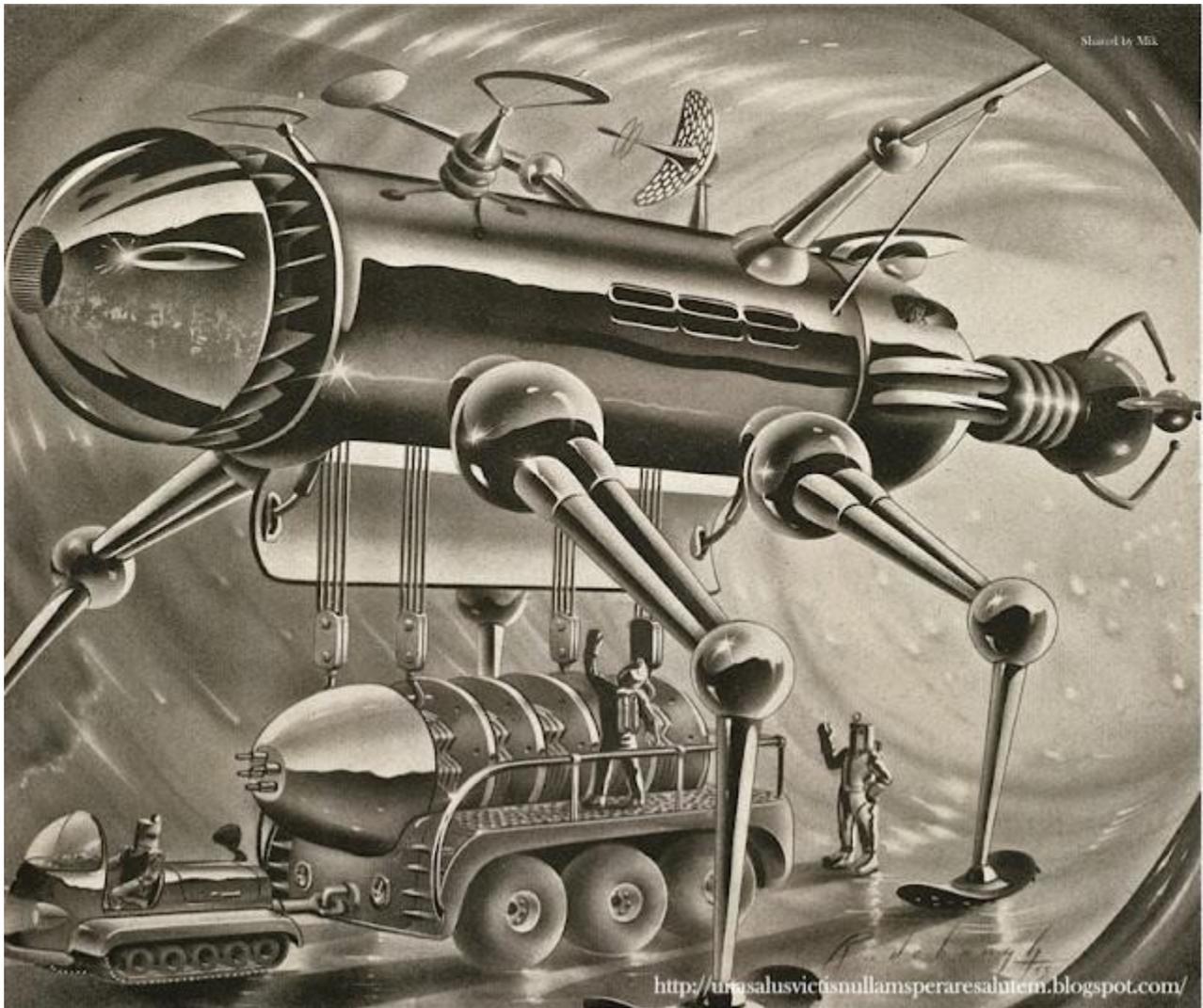


# Fadeaway #68



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**FADEAWAY #68** is a fanzine devoted to science fiction and related fields of interest, and is produced by **Robert Jennings, 29 Whiting Rd., Oxford, MA 01540-2035, email [fabficbks@aol.com](mailto:fabficbks@aol.com)**. Copies are available for a letter of comment, or a fanzine in trade, or by subscription at a cost of \$25.00 for six issues. Letters of comment are much preferred. Any person who has not previously received a copy of this fanzine may receive a sample copy of the current issue for free by sending me your name and address. Publication schedule is erratic these days. This is the March 2025 issue

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LONG TIME, NO SEE... Yeah, about three years to be exact. I've been busy. Also there have been other problems, but the main reason there haven't been any new issues of *Fadeaway* till now can be amply summed up by the following...

THE BACK COVER ILLO THIS TIME ROUND is from a never-produced issue of my old zine *The Comic World*. As you can see, the cover feature for this un-published issue was going to be about DC Comics' tiny super hero The Atom.

A friend back in those days was a great fan of the character, and after some in-person conversations, he agreed to do a feature article on the The Atom for *Comic World*. He was enthusiastic about the article, I was enthusiastic about printing it. Over the course of six weeks or so he did research, did interviews with artists, with writers, even with DC editors and production people. I got a few regular updates. The article was being written, more background information was being added in; the article was almost done. Based on his enthusiastic letters I asked artist Dan Carroll to do artwork for the article, including what was going to become the front cover of the fanzines, with full color separations even.

Them there were fewer updates from my friend. I wrote and asked him what was happening, but he was "still working" on the material. In person he promised to have the article for me in a couple of weeks, tops, as soon as he finished doing some rewriting.

That rewriting stretched out to several months. On the few times after that when I saw him at conventions or elsewhere he always assured me the article was almost done and he would send it along in a few days. Here it is 2025, and those few days have turned into a few decades with no article from him and no indication that there ever will be.

Well, them's the perils of amateur fanzine publishing. This was not the first time or the last time that someone promised an article, or a review, or an interview, or some art, or even a letter of comment that failed to materialize. This is a hobby; this fanzine doesn't pay its contributors for any material that gets published, and of course, it's a money losing proposition for me too, strictly an act of love, something I turn out on my own for the enjoyment of other people in the hobby.

I have a whole file of emails from people who have offered to do articles and artwork for *Fadeaway* but haven't come thru with the material. There's no use trying to badger people. This is an amateur publication, and you can't force someone to be creative or to deliver on their promises in this situation. I would like to publish every bit of the material that has been promised to me. The subject matters are varied and I am sure you readers would find all of them interesting, but...

Waiting for people to turn in material has basically meant that the title of this fanzine has come close to becoming a reality. You can't force someone to do creative work for your fanzine. You can ask and entice, make suggestions, add encouragement, provide support and hope for the best. Things either come thru or they don't. Which is my way of saying that future issues of this zine will probably have a lot of material written by me. It was never my intention to turn *Fadeaway* into a perzine, but I still have the urge to produce fanzines now and again, and I don't plan on allowing *Fadeaway* to actually fade away. So it is very likely that future issues of this fanzine will pretty much feature everything except for the letters column written by me. It's not what I wanted or ever expected, but here it is anyway.

And, keeping with the realities of this new decade, all issues of this zine, beginning right now, will be in digital format only. No more printed copies. The cost of postage has taken a giant leap upward in the past couple of years, and yet another round of postage price increases is due to kick in around mid June. Adding in the rising cost of paper, toner ink, and mailing envelopes makes the shift to an all digital format a no brainer. That does mean that all the color pics and illos can now be seen in full color, plus distribution of the issues will now be almost instantaneous. So here it is, and I hope you enjoy it.

P.S. If, by chance, any of you folks who said you've been working on articles for this zine send your material along, I would be very happy to run it in an upcoming issue.

AND SPEAKING OF ARTWORK The cover for this issue is another example of the excellent work that futurist artist Arthur Radenbaugh (1906-1974) did back in the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This bit of art was created for a mining corporation projecting how future technological developments would mean easier and more profitable extraction of mineral ores. It was part of a

short series that appeared in company and industry magazines. See issue #67 of this zine for a fuller write-up of Mr. Radenbaugh and his astonishing variety of artwork.

#### TRACKING DOWN THE NEW STF

Truth to tell I have plenty of stuff to read, thousands of books in my inventory, stacks of books that I have been intending to read but haven't gotten around to yet here at the house, and a lot of titles I kinda want to reread at some point in the near future.

All well and good, but, I also want to keep abreast of the new novels coming out in the genre. I read reviews from people whose opinions I value, and they recommend a number of new books that look quite interesting. As I wrote in articles and past reviews, I truly think we are in the midst of a brand new golden age of science fiction and fantasy literature, and I'd like to keep up with the field.

This does not, however, mean that I want to buy a ton of new books. The retail price of new hardbacks keeps going up, which is a deterrent, but the main reason I don't want to buy a lot of new books is because my house is already packed to the rafters with stuff, material that I have been slowly trying to prune down. I don't need a lot of new volumes filling in the space.

In the past what I have done has been to get books both old and new thru my local library. My town library is linked not only with all the other libraries in the state, but also with a vast network of libraries across the New England area, and even the whole nation thru an intra-library loan program.

This means that if I want a new title, or even an obscure out of print book, I can usually get it thru my local library.

This has worked very well, up until the present time. Things seem to have changed, as in the system seems to have completely ground to a halt as of the 2024 winter season.

From early October thru February I have requested maybe a dozen different books from the library, mostly new stf, and have only received one title back.

What is going on here? It seems remarkable to me that no libraries in the state, or even in the entire New England area have bothered to stock any of the newly released science fiction and fantasy books.

I can't figure it out. Either library budgets have suddenly gotten much tighter, or else the buyers at every single library in the entire region have suddenly decided not to bother with science fiction or fantasy any more.

If there was a huge influx of new, important mainstream titles being published all at once this might make sense, but I haven't noticed anything unusual or spectacular in the mundane world of literature making headlines, or anything else that might cause this kind of library drought of science fiction and fantasy material.

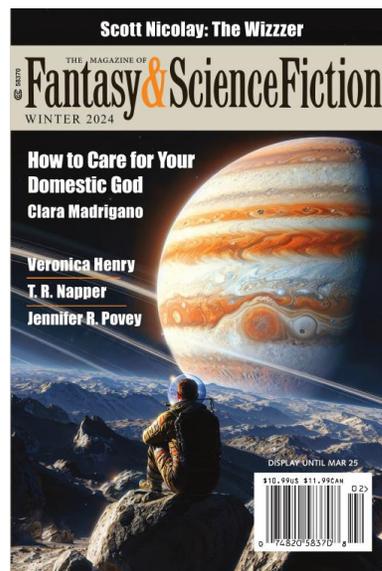
I don't know what gives. I am going to try it again this coming week. Maybe things will be better. I hope so. Updates on the situation next issue.

#### MORE UNSETTLING NEWS ON THE SF FRONT

As word has come down that as of the end of February the three major pro SF/Fantasy magazines have all been sold to a brand new owner. Analog, Asimov's, previously owned by Penny Press, along with The Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction, previously owned by Gordon Van Gelder, have all been bought by Steven Salpeter, under the corporate entity of 1 Paragraph Books. 1 Paragraph was incorporated in Florida on 16 January 2025. Mr. Salpeter is the chief operations officer of Must Read Books Publishing which holds 1 Paragraph as a sub-entity. Must Read Books includes several other investors who are only indirectly involved with the management of the publishing company's titles and assets.

In addition, a week or so later 1 Paragraph also purchased Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine and Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine from Penny Press.

Mr. Salpeter has said he purchased the science fiction magazines because he is a big fan of stf, and intends to keep the titles going as print ventures with no changes in editorships.



In my opinion the main problem the new owner(s) will have in keeping those magazines going as print entities is finding some way to cure their distribution problems.

I try to buy the science fiction mags whenever I see them on a retail magazine rack, but frankly, I don't see them very often anywhere. They are displayed in major chain book stores like Barnes & Noble, but hardly anyplace else. Circulation figures seem to indicate that subscription sales account for a considerable portion of the current circulation, and a substantial part of each magazine's profit margin.

That said, it is very difficult to garner new subscribers unless potential customers can sample a few issues to decide whether they like the title enuf to want to subscribe, and if there is low or very spotty newsstand distribution then the pool of potential customer will vanish.

I personally have given up subscribing to those mags due to my experiences a few years back when my sub copies almost always arrived in badly battered, and sometimes almost totally trashed condition after traveling thru the US Mail system.

In olden days magazines like Analog wrapped their subscription copies in a form fitting kraft paper wrapper that protected the issues from the horrors of bulk mail handling, but that idea went out the window sometime in the late 1970s. From then to now the mags just slap a mailing label on the front cover, shove the copies into the mail and hope for the best. The best rarely happens, at least in my experience.

Except for F&SF all of the other magazines, including the detective/mystery titles have been relatively stable in recent years, altho most have been trying to deal with slowly eroding readership levels.

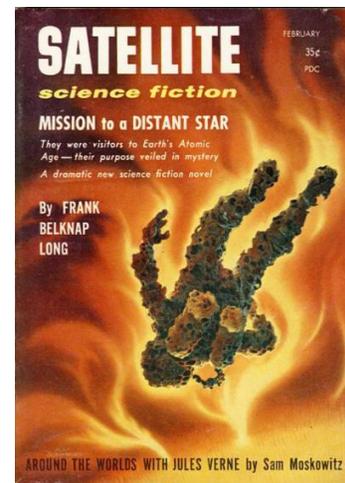
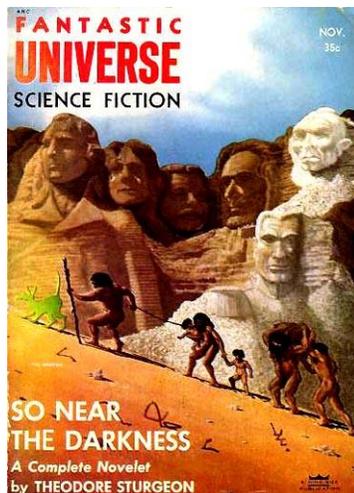
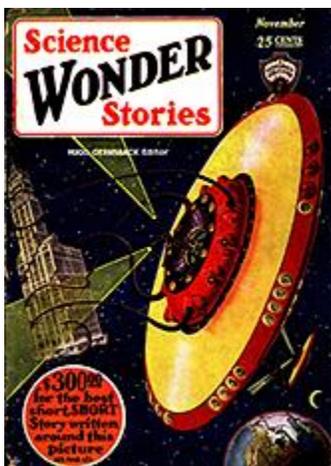
F&SF has been in serious trouble for a long time now. They stopped accepting submissions back in 2023, adjusted their acceptance payment rates at the same time, and have been putting out issues on a highly irregular schedule, even tho the schedule was officially declared to be "quarterly". After a gap of many months their most recent issue was dated Winter 2024. The sales of this title to new owners may be its only chance of survival.

What will it mean for the future? Your guess is as good as mine. I grew up in the era where science fiction magazines were the core of the entire genre. If you didn't read the mags you just weren't in the hobby, it was that simple. The sales penetration of science fiction magazines has been declining at a steady rate for the past thirty years, and the advent of e-publishing has not done much to revive the format.

If the magazines fail, then it means that a primary source of science fiction creativity will go with them. Robert Bloch once declared that the loss of theme specialty magazines was being taken up by original material paperback book anthologies, but that concept was only viable for a few years in the 1980s, and now seems to have mostly gone away.

There are many concepts and unique ideas that cannot be sustained in a novel length format. My personal opinion has always been that the ideal format for science fiction and fantasy was the novelette, room enuf to explore ideas and characters, short enuf to avoid needless padding that overshoots the set-up.

If the magazines die, what will become of short fantastic fiction? It does not look like a promising future to me.



# SHE'S HOT – BUT IS SHE HUMAN?

*Being a discussion of inter-species sex, with reference to science fiction and fantasy examples, or; ZAP! It's a Barbi-Wookiee!*

by **David M. Shea**

There is a separate fandom, which overlaps somewhat with SF fandom (all these borders are vague), called “furry fandom”; which concerns itself with drawing, costuming, and presumably writing about non-human species portrayed *as if* they are human. Regular readers of my late fanzine **Twink** will doubtless recall the work of Toronto fan artist Taral Wayne, whose drawings graced the covers of #14, #20, #29, and also the computer-literate centauress whose likeness topped the fanzine review column for many issues.

Skipping briefly to the now discontinued weekly **City Paper** of Baltimore, which despite a high degree of commercial success still styled itself as an “alternative” or counter-culture journal. It was Very New Aesthetic, very eager to demonstrate its contempt for anything traditional, and to praise anything new, regardless of merit. The newspaper featured a regular and highly explicit sex-advice column titled “Savage Love”. The writer thereof was non-judgmental. Almost the only thing he disapproved of was the sexual exploitation of children.

At one point a couple of columns were devoted to “furry sex”, which is about people who like to have sex while wearing an animal costume, or while their partner is wearing such a costume.

In short, some folks get off on screwing someone/something who is fantasizing as being other than human. Moreover, this is not an unusual fantasy: note the **Playboy** “bunnies”; the sexual archetype for a generation of American males in the 1950s/1960s. Or consider “Catwoman” in the Batman comic mythos. Or even the live-action film of “Josie and the Pussycats: -- the sexual metaphor there is almost too blatant. Or consider the live action film of “Cats”, with Taylor Swift dancing in a skin-tight feline costume, You can't tell me that was not intended to be sexually evocative.

By a not too circuitous route we have arrived at a clearly science-fictional trope: inter-species sex. What better place to begin than with Tolkien, who chose not discuss sex openly, but was too honest to deny its consequences.

Elves are immortal, or effectively so. Why? Do not look to Tolkien for any answer beyond: “Because God made them that way.” Nevertheless it's apparent on that basis alone that Elves cannot be strictly human; they are certainly not *homo sapiens* as we understand the term. But equally clearly they must be members of the same genus.

The first documented case of inter-species sex in Tolkien is found in “The Silmarillion” involving Beren and Luthien. The author makes it clear that the two species are not only capable of sex, but amphibiotic: capable of producing fertile offspring. Elrond is a direct descendant of the Beren/Lithien relationship. That's perfectly sound biology, well demonstrated in the genius *Casis*. Dogs can successfully mate with gray wolves, the small red wolves with coyotes, and etc. Jack London wrote whole books about that sort of thing (“Call of the Wild” being the most prominent example).

In the Beren/Luthien case we had human male/elvish female, with the immortality strain apparently gender-linked through the female DNA. Tho Tolkien does not clearly state it, there must have been other crossovers: Legolas recognizes the Prince of Dol Amroth as having elvish blood, and bows to him (and Legolas is practically a prince himself). It seems a plausible speculation that perhaps this lineage comes among mortal men through an elvish male/human female cross, or more than one such case.

The case of Aragorn and Arwen comes in rather after the fact, as far as the story goes. Arwen as the daughter of Elrond is also descended from Luthien and Beren. And she voluntarily gives up her long elvish life to marry a mortal (If---SPOILER ALERT---you have not read the detailed appendices at the end of “Return of

the King”. when Aragorn dies many years later, Arwen goes alone to abandoned Lorien and there gives up her life.)

Perhaps it would be as well not even to pursue the subject of dwarves, hobbits, or their respective sexual involvements; tho it does not seem too far-fetched to view both races as, again, different species within the closely related genus *homo*. I don’t doubt that someone, somewhere, has written gay/slash fiction about the friendship of Legolas and Gimli.

Tolkien grew up and lived most of his life in a society much more segregated by gender than is the case today. Most of his personal and professional friendships would have been with men, all or nearly all of his colleagues and students were men. Certainly he would have been entirely comfortable with the notion of a lifelong friendship between two males, without imputing a sexual element to it.

Human taxonomy is a little unusual in that we occupy a genus *homo* comprising only one extant species; our nearest collateral *h. nesanderthalensis*, having died out a long time ago. Of course the human genome is highly plastic; African pygmies, Vietnamese *ontagards*, Norwegians, and the freak show of WWF wrestling are all one.

In fact, modern genetic testing has identified traces of Neanderthal DNA in some modern populations; which makes clear that *H. sapiens* did interact sexually with Neanderthals. Which way? Probably both ways; i.e. sapiens male with Neanderthal females, and vice versa. Whether this ever proceeded beyond a little casual rape, to anything like a semi-serious pair bonding as we would use the term is impossible to tell.

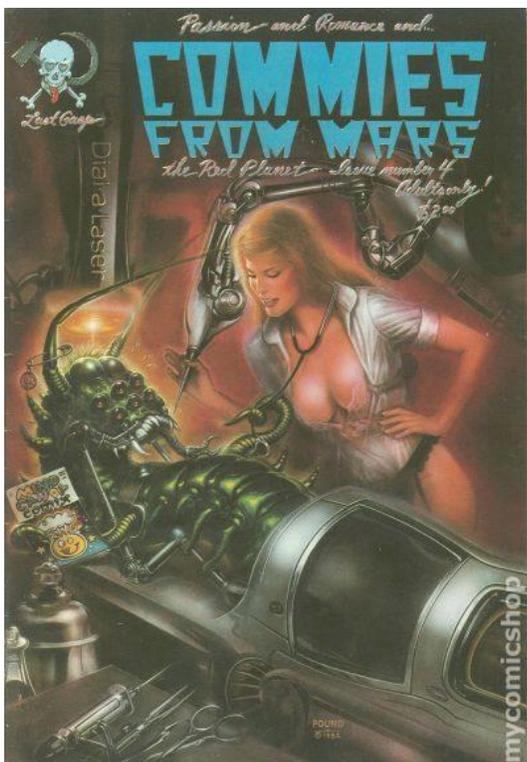
As this discussion moves from the fantastical to the merely science fictional, it may be well to keep in mind some troubling points: first, that any “alien” species interfertile with *H. sapiens* pretty much has to be defined as human, a closely related species in the same genus. Second, where this leaves us with respect to paleoanthropology, which appears to show humans originated on Terra, remains to be seen. As a corollary, how do you explain highly similar species on separate planets? Parallel evolution? Theoreticians advance apparently plausible arguments as to why the hominid firm is advantageous for intelligence: upright stance, forelimbs adapted for manipulation, binocular vision, and so forth. But the planetologists had all sorts of good

reasons for why every planetary system ought to be like ours; small rocket planets inside, gas giants far outside (see Heinlein’s “Time For the Stars”)—and that has proved not to be the case. I suggest an open mind.

In the various Ekumen stories, Ursula K. LeGuin solved the first problem (at the expense of avoiding the paleoanthpology question), by stipulating that all of her peoples---the Hainish, the Cetians, the Terrans, even the bisexual Gethenians---were all humans, having been “seeded” across this section of the galaxy a few million years ago from a common ancestral stock. Miller & Lee have similarly indicated that their Liadens are human, and interfertile with the Terran kind, having only such superficial differences as distinguish you and I from Koreans or Masai. The People of the Zenna Henderson stories don’t even have that much difference, being interfertile (see Peter and Bethie in “Gilead”) and indistinguishable from white Americans. Why this should be so, if one were able to ask the late Ms Henderson, one would probably get no further than divine will.

Superman and Lois Lane (Clark Kent by definition not *h. sapiens*) pose a different question that the comic books never bother to even consider. Robert Heinlein also pretty much ignored the topic altogether, except at the end of “Glory Road”, where Oscar admits having been attracted to a girl who had soft plushy fur all over, “like a chinchilla”. But she was probably “human” within our flexible definition---certainly Lordo Doral and his household are.

When Oscar semi-reluctantly agrees to boink as many Doral females as he can manage, Star tells him that he will probably leave children there. As we don’t know what happens after the end of the story, when



Oscar sets out again on the Glory Road, we don't know if he ever returned to House Dorai to follow up on the question.

In Alan Dean Foster's "Icerigger" (1974) and the sequel "Mission to Moulokin" (1979), the felineoid Tran princess Elfa is openly sexually curious about the human, Ethan. And at least occasionally he fantasized about her, tho they never actually get it on.

Anne McCaffrey likewise avoided the subject, except in the early soft-porn "The Thorns of Barevi" which involved a human female with a humanoid Catteni male. Many years later she used that as a sketch on which to construct the novel "Freedom's Landing", which has since expanded into a lengthy series. I have read only the first book, so I don't know if the fertility question has been addressed in a later volume.

Asimov chose to confine himself merely to humans and robots. He did have humans interacting sexually with robots, most obviously in "The Robots of Dawn", but that hardly counts as the same thing.

The Darkover series stories of Marion Zimmer Bradley featured humans mating with the hermaphrodite chieri, most notably in "Darkover Landfall"; human female with a chieri functioning as a male. In "The World Wreckers" it was the other way round. But there are hints all thru the series that certain characteristics, notably the psychic talents of *laran* and the hexadactyl, six-fingered hands, came into the Darkovan gene pool from the chieri. Oddly, this interbreeding is generally fertile---but generations later some recombination of genes results in asexual persons; *emmasca*, who never achieve sexual maturity. This trait does occur, rarely, in *H. sapiens*.

In fact, the six-fingered hands and six-toed feet have been identified as a mutation in some isolated human populations. There is no evidence to suggest that it is of extra-terrestrial origin.

In the non-series book "Hunters of the Red Moon", Bradley's Terran hero managed variously to get it on with two different extraterrestrial females, tho both of those appear effectively human and would cause little comment in most public places in the United States. The fertility aspect is not addressed.

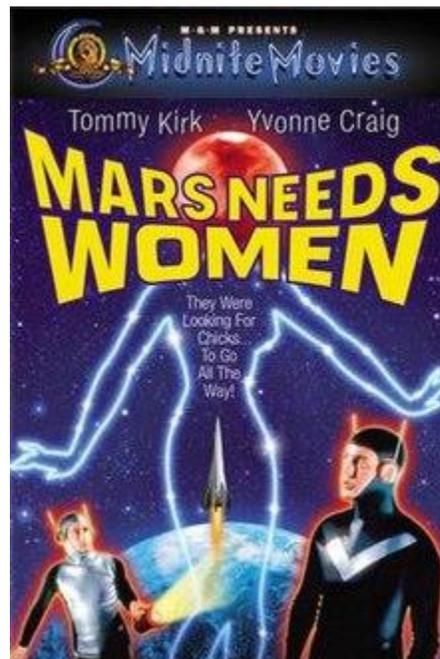
One SF writer who had dealt with the subject from the very beginning of her career is C.J. Cherryh. It was evident in her first novel "Gates of Ivrel" and thru most of the remaining books of the Morgaine cycle. Worlds are limned by Gates, which span space and time. Technology is cited as the explanation behind the Gates, tho it reads very much like magic in the context of the stories themselves. In the novels Morgaine is destined to close the Gates. She is, or at least appears to be, of the humanoid ghalur, a race at least occasionally interfertile with humans. The relationship of ghalur with humans varies from place to place.

A stranger case is seen in the author's "Brothers of Earth". Humans have come before to the world of the Nemet, and so it is known by experience that the two races cannot interbreed. But Kurt Morgan, alone and lost and with no hope of finding his own world again, chooses to be nemet, (a recurring theme in Cherryh's work). Oddly, the fertility issue is dealt with in nemet custom. The producing of heirs is so important that if a husband is incapable of fathering any, then it is discussed (calmly, over tea), and a suitable substitute is chosen; with the whole situation being written into the marriage contract before witnesses.

In Cherryh's "The Faded Sun", there is insufficient evidence to consider fertility between humans and mri, Kel Ducan being the only apparent test case. On the first occasion that he has the opportunity to be with a mri woman, he elects not to, altho the kath'ain was willing, even curious. A similar case is seen in the more recent Foreigner series, where the human Bren is sleeping with his atevi bodyguard. The atevi appear disturbingly humanoid, except for their greater stature, but are 'hardwired; differently---which may or may not be intended to suggest enuf difference between the DNA of the two races to prevent interbreeding.

Off topic, but a most unusual and interesting tho non-sexual pattern may be seen in the obscure Cherryh novel "Wave Without A Shore", in which two sentient species share a planet while studiously ignoring the existence of each other. Humans who commit the unforgivable social offense of seeing ahnit, who wander freely in the human city, are likewise conventried.

A Bertram Chandler apparently borrowed the idea of the underpeople from Cordwainer Smith (see "The Dead Lady of Clown Town). Smith may have been inspired in turn by H.G. Wells' "The Island of Doctor Moreau". In Chandler's "The Wild Ones", the very last John



Grimes novel, completed shortly before the author's death in 1984; Grimes repeatedly has sex with both Sheri and Darleen, who, despite being legally classed as human, are the product of bioengineering from kangaroo ancestry.

One further obvious example would be the relationship between humans and the centauroid Titanides in John Varley's Gaea Trilogy, especially the love between Chris and Valiha in "Wizard". But this is a special instance and the Titanides were deliberately engineered to be sexual compatible with humans. The whole elaboration of Titanide sex-and-fertility issue is clearly a case of Gaea (Varley) showing off her/Varley's cleverness.

Humans have an amazing talent for choosing up sides and killing one another over the slightest pretext; not merely across racial/ethnic lines, but even within closely related ethnic groups. The difference between Tutsi and Huto, between Serb and Croatian, between Irish Catholic and Irish Protestant, is virtually indistinguishable to any otherwise observer, yet these miniscule distinctions are made the basis of lethal hatreds spanning generations. There is overwhelming societal and religious pressure to mate within your own "tribe".

And yet, some people don't. Some people choose sexual partners outside their own group. Sometimes this involves a mere temporary sexual liaison, yet often, in the face of every disapproval society can offer (literally murderous disapproval), in many countries, people marry someone "different". I read somewhere that young third and fourth generations of Japanese ancestry marry outside the Japanese-American community by more than half, with a third marrying people who are not Asian at all. Many fair, blue-eyed Americans proudly declare some tiny fraction of Native American heritage.

Annette Gordon-Reed who wrote the book about the Thomas Jefferson/Sally Hemings relationship said the reaction to the book surprised her. It was not so much the number of people who believed the story; rather, she said, she was struck by the number of people, black and white, who wanted to believe it; who saw it as a touching tale of true forbidden romance, a marriage in all but name. That's obviously presentism; a revisionist view of history thru the lens of our current beliefs. Still, it represents a sea change in how "other" out-group sexual relationships are viewed, at least in the United States.

So far, despite the ranting of saucer-ite cranks, humanity has not had to face dealing with another, or several other, sentient species. When and if that situation actually comes to pass, there will be a horde of new problems that *H. sapiens* will have to address. Many of these problems will be technological, linguistic, even philosophical or religious. If the Others are anything like us (read: more or less humanoid)—and possibly even if they are not--the question of inter-special sex may have to be addressed. It's not too soon to start considering our options now.



**The Secret History** (133)  
of  
**FORGOTTEN SUPERHEROES**  
*The Incomplete Collectors card set*

## Utensilman

After having been kicked out of cooking school for "the inappropriate usage of condiments", Ulysses Van Ulee was taken in as apprentice to the ancient master chef "Cliff", and taught the fighting technique of "Deadly Dining". Recurring villains were evil food critics, evil health inspectors, and evil people just-out-for-a-nice-dinner-but-a-bit-too-picky-about-the-meal, causing several comic historians to wonder about the background of the uncredited writer. (The Food Network expressed interest in making an animated show based around the character, but nothing has been seen of that, though they did issue a nice tie-in with the publication of a book of recipes with new art.

*"The Unusual Utensilman" #1 - 64 (1953 - 1958)*  
*"The Ultimate U" (1982) 1-shot graphic novel reboot*  
*"U and You In the Kitchen" (1999) recipe book*

# Total Confusion 39/2025 report

By  
Louis J. Desy Jr.

The Total Confusion game convention took place February 20 to February 23, 2025 at the Royal Trade Plaza/Best Western hotel in Marlborough, MA. This report is in three parts: I. History Back in the Day' 1980s; part II. Recent Past (1987 to late 2000s) – Is Total Confusion still around? part III Current Day – Total Confusion 38/2024 and 39/2025. Note that there are a number of asides that will be part of this article, since my motivation is to 'get it all down in writing' so it gets persevered in some kind of written format. I hope that decades from now someone like me will come across this article in some online archive and think 'wow, that was a great time to be alive, I wished I was alive back then and could have been part of it all!' Whenever I run into people now-a-days I tell them 'get it down in writing or make a podcast. We need to get this all recorded while most of us are still around to record what happened in the early days of role playing and wargaming.'"

## **Part I. History - 'Back in the Day' up to March 1987**

First a little history: The predecessor to Total Confusion was a game convention call 'MASS CONFUSION' that was held twice way back in 1984. It was organized by Robert Jennings, editor of this fanzine, and had many area gamers contribute to the running of said convention. It only ran for a few times because after all of the work of running it the staff was exhausted and decided against organizing or running another event.

After that Paul Howley, the owner of That's Entertainment, a Worcester, MA comic book store, decided that 'he too wanted to run a convention' hence he took the steps necessary for the running of said convention, mainly by renting space at the Yankee Drummer Inn that was in Auburn, MA at the intersection of RT-12 and RT-20.

But there was a big problem. The main idea for Total Confusion was to have a convention that local people in Worcester would be able to attend for little money. As such it was envisioned that the convention site would be on the local RTA system so students who did not have a driver's license could take a bus to the convention, and since it was local

they would not need to rent a hotel room, which would have been the case if they went to a major game convention like Origins or Gencon.

It was also planned to be held on the weekend after President's day in February since that week is typically school vacation so students would have the days off and be able to attend with no issues about missing school. It was also envisioned that there would be fast food places nearby so food would be low cost for attendees. Unfortunately, the Auburn site had NONE of those qualities.

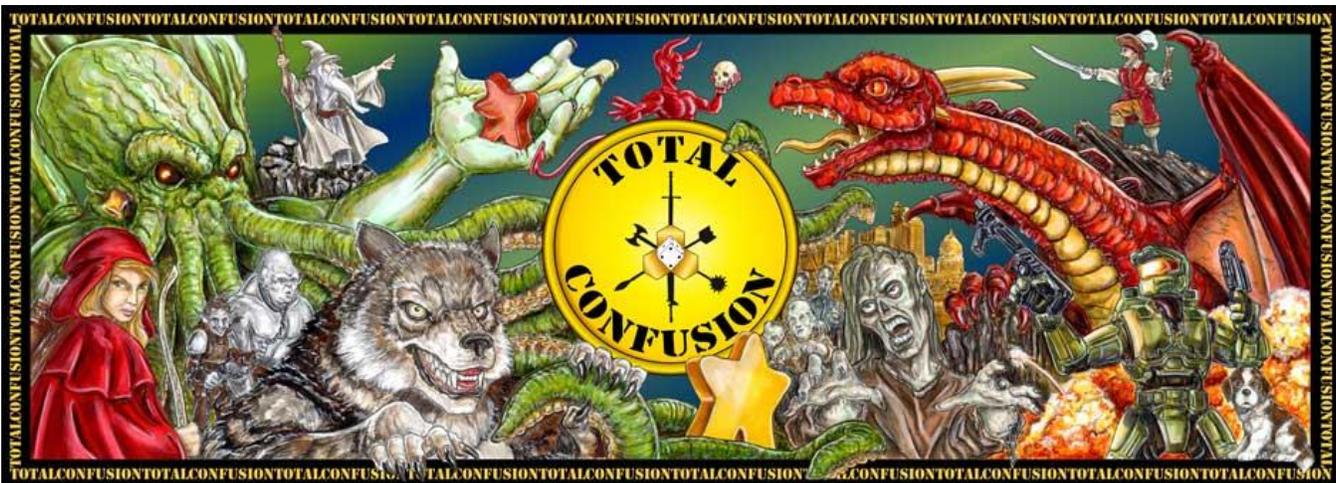
After renting the space in Auburn, almost nothing was done to organize the convention for many, many months, so my friend, Alan Chiras, got Paul Howley to allow him to 'take over' the running of the convention as long as costs did not rise beyond what had already been put out for the convention. It was agreed that Alan could run things as long as it did not cause any losses for the convention (or for Paul Howley) in the months leading up to the event.

Alan got seven vendors to sign up to exhibit at the con plus he organized a mailing list and flyers to be passed out for registration. Being Alan's friend, I helped where I could.

More time passed. In the summer and fall of 1986 we collected contact info on index cards from local game and comic book stores and such. I was given the task of preparing mailing labels for the flyers from these index cards.

On the Tuesday before Thanksgiving 1986; November 25, 1986; Alan called me to ask if the mailing labels were ready yet and even though I had had them for weeks I had done nothing, so I had to tell Alan nothing was ready. Of course, Alan was not happy and 'bawled me out' for not doing anything, so I closed the door to my office at ES Data in Billerica, MA and spent all morning setting up a contact/mail list database on my Tandy 1000 in a programming language called FilePro and printing out the mailing list onto mailing labels with my DMP-130 Radio Shack printer.

Since this day was a company half day, I left the office in Billerica at noon and Alan had his mailing labels that afternoon. The flyers were mailed out to everyone before Thanksgiving. As I recall there were a bit more than 300 labels in this print run. But at least people could register, and registration



money started coming in during November and December 1986. Total Confusion #1 was held March 13 to March 15, 1987.

Here is a short history taken from the convention web site at [www.totalcon.com](http://www.totalcon.com):

"Total Confusion has over thirty years of experience bringing great gaming moments to players in the New England area and beyond. TotalCon is always held the weekend after Presidents Day in February for 4 days ( Thu - Sun ). It was started in 1987 at the Yankee Drummer in Auburn, MA by Wes Carpentier, who still attends TotalCon each year and is a permanent VIP at the convention.

In 1988, Total Confusion was held at Clark University in Worcester, MA followed by two years at the Sheraton Hotel in Worcester. As the convention grew, it moved to the Royal Plaza in Marlborough, MA. From 1997 until 2002 the convention was held at the Ramada Rolling Green in Andover, MA. Since 2003, Total Confusion has been held at the Holiday Inn in Mansfield, MA. In 2017 Total Confusion moved back to the Royal Plaza in Marlborough. In 2019 Total Confusion hosted its largest ever gathering of gamers."

Note: the illo on the next page is an ORIGINAL FLYER from the first total Confusion handed out by Roger Anderson of Music Quest Comic book store in Worcester, MA

Interesting story about the original flyer. My friend David Cappabianca, sent this to me in 2023. Apparently, he somehow saved an ORIGINAL flyer that was handed out to customers by Roger Anderson

from his comic book store. (Note top center of the flyer page the Music Quest store stamp in red.) Since David knew I was interested in such things, especially since Roger was a friend for about a decade, he knew I would love to have something like this. He framed it and mailed it to me in 2023 where it now sits in my room as a reminder of an era 'where things were happening and it seemed like stuff was getting done in gaming, computers and the world all the time.'

To me, back then, it seemed like that time period when something innovative, exciting, different, things with wide mass appeal was happening in the world of gaming all the time would never end. Yet time marches on, and things did change.

One of the shocking things for me today, is that the Yankee Drummer Inn in Auburn is no more. The entire motel was torn down and the site is just a parking lot now, and where the building was is now a concrete pad.

Months ago as an impromptu memorial to Total Confusion 1, I put a solar powered LED light in the place where I thought the basement 'theater' would have been, the place where Alan Chiras did a presentation to attendees and staff back on Saturday, March 14, 1987, but someone has since removed it.

Each year on these dates, March 13 to March 15, I like to go out there and remember what was going on at that time in 1987. Seems strange to be able to have such a perspective on things. Sometimes it seems I am one of the last gamers left from that era. Some of the people involved in the first Total Confusion are still around, while others have since passed on.

Gary Defore - passed away June 28, 2021; I am sure he was there for Total Confusion 1 in 1987.

He played in a Russian Campaign tournament that we ran for the convention

Richard Willey - passed away October 7, 2024. I am sure he was there for Total Con 1 in 1987; He also played in the Russian Campaign tournament that we ran for the convention.

Patrick Flory - Passed away June 4, 2022; He ran The Citadel Game Store in Groton, CT. At this point in 1987 the store had been moved from its original location at 177 Bridge St to The New London Shopping Center and was at the end, nearest to the street in an unusual, trapezoid shaped space in the strip mall; Interesting story, in the same mall was a Radio Shack a few doors down, One time the Radio Shack manager came over and thanked Pat for being there because apparently a number of Pat's customers wanted to play the computer wargames that he had in stock, so they would then go to this Radio Shack and purchase a computer to be able to play those games.

Alan Chiras - Now lives in Key West Florida; was a key person in getting Total Con 1 running but in later years there was a power struggle for the convention and Alan got 'pushed out'; Since I was a friend of Alan's I didn't do any more work for the convention after the two years at the Sheraton Lincoln in the early 1990s. After that happened and in the 2000s very little was heard about Total Confusion. Most of us in the gaming community thought it had stopped running, but starting last year I made an effort to find out what was going on and decided to help wherever I could.

Me - Still in the area and doing whatever I can to ensure Total Confusion continues on into the future. Back for the first few conventions in 1987 or so, I distinctly recall handling the photocopying of about 1,000 pages of RPG modules at the Staples over at Lincoln plaza un Worcester. It cost me about \$50 to do so. Today most people have the used of a high speed copier at work, BUT, 'back in the day' such machines were expensive, so unless one worked at a large company where such machine were; one usually had to go to a print

shop and pay \$0.05 or \$0.10 per black and white copy for the material.

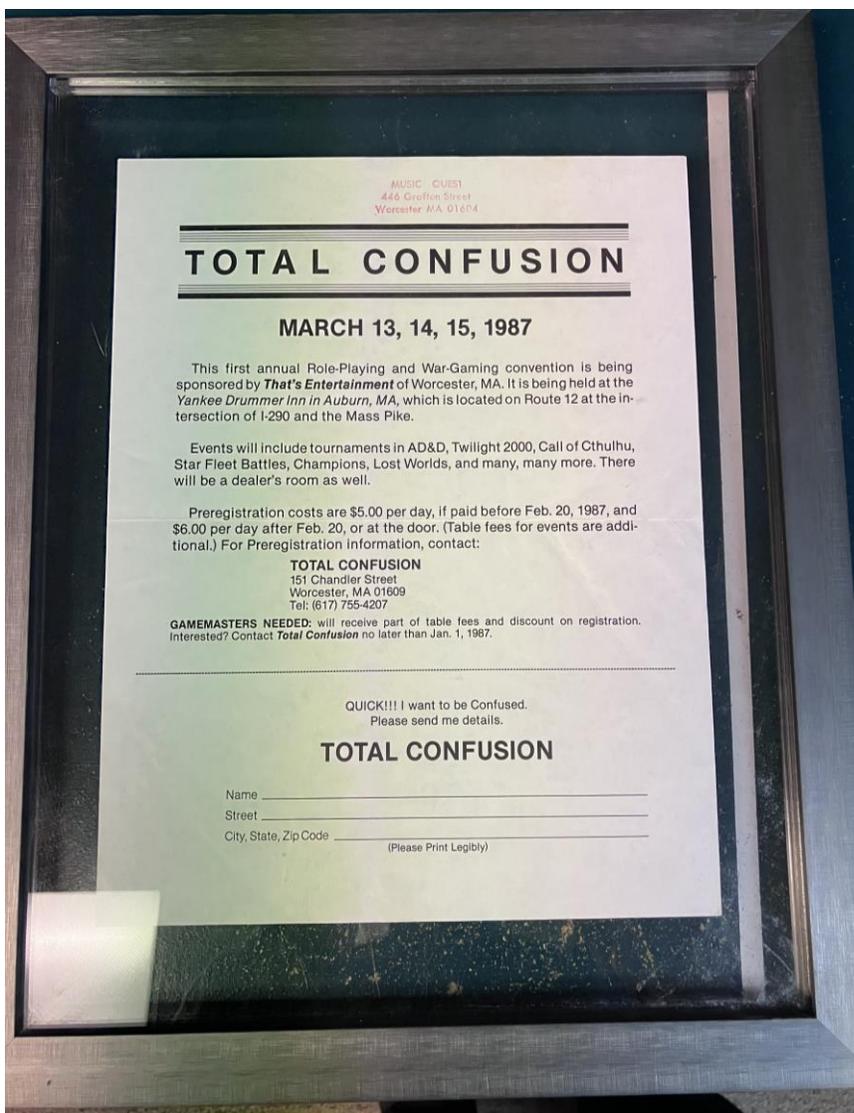
Conrad From - used to live in Worcester, unknown what his current status is or where he is, BUT he was an attendee of at a number of early Total Confusion conventions.

David Union – still lives in the area but does not attend Total Confusion anymore.

Charles Staples – May be in area but seems to be out of gaming.

Mike Chambers – He lives in Maine now and still attends the convention. I saw him at Total Confusion 39/2025.

Greg Belevick - From the WPI war gaming group back in the late 1970s or so, he graduated WPI in 1980 and I lost contact, but he still attends Total Confusion; I meet him last year at Total Confusion and he remembered me from 'back in the day' plus he recalls a number of other people within our old gaming group. It was great talking with him especially since he knows and was part of a lot of the



history from back then.

Paul Kenney - Good and well know Dungeon Master and dungeon module writer, one of the authors of the well known Dr. Demento Dungeons. (Mass Confusion had the Dr. Demento Dungeon; the next Mass Confusion had the Condo of Dr. Demento. Roger Anderson was working on 'The House of Dr Demento in 1988 after Paul passed away in April 1987.

Tragically passed away from a sudden heart attack while visiting Roger at Music Quest. Paul had decided to walk down to the CVS at Rice Square to get some snacks, went out the door took a right and then almost in front of Roger's store keeled over from a massive heart attack right on the sidewalk. While an ambulance was called, it was too late. He was gone.

Roger Anderson – died unexpectedly in his sleep on November 9, 2012. He was the proprietor of the Music Quest, a music and comic book shop in Worcester, MA at 446 Grafton Street that was open for about 35 years, from 1977 to 2012. He judged the miniatures painting contests at Mass Confusion and first few Total Confusions. I think he may have had a dealer table at Total Con 1 also in 1987. Wrote some of the RPG Modules played at both.

People interested in said modules MAY be able to still buy copies of them from Nobel Knight Games where there is a open inventory slot in their listings. Apparently after all this time original print copies of these modules are considered 'collectibles' within the RPG industry. I myself have a few and cherish them. There is one seller on eBay that makes photocopies and sells them for big bucks without disclosing that they are copies, and not originals. Buyers, I suspect, are more interested in getting a copy of the modules to read or play and do not really care they are not originals from the 1984 print run.

Jesmyn Desi – my sister, who attended a few of the early Total Confusions with me. Amusing Story, one of the early Total Confusions Jessie and her Friend Christine Carelli worked at Roger's table at Total Confusion held at Clark University so he could open his store and take a little break. When Roger returned, Jessie and Christine played a small practical joke on Roger. Initially when Roger returned they turned over about a hundred dollars in sales to him. While not terrible, this amount of revenue for several hours was not great either, However, A little later they turned over the entire amount which was in the range of several hundred dollars. Roger was both shocked and pleased that

sales had gone so well and had not been expecting anything like that amount for the entire convention.

Robert Shear - a.k.a. Weird Bob (WB), best friend of Roger Anderson and Steven Wentzel. Passed away February 15, 1998. Today the cemetery plots of Roger and WB are only 105 ft apart. Strange how we, Roger and I, used to visit WB's plot every Memorial Day and spend a few minutes there after Roger visited his family plots just a few hundred yards to the east of WB. Now that Roger is gone, his plot is about half way between both sets of plots. Every holiday I got out there and pour out a drink for both of them and reflect how strange things have turned out. If someone had told me years ago that I would be standing next to Roger's cemetery plot someday on a Christmas afternoon I would have thought the statement to be absurd, but here we are.

Steve Wentzell – Childhood friend of Roger Anderson, they lived near each other when kids, I think on the same street, Steve ran Comics, Records and Fun in Milford, MA from June 10, 1985 to October 31, 2003. The store came to an end when the landlord informed him mid 2003 that he wanted to lease the space to a car repair shop downstairs in the same building.

My sister, Jesmyn Desi worked as a cashier for him while she was in college in the late 1980s/early 1990s. One of the very nice things that Steve did for her was one year we drove to Origins since it was being held in Baltimore, MD. Steve had some wargames that were left in his store space when he took over the location in 1985 from a card shop. One of the abandoned games was Avalon Hill's Victory in the Pacific, which he gave to Jesmyn to sell at the Origins auction and use that money to help pay her trip expenses.

## **Part II. History –Recent History 1990 to 2023 -- Hey Is That Total Confusion Thing still running?**

In the 'more recent era' there was a question as to whether or not Total Confusion was still running. In 2009 while at Origins Game Convention on the Sunday I was looking at the table with convention handouts and saw a stack of Total Confusion book marks. Something seemed wrong with them but I could not put my finger on it. I took one anyways to save in my archive.

Months later, on Sunday May 24, 2010 I found out what it was. More history: Sunday, May 24, 2010 was the start of Pat Flory moving the Citadel from 537 Long Hill Rd in Gorton CT to 565 Long Hill Rd; just a few addresses down the street.

Charles Dunn picked up one of the Total Confusion books marks that Pat had one the front counter and said to me “What is wrong with this?” I felt something was wrong but did not know what. Charles said; “There are no dates or locations on this!”

Then I realized what the problem with this advertising was: anyone interested in the convention from the book mark hand outs would not know where or when said convention was being held. I think the idea was to make generic handouts so they could be used for years to come, but not having any location or dates made them virtually useless for anyone interested in the convention.

As a result of conversations like this I decided to take a ride down to Total Con to see if it was still running. Which I was able to do in 2009. I met my seminar NSDM, associate there; Carl Olsen, and we talked for a while on site and then we went to a nearby D’Angelo’s and talked for several more hours about Total Confusion and gaming in general.

While I was on site, I made mention that I had thought the convention had stopped running on a regular basis, and maybe had even gone out of business; to which a staffer of Total Confusion replied ‘Yeah, we get that a lot’. My reaction is that if people think you are gone, maybe better marketing would remind people that you are still around and in business.

My reaction to Total Confusion being in the Mansfield, MA location was that it was not good for the target audience in Worcester, MA since there was no public transportation to get someone from Worcester to Mansfield. Even with me having a car it was still a ride of over an hour to get to the site. Plus the location was in an office/industrial park, so once the weekend came nothing was open or nearby for food. Attendees were at the mercy of the hotel for food and accommodations, since the site was the only hotel in the area. Even so it seemed like there were 300 to 400 people there so the convention was doing OK.

### **Part III. History - Current Era - I Volunteer to help the convention 2024/2025 and into the future**

A few years ago, I remembered that Total Confusion was being held only 8.7 miles from where I live in Shrewsbury, MA at the Best Western Royal Trade Plaza in Marlborough, MA. So I started going over late on Sunday and ‘to see what was going on’ and getting a copy of the program book plus any other assorted leftovers from the weekend and talking with any attendee stragglers still onsite.

Plus, afterwards I would usually go out to the Worcester County Memorial Park cemetery and make the rounds of Roger Anderson, WB et al, and anyone else nearby to pay homage for the work people like Roger et al did ‘back in the day’ to help the convention run and his contributions to the organization and RPG gaming in general. This is partly a throwback how in the 2000s or so, that before I would go off to any convention I would typically stop over Roger’s house and check on him, His wife, Jing and daughter Oji to make sure they were ‘all set’ before I headed off for a few days to any convention.

Last year I decided ‘Hey I should volunteer and help out’ to ensure the convention continues to run and does well, BUT I was concerned that some of the fall out from the power struggle between some of the staff and Alan Chiras could still be a factor and I might not be welcomed back or even allowed to volunteer. As things turned out I was totally wrong on that aspect. To volunteer in 2024, I just went over late Wednesday afternoon and sought out some of the onsite staff and asked them “Do you need/want any help?”

As it turned out they were in the middle of assembling ‘gamer bags’ and welcomed help to get about 50 of them done. Gamer bags are special collectible items for the convention that people can buy in advance or convention guests are given to show gratitude for appearing at Total Confusion.

So after I helped with that task, there was the whole setting up of the prize room to be done which consisted of putting items/ games on display on tables in the prize room that attendees/volunteers could get in exchange for volunteer tokens or points awarded for winning tournaments.

As a result of showing up each day, I was given a yellow volunteer vest on Friday, the second day of the convention. There was another volunteer I made friends with, Tim Allen, who joked that we were ‘minions’ because we were dressed in a yellow vest making up look like the minion characters from the movie Minions. We also joked about how we were like minions since in the movie they usually tried to help but were usually somewhat misguided and error prone; which turned out to be true for us on several occasions.

Tim was an interesting person to talk with; apparently, he is retired military and made it to either the rank of Lieutenant Colonel or Colonel before he retired. He attended the Army war college in Carlisle, PA and did graduate from there with a master’s degree. I was very impressed. I mentioned to Tim

that I was surprised that the Army, allowed him to retire, since the fact they let him get a degree from such an institution seemed to indicate to me that the military was preparing him for some kind of higher-level position and any organization would not want to lose that kind of experience and background.

As things turned out in 2024, I found out that just about the entire organizing staff from 'back in the day' was gone with many of them not even attending the convention anymore. I was somewhat shocked to find this out, but relieved that there would not be any of the personality clashes and problems from 'back then' lasting into the current era. I was also somewhat shocked since Total Confusion is currently the LARGEST gaming convention in New England.

I got to talk a little with the current director, Steve Parenteau, and found out that he and his friends attended Total Confusion Two in 1988 and drove in from Rhode Island. Steve seems to currently have things well in hand and works as an engineer, so he has a professional background as to how things should run in an organization.

I wound up volunteering for all days of the convention Thursday, Friday, Saturday and Sunday. It was great fun. As time permitted, I told stories about Total Confusion events from 'back in the day' to ensure the stories and legends/myths continued to be remembered into the future.

### **Total Confusion 39/2025**

This year I signed up in advance and volunteered for all available shifts. It was great. I loved helping out and doing what I could for everyone and everything convention related. At the end on Sunday, we agreed that over the four days I had volunteered about 38 hours or so but since the volunteer token box only had 22 tokens left it was agreed to give me a free badge for 2026, and the director of the board gaming area suggested I see about becoming an associated member due to my 'over volunteering'.

I emailed the request to Steve and they will see when they review staffing levels if there is an opening for such a promotion. The only difference between my being a volunteer or an associate is that I would get half of a hotel room on site, which would be helpful since then I would not need to travel to or from the site each day, plus a promotion would get me closer to being allowed to 'buy in' to the convention and having a small equity interest in Total Confusion.

In the run up to Total Confusion, On Tuesday, February 19, 2025; I went out to the cemetery plots of Roger et all in Paxton to do my traditional visit as I had done 'back in the day', make the rounds and reminded myself that it was important to do well since I am one of the last few left that remember gaming from 'back in the day' and that it is up to me to carry on with things and ensure the work everyone did in the past carries on.

The plan was that late Wednesday afternoon I would go on site, get my weekend badge and then present myself to the staff for whatever they wanted or needed done.

Originally, I was scheduled to work at my job at Amazon, but mid-February I put in for a leave of absence since my right foot was hurting. A doctor's visit did find a small infection that could be causing the pain and he prescribed some stuff to put on it. Originally, I had put in for Wednesday afternoon off and took Sunday of the convention off as a personal day from Amazon, but with the foot problem potential workers comp injury Amazon 'zeroed out' my entire schedule pending receipt of a doctor's note that I am able to return to work.

However they did recently send an email stating that even though I am not currently scheduled on the A to Z app, I could just simply come to work and use the app to clock in and work. So apparently, I still have my job, but most important to me was that I was able to attend Total Confusion for all the days and not miss anything.

While people may question 'where are my priorities'--Essential Job or just playing games; I would counter 'which is more important, a once per year convention, or work that I can do at any time or replace with a similar job?' A true gamer knows the answer to such a question! How many times in the past did people think, I can't go to a convention due to a lack of time off or money to go, only to discover a few years later that the convention stopped running, or worse, that the friends they were going to go with have passed away and now one can never toss dice with them again.

In my own group I related a car ride to Origins 1991 with me, my sister, Pat Flory and Richard Willey. Pat and Richard are gone now so we will never be able to make such a car trip ever again. I can't remember what company I was working at, at the time or even if anyone knew or cared if I took a few days off to make that trip. Bt the car trip, the conversations, and the convention itself have become a favorite memory.

Wednesday evening on February 19, 2025 the registration table opened and there was a small line as people got their badges and tickets so they would be all set for 8am Thursday games. While I was out front, I got my badge, but there were problems finding it in the stacks of badges, so the staff had to reprint it again. One has to present an ID to get their badge in order to avoid the problem of anyone just walking up to the table, looking over the stacks of badges and just reading a name off the top badge to get a badge for the weekend. One of my volunteering tasks that evening was to sort the piles of badges into last name alphabetical order. Apparently, when the badges are printed, they print in order of registration, not in last name sequence.

Unofficially I was told there were 800 or so preregistrations BUT I did note that there was one badge in the low 1300s so I think Total Confusion had over 1,000 people all weekend. I also noted from the fullness of the parking lot that convention attendance did seem to be following the typical convention ramp up where if Thursday, Day 1 is 100%, Friday would be 150% Saturday 200% and Sunday back down to 100% as everyone leaves by mid-day, especially the people who traveled to the area from other states.

Thursday, February 20, 2025 I was on site at 7:05am, so I got off to a good start for the day. All was well. I was working at the board game library table helping people check out games from the convention library.

At one point it would have been helpful to have another chrome book workstation for all the volunteers to be checking games in or out, since a few times the workstations seemed to freeze up. During one of those occasions I pulled out my iPhone and did an internet test and it showed 10mps up and down for internet speed, so I think the problem is that the chrome books were all on a slow CPU, an Intel Celeron. I think a faster computer would not have those problems. We can see for next year if a chrome book with an Intel Icore 3 keeps working while the slower computers are frozen.

All was going well Thursday and then late afternoon my friend Kraig started blowing up my phone about needing a ride to an urgent care hospital because he stepped on some glass in his bare feet a few days ago and an infection had started. I initially threw a fit with 'look this is a once per year event, this has been going on for days and NOW you need a ride? Why didn't you say or do something earlier when I had nothing going on. It's like you somehow

knew and were waiting for me to be doing other things!'

At the time I had been tasked with helping the Total Confusion Flea market. The way that works is that people bring in games for sale, register them with the table, and put them out with a short description plus a 6pm and 8pm price. The line forms at 5:30pm and people are let in to browse. If someone wants to buy something they pick it up, bring it to the front table, pay CASH for it, and it is theirs. There are two prices; a 6pm and an 8pm price. At the start, the 6pm prices are in effect. At 7:45pm everyone is kicked out of the room, and the line reforms for 8pm. Then everything sells for the 8pm price which is lower than the 6pm price.

One interesting moment occurred when an attendee saw a copy of GDW's Twilight 2000 for sale and recalled how it was one of his first RPG games when he had first started gaming. I thought he was going to buy it, but for some reason he did not. Since it was now about 7pm and things seemed somewhat quiet with the flea market and there was sufficient staff there, I slipped out for a few hours and gave Kraig a ride to the doctor and then returned to the site about 9pm or so.

At that time things were winding down and I was tasked with starting the inventory process for the flea market lots. This is where an 'inventory' sheet for each lot was printed out and I had to verify that the unsold games on the list were still there. I did this for a number of lots and things checked out except for the last lot, which had problems. However, the people on the workstation remembered that there were all kinds of problems entering those items into the system originally, and it turned out that the seller was happy with his payout from the flea market anyway.

I left the site about 10pm or so after the flea market inventory was done and nothing else seemed to be going on. On the way out I thought I saw Eric Tenkar at the hotel bar but did not stop since I wanted to get home and get to sleep, plus I was not entirely sure it was him. Eric Tenkar runs a You Tube channel called Tenkars Tavern where he reports on items of interest to OSR RPG gaming and such.

He also reported on my lawsuit against Ken Whitman back in 2018 about unfilled Kickstarter projects. Whitman did 6 projects, took in about \$170,000 or so and never delivered on anything.

One of the small things I did to help out at times is that I would notice an unused hotel luggage cart, so I would bring it back out to the lobby, since there only seemed to be a total of five carts in the

place. At times they were all in use and people had a tendency to leave them wherever they finished used a cart instead of returning it to the lobby area.

Friday, February 21, 2025 – I was a little late getting onsite and did not make it there until almost noon. The staff was ok with that, so I went to the game area and to work checking games in and out of the library all day. It looked like attendance was around 600 or so with the large ball room filled with gamers plus a few side rooms filled with vendors. (Vendor areas do not open until Friday, so this was the first day of Total Con 39 for vendors on site and selling.) Once in a while I made a circuit of the entire plaza to see if anyone needed help with anything but things were running well.

On the way out at 10:00pm I again noticed someone who looked like Eric Tenkar was at the hotel bar with his wife so I stopped and discovered it

really was Eric Tenkar. We talked for a while and then I went home for the night.

Saturday, February 22, 2025 – On site at 10:40am, went to the board game area and went to work checking in and out games. The place was jammed, the parking lot totally full up, everyone was having a good time.

One interesting problem occurred around 9:30pm while making my rounds. Two Marlborough police officers showed up at the front side door. I was not sure what was going on and was concerned that one of the convention attendees was ‘acting up’ and causing problems. (I did not have to go into ‘grumpy old man mode’ [I am 60 so I am allowed to become a grumpy old man but prefer being a helpful minion or grog nard.] and give some idiot a what for.) As it turned out, no one from the convention was involved. I talked with Hotel Security and they were not even aware that the police had stopped by.

Back in 2024 there were FOUR incidents where an ambulance took away attendees. Apparently, a number of attendees were diabetic and the long trip plus poor eating caused low blood sugars. Everyone recovered and was fine and back to gaming the next day. Fortunately, this year there were no ambulance visits or health problems with any attendee.

One interesting note is that about 5pm I was making my rounds when I saw a ‘Firefly BBQ’ SUV out front. Since I had heard people talking about BBQ being the volunteer meal on Saturday, I figured it was for us so I inquired ‘do you need any help’ and got a hotel luggage cart to haul everything up to the second floor green room.

While doing this I ran into Bill Webb in the green room and got to talk with him for several minutes. Bill Webb is a game designer and founded Necromancer games back in 2000 or so. In recent years he founded Grog God games and is an industry VIP at Total Confusion. So I was very glad to have a chance to talk with him a little.



Saturday evening Greg Belevick was running the standard traditional Circus Maximus game in the hotel restaurant that was in the middle of being remodeled. I was told that the convention could run games there but due to delays in getting building permits the remodeling had been delayed and the hotel was unable to serve food in that area. I left the site a little after 11:18pm.

Sunday, February 23, 2025 – I got a ride over and was on site 8:57am. The place was starting to clear out. While some attendees were still gaming, the big ballroom was half empty at 9:09am. I got to talk with some Solarian games people and Jayson Elliot at 10:08am or so. I had talked with him in 2024 on Sunday just as he was about to leave the site at 4pm about Gygax magazine and his trying to do something with the TSR trademark. I learned that he had moved Solarian games into CT recently so hopefully he will do some promotions at The Citadel in CT in the coming months.

The board game library closed at 3pm Sunday so people only had a little while to check anything out and return it before we closed down for the end of the convention. I had originally planned on staying until 6pm or 7pm and helping with packing up, but by 5pm it was dead so I went home.

It was a great Total Confusion. Since I had put in 38 hours or so there was mention about maybe making me an associate of the Convention and giving

me a free badge for 2026 when registration opens. I still have five volunteer tokens from 2024 which I cherish and keep next to a photo of Roger and Oji in my bedroom.

I am glad that I am now more or less officially part of the Total Confusion staff as a volunteer, in that such a position will enable me to be of help and ensure that the convention continues to run into the future and hopefully continue long after I am gone and no longer able to help them. In addition, I do have some hope that the stories about how it all started survive and are retold for years to come.

People on both sides of my family tree usually live well into their 80s/90s and once in a while someone makes it to over 100; so even though I am 60 years of age as I write this, I look forward to Total Confusion 79 in 2064 when I slowly walk in on site at age 100 carrying my framed copy of my Total Confusion 1 flyer and retelling all these stories about how things started and were kept going no matter what was going on in the world, and remember everyone that helped out or took part in Total Confusion, or how Roger Anderson when judging the miniatures painting competition had a preference for miniatures that were clearly done by a hobbyist as opposed to something that was done by a professional, since his view was that the competition was supposed to be for hobbyists, not something professionally done or done by machine.

## How you know you're marooned with a strategy war gamer



**“We could start by building a railway!”**

# REREADING THE COLLECTION...

Recently I felt the urge to read some comics from my extensive collection of back issues. Specifically, I had the itch to read some Batman adventures. I decided to indulge the urge by checking out my run of *Detective Comics*, which of course headlines Batman. Based mostly which box was nearest the end of shelving unit six, I decided to start around 1968 and work my way up. It's been quite a long time since I read those issues. Obviously I read them back when I originally bought them, then I think I may have reread them around the turn of the new century, so altho many of the stories stuck in my mind, many others were only a dim memory.

I've been a Batman fan for most of my life. Sometime between the ages of seven and eight I discovered super hero comics, in addition to the funny animal and westerns I had been reading. There was Superman, Captain Marvel, Batman, Captain Marvel Jr., Wonder Woman, and more. But the two that became my long time favorites were Captain Marvel Jr. and Batman. Cap Jr., alas, died in 1953 when Fawcett got out of the comic book publishing business. It was a great blow to me, but there were other heroes, and there was especially Batman.

I followed Batman steadily thru the years, and never missed any issues. There were good times in the early and mid 1950s, and some not so great stories in the early 1960s, but I still stuck with the character because I really liked the set-up—a human being in a costume with a side-kick to bounce conversation and observations off of, fighting crime at every level. He was billed as the World's Greatest Detective, but by the early 1960s the brand had been hopelessly corrupted with goofy pseudo-science fiction aliens and ridiculous gimmicks that adapted very poorly to the then current DC Comics format of mostly eight to ten page stories.

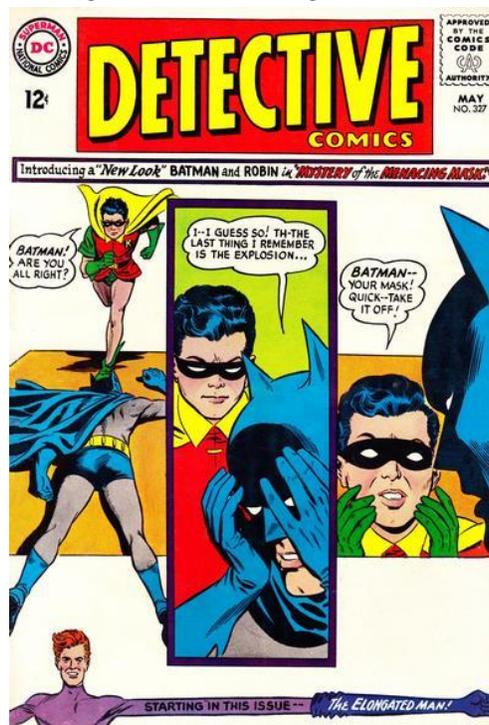
I was very active in comics fandom beginning in 1959, and by 1963 word around the hobby was that Batman was going to be cancelled. Sales were just pitiful. Bob Kane, the character's creator, had been officially notified, and it was just a matter of weeks before the plug was going to be pulled.

Except the powers that be decided to revamp the character, and that included switching editors. Jack Schiff the long time editor of *Batman*, *Detective Comics* and some other titles, was replaced by Julius Schwartz, who had successfully reintroduced the Flash in 1956, launching the Silver Age of Comics, and was editor of a series of successfully science fiction titles in addition to *The Flash*. The first official Schwartz issues started in late 1963. His first issue of *Detective* was #327, dated March 1964, but on the newsstands a few months earlier.

Major changes were made immediately, starting with the style of artwork, lengthening the stories, and getting rid of most of the dumb-ass science fiction aliens from other worlds themes along with most of the unbelievable gimmick plots as well. Fan fave artist Carmine Infantino took over the pencil art, with inks by Joe Giella, occasionally spelled by Murphey Anderson. Schwartz's regular cadre of writers, spearheaded by John Broome and Gardner Fox took over most of the writing, and things picked up immediately, particularly the sales figures. The format was one long Batman & Robin story, and one short 6 to 8 page backup, usually *The Elongated Man*, but often *Batgirl*.

Things did not go entirely smoothly. There were a few missteps. One of Schwartz's more unpopular changes was to introduce a yellow oval to the costume right in the center of Bats' chest with a small bat figure inside. As Richard Kyle and many other comics fans noted, a big yellow spot right over his heart made an ideal target for any criminal holding a gun, or any other kind of weapon.

The other misstep was a major one. Batman never used a gun, but in that same issue, #327, the story showed Batman picking up and holding a pistol on the bad guys after defeating them. The eruption of outrage from the readers was almost unanimous. Schwartz, had to admit that he had made a serious mistake, and promised it would never happen again.



The stories got a lot better. But then came an unexpected quirk. In 1964 Hugh Hefner, a dedicated film buff in addition to being the creator/editor of *Playboy*, screened the 1943 Batman movie serial at the Playboy Mansion. The event was extensively covered by the press, and it was very well received by his guests, who talked it up around Los Angeles and Hollywood, which led Columbia to rerelease the serial to theaters around the country both as a full length movie, and in the original format of a 15 chapter serial. It was a monster hit with college age audiences who thought that the low budget special effects, ludicrous science fiction gimmicks and unbelievable cliffhangers were hilarious.

Clearly a work of its time, the serial featured outrageous situations and ridiculous cliffhangers. But the most annoying feature was the Columbia penchant of having a narrator speak over the closing minutes of each chapter daring viewers to guess what will happen and asking in breathless tones whether the hero(es) will survive. Well, since it was a fifteen chapter play, obviously they would survive to the end of the serial. It was deemed camp humor, a fad that rapidly caught on among hip young people college age and up.

There had been ongoing negotiations with CBS to develop a live action Batman TV program in the style of Superman and The Lone Ranger for a possible Saturday morning time slot. The unexpected popularity of the 1943 Batman serial changed all that. A new round of negotiations led DC to lease the rights to the character to ABC, who in turn contracted 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox to produce a series, and they in turn engaged TV producer William Dozier to develop the concept of Batman as a humorous detective costumed hero program.

The series featured strong upbeat theme music by Neil Heffly, but the stories were played strictly for laughs. All the scenes were offered tongue-in-cheek, with exaggerated silly plots and stilted conversations between the heroes. Batman and Robin faced even the most ludicrous situation with deadpan seriousness. The

whole purpose of the series was to make fun of the characters, play them up for laughs, and it always seemed to me, to sneer condescendingly at people who actually read and enjoyed comic books, people like me.

ABC bought the package, and decided to air it twice a week in prime time. Each first episode would end with a cliffhanger, just like in the serial, and the story would be resolved in the second half hour program.

The Batman television series immediately became one of the most popular shows on TV.

This led to an abrupt shift in the Batman comic book stories. Suddenly “camp” humor was the theme, as the comic tried to imitate the success of the TV series. And to the horror of many fans, it worked! Sell-thru ratios for the Batman comics jumped to eighty percent and higher.

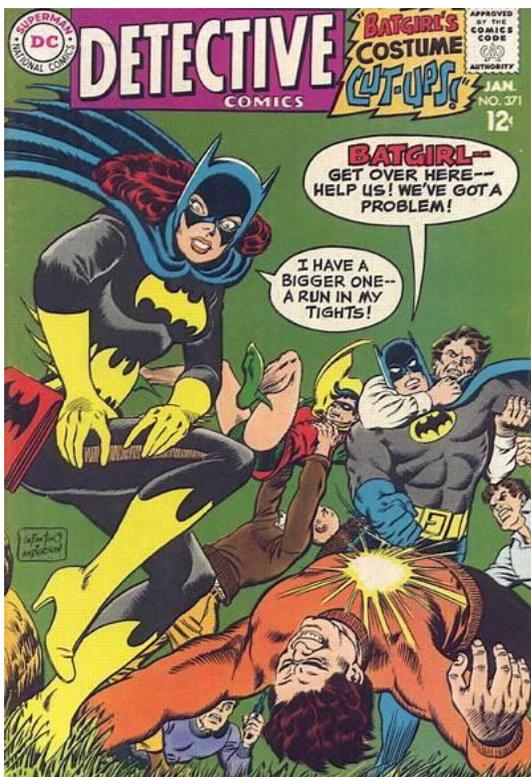
I wasn't happy. For the first time ever I was seriously considering giving up on the character, but the TV series only lasted three years, bowing out in March 1968.

Unfortunately the camp stories in the Batman comics did not go away. I decided to keep buying the series, but I was not thrilled with many of those stories. And the one that caused me to almost drop Batman forever was issue #371.

Dated November, 1967, the cover says it all. Batman and Robin are in serious trouble, but Batgirl can't help because

she has a fashion problem, a run in her tights. The story inside is more of the same. Batgirl has to deal with her feminine whims, her mud splattered costume, repair her makeup, or worry about getting her hair messed up, right in the middle of battle scenes with the bad guys, a bunch of lucky lunkhead nobodies know as the Sports Spoilers. Misogynic in the extreme, it trivialized any claim Batgirl had to being a legitimate costumed hero, and graphically demonstrated the nonsensical depths to which the “camp” style story plots had fallen.

The cancellation of the TV series led to a sudden drop in the sales figures for the Batman titles, which caused some fast editorial changes. It took a while to run thru the backlog and change focus, but by the late summer of 1968 the story emphasis had shifted away from camp humor.



With issue #378, dated August 1968, there was another major change. Gardner Fox and other older writers were dropped from DC because they had demanded that they be treated as regular employees and receive health insurance. DC responded by cutting all their assignments. Gardner Fox had been the major writer for the Batman titles since Schwartz took over as editor. But by a remarkable stroke of good fortune, a new writer appeared to take over those chores.

Frank Robbins was the creator, artist, and writer of the long running Johnny Hazard comic strip. Heavily influenced by the work of Noel Sickles on the Scorchy Smith comic strip, Robbins had a strong, dynamic, minimalistic art style ideally suited for black and white daily comic strips. Unfortunately, near the end of the 1960s, adventure comic strips were dying off. Newspaper editors wanted humor strips, and Johnny Hazard was losing papers steadily when Robbins decided to do comic book work to supplement his income.

In 1968 Robbins approached DC Comics, which he regarded as the leader of the field (after all, they published Superman). The editors were not keen on using him as an artist. The DC comic book style emphasized sleek, realistic style artwork, with closed line central figures. That wasn't the kind of art Robbins specialized in. On the other hand, the stories in his Johnny Hazard comic strip had always been complex, character driven, with unusual, action filled plots. They decided to try him out as a scripter.

Robbins wrote first for Los Lane, then became the regular writer for Superboy. One month later he was writing for Batman. Robbins along with writer Dennis O'Neil had a different vision of the Batman character.

The kind of stories Robbins wanted to write involved the basic premise of Batman. He was a creature of the night, he was the world's greatest detective, and he therefore should be using his skills and intelligence to solve crimes instead of just slugging it out with gaudily costumed bad guys.

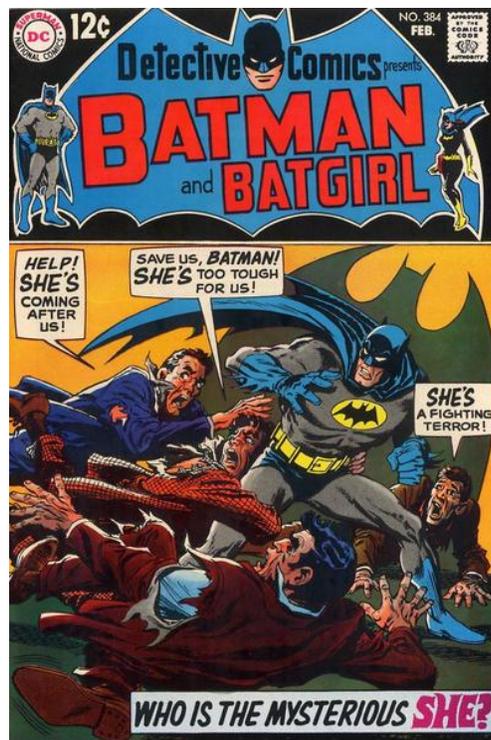
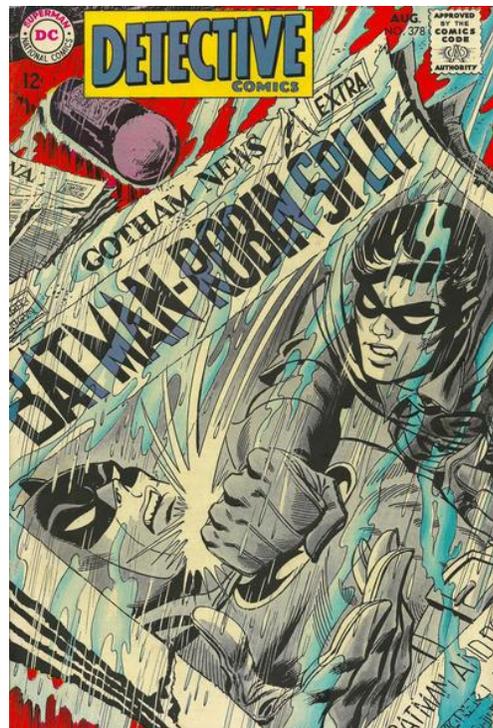
Editor Schwartz, faced with a rapidly declining sales base, was willing to try a new approach. Robbins was joined by artists also interested in seeing Batman return to his roots, particularly Neal Adams, Irv Novick, and Bob Smith. Neal Adams and Bob Smith were the relative new kids on the block so far as comic books went, but Novick had been around drawing comics since the late thirties and onward.

Working together they essentially reinvented the character. It was also decided that Batman, dark creature of the night, really didn't need a kid sidekick dressed in a bright red and green colored costume. Robin was allowed to age, and was hustled off to Hudson College, where he continued to function as Robin in backup features for *Detective Comics*, finding plenty of crime and action in two part adventures, also usually written by Robbins.

The first Frank Robbins Batman story in *Detective* was #378, dated August 1968. There were more changes coming.

Batgirl had been developed by DC at the direct request of the TV show producers, who wanted a strong female interest in the series. They were going to introduce Yvonne Craig as Batgirl, the costumed hero daughter of Commissioner James Gordon on the TV program. Schwartz and artist Carmine Infantino decided to emphasize strong character development with Batgirl, and with the new shift in story emphasis, Batgirl also became a regular backup feature in *Detective Comics*, alternating with Robin and Elongated Man, but increasingly becoming the more prominent backup character.

During that process Barbara Gordon/Batgirl

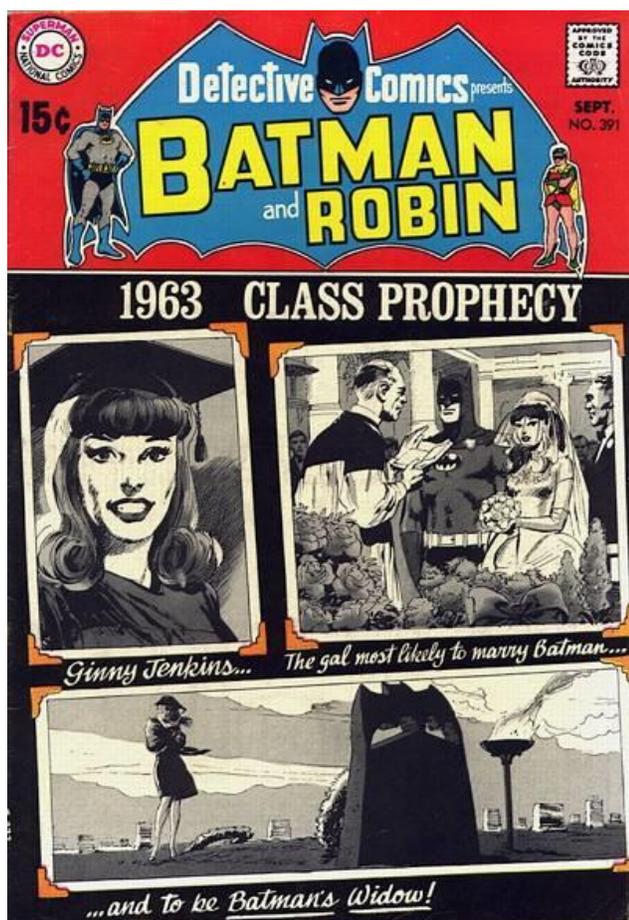


managed to meet Viet-Nam vet Jason Bard. He had a bad knee and walked with a cane, the result of a war injury. He was trying to make a career as a private detective. Jason and Barbara became a dating couple, which naturally led to problems when Batgirl was needed to help out on some of the more complicated cases Bard got involved with.

The following five year run of *Detective Comics* produced some of the best Batman stories published since the late 1940s-early 1950s. Robbins offered very strong story plots with interesting characters, and he often played fair with the readers, offering them a chance to match wits with the Batman in solving the crimes as they unfolded. The art work was increasingly sophisticated, dark, brooding. Along the way the word “the” was added to the character’s name. He was known as *The Batman*, with taller bat ears for his cowl and a sweeping cape that emphasized the gothic weirdness of his appearance. One fan described the new Batman look as “Dracula with a halo and a cape”.

The stories were impressive, featuring often complex mysteries with weird overtones; sinister riddles that needed the sharp intelligence and hard fists of the Batman to solve. The covers during this period were especially striking, featuring artwork by Neal Adams and Irv Novick. They really stood out on the news stands, and on a couple of occasions the covers promised more than the inside stories delivered.

Take the cover for issue #391, September 1969, for example. The story inside was pretty good, but it sure didn’t match the impact of that cover drawn by Neal Adams.

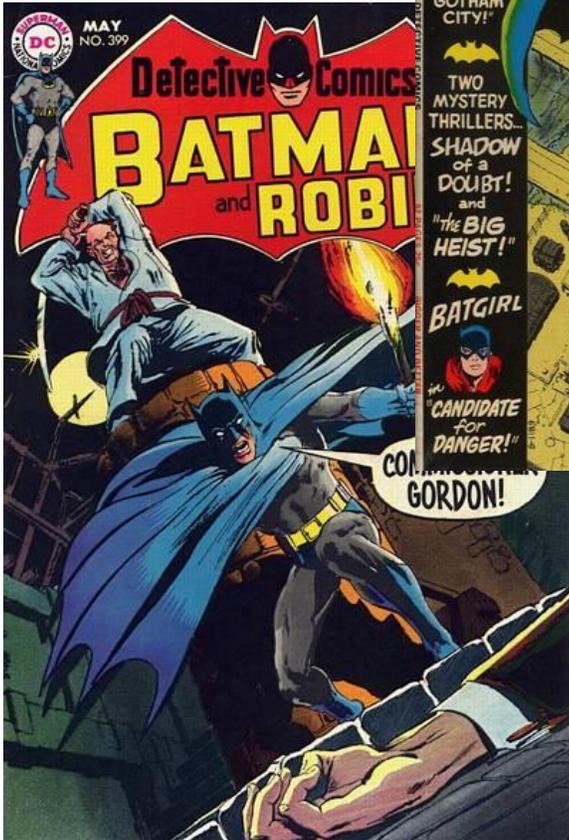
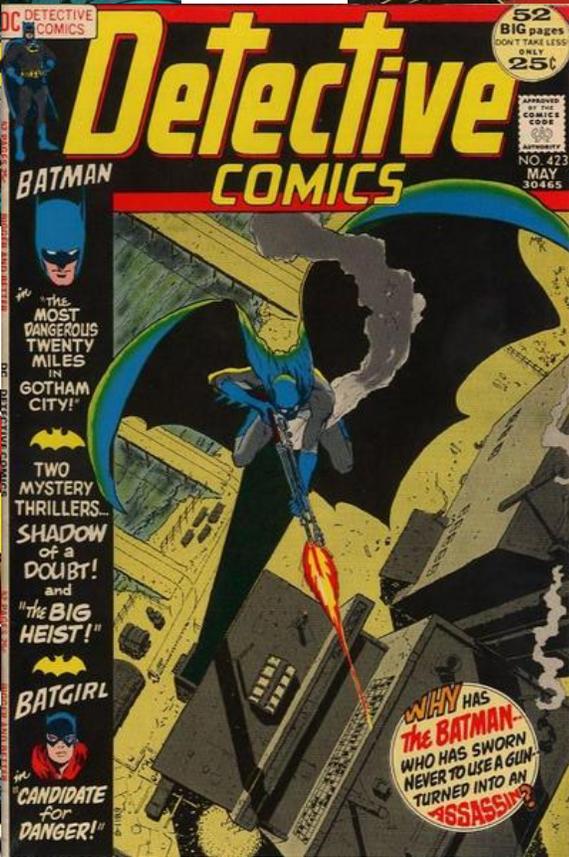
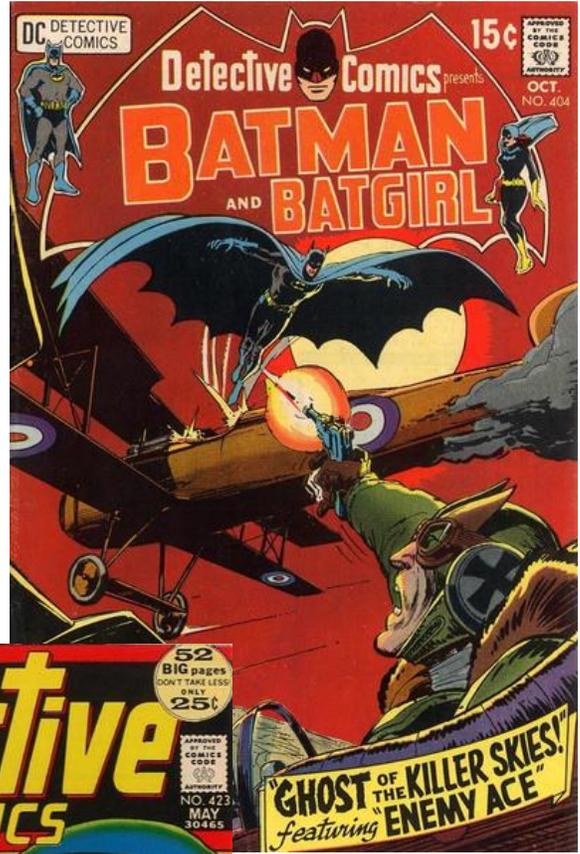
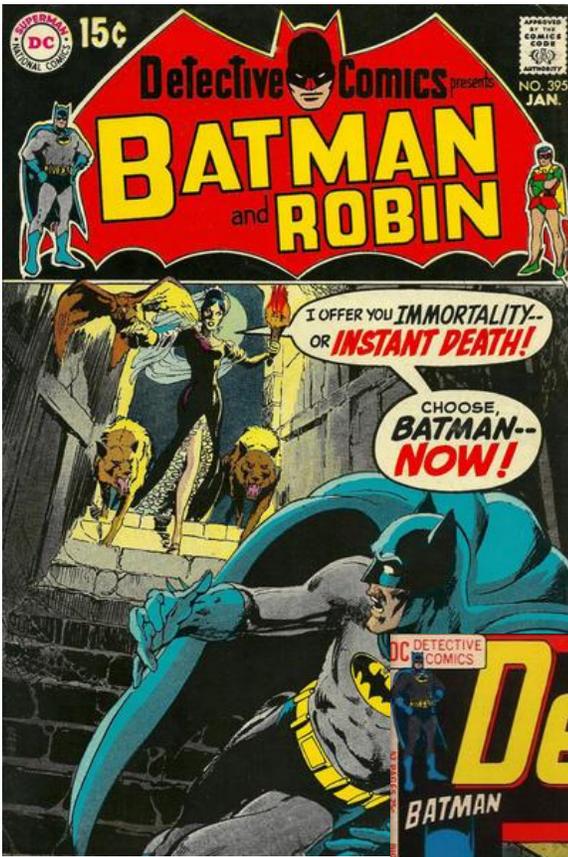


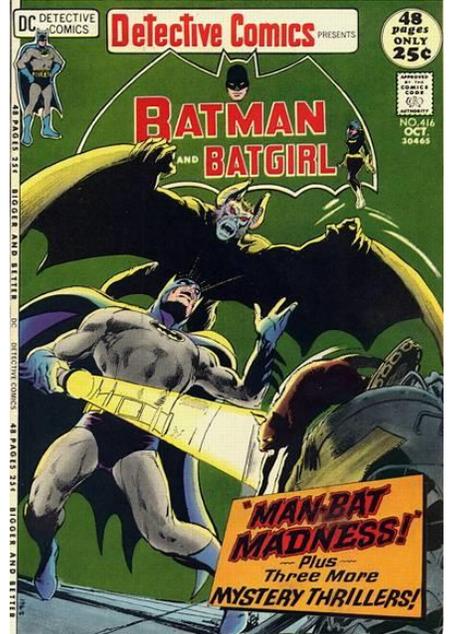
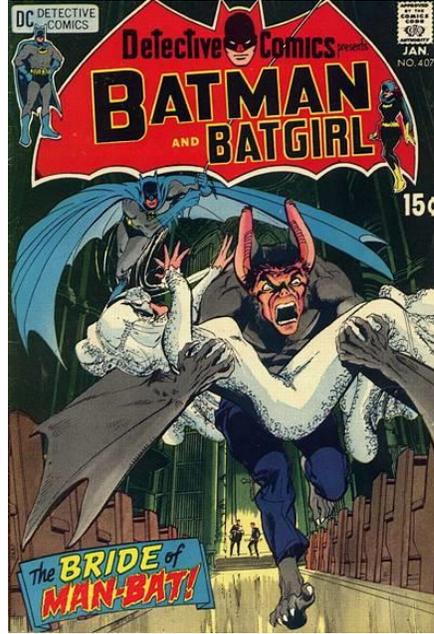
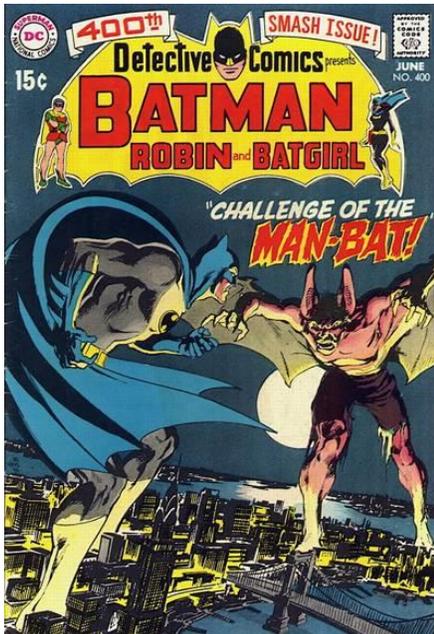
The sheer variety of story plots is impressive. While Marvel and many DC titles were featuring heroes hammering it out with costumed super villains, Batman was offering stories where Talia the daughter of Ras Al Ghul is involved in a brutal murder and offers Batman immortality if he will wed her or instant death if he refuses; or where a movie company is making a film about WWI German fighter pilot Baron Von Hammer (Enemy Ace from DC war comics), only to have a series of murders committed, apparently by the ghost of the dead pilot himself; or Bruce Wayne caught in a bizarre series of circumstances that finds him accused of murder and hunted down by somebody in a Batman costume; or the author of a book about a decade old murder winds up dead, and the answer to the old murder could well mean the death of the Batman; or Commissioner Gordon is kidnapped and tortured to reveal the secret identity of the Batman, only to have Bruce Wayne being forced to create an alternate Batman and rescue the Commission before chaos and mayhem strike the city; or Batman actually using a rifle, for real, seeking to prove that an upcoming assassination attempt might not be able to be foiled no matter what Batman and the law can do to

prevent it; or the Batman forced to engage in a fixed game of Russian Roulette to prove that a series of unusual suicides were actually clever murders.

And in addition to great stories, sometimes the new Batman team struck solid gold, as with issue #400, June 1970, when *Detective Comics* introduced a brand new villain, a grotesque mockery of what had once been a human being--the Man-Bat.

A story built out of pathos and desperation, zoologist Kirk Langstrom was working on developing a serum that would give humans beings, particularly those who were deaf, the extraordinary sonar senses that bats possess. But when he tried the solution on himself he was transformed into a grotesque anthropomorphic half human-half bat hybrid complete with wings. The longer he remained in that condition, the more his humanity began to fade, to be replaced by the feral instincts of a true bat. Viewed by everyone as a monster, the Batman





discovers his true identity, and it becomes a wild race to somehow capture Langstrom and find a way to reverse the process before the Man-Bat is killed by the police or before Langstrom changes into the Man-Bat permanently.

Man-Bat was too good a character to be a one hit wonder. Two issues later, in #402, Man-Bat was back, with a new set of problems. He was back again in issue #405, and #407, where his true love was determined to marry Langstrom whether he was a living man-bat or not. Along the way she also got an injection of the serum, and the Batman was in dire danger of suffering the same fate. As the saga unfolded, Man-Bat moved to Las Vegas where he and his wife were infected by mutant vampire bats, directed by a ruthless, greedy human bad-guy, with the risk of the antidote to the serum in danger of failing or the supply running out.

Man-Bat has since been recreated and changed and reinvented numerous times over the course of the years, becoming one of Batman's perennial villains/assistants in a long running series of appearances in the assorted Batman comics, and even getting his own mini-series several times.

In addition to reading the stories, I glanced over the letter columns. I wasn't particularly interested in reading fifty-five year old letters of comment, but I was interested in who the letter writers were. A lot of familiar names from the early days of comic fandom popped up, along with some future artists and a future editor or two, and among the mix were often letters from Guy Lillian, Steven Carlberg, and Donald D. Markstein; names that should be familiar to readers of this zine. For a long time Mike W. Barr had a letter in almost every issue, until he was invited to write a few scripts for the comic and almost overnight became a comics pro instead of an enthusiastic fan.

Despite showcasing some of the best stories and art that Batman had published in years, there were problems. Sales figures were slowly sinking. The average issue sales for 1970 were 209,630. The reported sales figures for 1971 were 199,112, and the reported sales for 1972 were down to 158,638.

The company was worried, and they had every right to be. With issue #414, August 1971, the cover price was raised from fifteen cents to twenty-five cents, with more pages added, increasing the page count to 52 pages. To fill out the extra pages DC reprinted classic stories from their past comics. There was a printed letter explaining to the readers that prices for everything involved in producing the magazine had increased, and the company was forced to raise the cover price to stay in business. Marvel Comics followed suit, but after a few months they dropped their cover prices down to twenty cents. DC held steady with the twenty-five cent 52 page format for almost a year, before dropping the price and the extra pages.

But the real problem was with the distribution, and the fact that the world was changing, with comic books caught in the middle of forces beyond their control. For most of their existence comic books had been

sold in drug stores, small corner grocery stores, newsstands, candy shops, and convenience stores. But by the late sixties leading into the seventies many of those outlets were vanishing.

The corner grocery stores were the first to go, forced out of business by super markets that sold more items for cheaper prices, offering complete one stop shopping. Super markets had originally sold comic books and had allotted big spaces for magazines. But that had mostly changed by the early 1960s.

Most newsstands bit the dust in the late sixties to the mid seventies when the owners of those stores aged out and retired, or their landlords decided to raise the rents. Small neighborhood convenience stores and candy stores, beloved by older hard core comic fans, faced the same situation. The real estate was worth more to the owners than the rent or the sales those stores generated.

Independent drug stores folded into larger and larger chains, and those big chain operations, like Walgreens or CVS, had no use for comic book racks, or even for many magazine racks either.

And the market was changing too. The readers tended to be older. A considerable percentage of the comic books sold in the 1960s were sold thru military posts. When Richard Nixon was elected president in 1968 he had pledged to end the war in Viet Nam, and a draw-down of troops began early in his term of office. By 1973 the US was out of 'Nam, and the size of the military was shrinking.

Increasingly comic books were being sold at chain convenience stores like 7-11 to older teens and adults. These were the kind of guys who went into the Gas & Go, and bought a six pack of beer and twenty or twenty-five comic books to make their Friday night after work routine complete.

Comic book fandom became increasingly important to the mainstream comic publishers at about the same time. Carmine Infantino had become publisher of the company in 1971 and introduced a number of new innovations, including a line of oversized treasury sized magazines with stiff cardboard covers. The treasury sized comics sold for a dollar or more, and featured reprints of rare classic DC comic issues. The reprint issue of

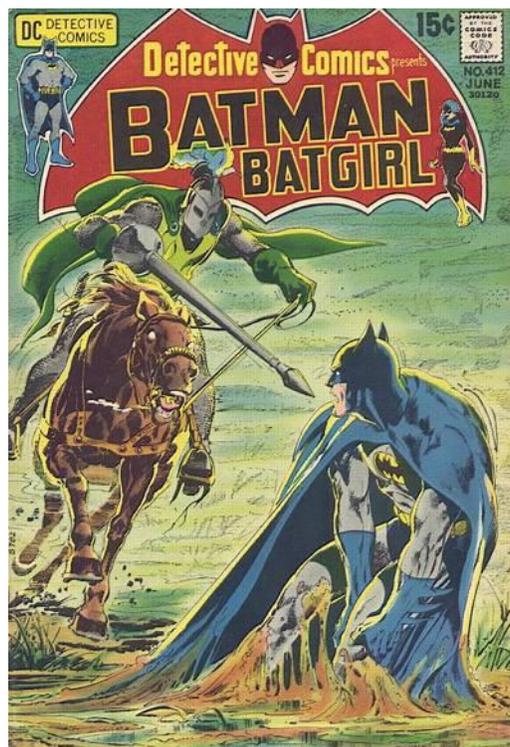
*Action Comics* #1 took the market by storm, and sold close to half a million copies. Those treasury sized comics were displayed on every magazine rack in the country, including those that had never even considered selling comic books.

Infantino introduced other gimmicks as well, including jacking the price of many of the comics up to fifty cents with a hundred page count. Within a few months the cover price was kicked up to sixty cents. The extra pages was made up of reprints from the DC archives, including golden age material, and to the delight of many comic fans, also including golden age stories the company had produced but for one reason or another had never seen print before.

He developed the ongoing push to get readers to subscribe to the DC comics by declaring that all subscription copies would be mailed out flat, in a mailing envelope to prevent damage by the post office. This was a huge selling point in a period where places to buy the comics were decreasing. For *Detective Comics*, the number of subscription copies sold had jumped from about 80 in the mid 1960s, to nearly 2000 by the early 1970s.

But, it wasn't enuf. In 1976 Infantino was replaced as publisher by Jeanne Kahn, a person who had no experience with comics, but had lots of experience producing magazines for children and tween age readers. The owners of the company still thought they were selling comics to young kids. They were wrong, and Ms Kahn quickly came to the same conclusion.

The overall DC sales situation would not stabilize until the middle 1970s. DC and Marvel had signed onto Phil Seuling's strange new idea of the direct market, where comic books were sold directly to dealers and specialty stores at distributor prices with no return privileges. By 1976 Seuling's Seagate Distributors was moving a substantial volume of comics into the hands of dealers and comic shops. This enabled the companies



to finally control their print runs and maximize their sell-thru ratio, which increased their profit margin significantly.

Changes were made immediately, including for *Detective Comics*. Julius Schwartz was out as the editor. Archie Goodwin had been hired in 1973 as editor and as a writer, first for the DC war comics, and then for *Detective Comics* with issue #437. He brought in new artists including Jim Aparo and Walt Simonson.

Frank Robbins was also out. He had done artwork for some of the Batman stories he had written, to mixed reactions from the readers. Editor Schwartz had quickly figured out that a lighter color touch was needed to showcase the Robbins art style, significantly different from the traditional deep color palate used for their other comics.

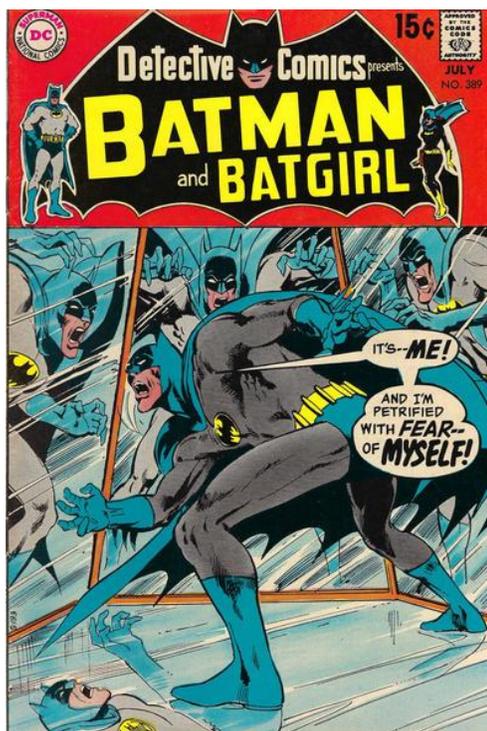
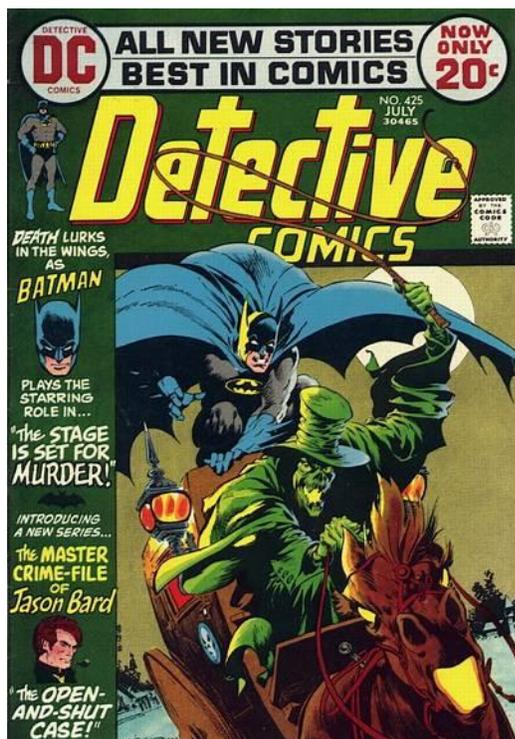
Robbins had done the artwork for the last issues of the DC *Shadow* comic before moving over to Marvel full time. At Marvel he worked with Roy Thomas on the *The Invaders* comic beginning with #1 in 1975. He also did art for *Captain America*, *Ghost Rider*, *Man From Atlantis* and *Human Fly*. He was involved in the Marvel style of comic story creation, but to the best of my knowledge he was not credited with writing any scripts for Marvel.

A few years later, in 1977 he decided to retire. He ended his Johnny Hazard comic strip and moved to Mexico where his living expenses were about half of what they had been in the US. He spent his final years painting. His paintings sold reasonably well, with some of his pictures being displayed in museums.

Archie Goodwin's first editorials in *Detective* (and his other magazines) directly spoke to readers, mentioned comic conventions he would be attending, and discussed the realities of the comic business as one adult to another adult. The stories were mostly good, with a shift in emphasis toward more action and more exotic background situations.

Archie Goodwin's tenure ended about a year later. For reasons unknown he left DC and went to work for other companies. I decided to stop my rereading there, at the end of the Goodwin issues, at least for now.

It was an interesting experience. Reading comics in a collection enables you to get a better insight into the process and internal development of the characters. This run of *Detective Comics* issues was pivotal to the survival and development of the Batman, a shift in emphasis and style that helped shape the character far into the future and also helped determine the style, indeed the survival, of DC Comics itself. And it made very enjoyable reading.



# Reader Reaction

**Jefferson P. Swycaffer; P.O. Box 15373; San Diego CA  
92175 [abontides@gmail.com](mailto:abontides@gmail.com)**



Fun Cover Art! Has an Art-Deco/50s touch to it, a never-never kind of retro sense. Nice art technique! Airbrush? Airbrush! Fun write-up of the artist.

re post-cards, aye, that was an art form indeed: the \*writing\* of 'em! Squeeze just enough natter and grommish to qualify as "having been in touch" without any meaningful commitment! Did you know the Post Office will deliver topless bikini photo post-cards? A friend sent me some "Don't you wish you were here?" naughties of that ilk from Hawaii. For some reason, I would have imagined the Postal Inspectors seizing and destroying something that saucy!

David M. Shea's "Elutriation" was a bit depressing. And he "failed" in an era where it was actually possible for newbies to get published. You could actually get an agent and sell a book without having prior success. Magazines were open to new writers. The market is a lot nastier now, and book publishers only want \*major\* successes -- Game of Thrones -- and not little triumphs. Could Ursula K. LeGuin succeed, starting out as a new writer, in today's market? I'm betting not.

Fun article on YouTube by Rob Imes. Alas for the fact that YouTube is a strong confirmation of Sturgeon's Law: an awful lot of it is crap. But it is a good place for music. I like to watch (listen) to short (10 minute) YouTube vids while eating

dinner. YouTube is also useful for technical troubleshooting! If you have a problem with your computer, hardware or software -- and if you haven't lost access to the Internet due to this problem -- the odds are darned good that there's a video showing how to fix yourself right up again.

The back-cover illo -- a giant war machine on two wheels! -- is unintentionally hilarious! The weight-to-tread-area ratio is abominable: it would sink right into the ground, up to the bottom of the chassis, and become instantly immobilized. At least infeasible WWII macro-tanks had wide treads! They suffered from the other major limitation of armored vehicles: horsepower-to-weight ratio. Anyway, today, anti-tank missiles are so darn effective, tanks are no longer the premier fighting vehicle.

///Arthur Rudebaugh who did that cover art was an early proponent and past master of the air brush back when most artists thought it was just a clever gadget. I am amazed at the depth and the scope of artwork he turned out during his lifetime. Unfortunately his health problems put him out of the commercial art biz from the early 1960s till the end of his life, but it is gratifying that his material is coming back into the public spotlight again in this new computer age. I even found a site devoted to his science fictional style art in Russia!

The fiction writing business has never been easy to get into on a regular basis, but I agree that things are much tuffer today than in the past, even within the past fifteen or twenty years. Today writers

who really want to write can launch their creations into cyberspace via e-books, but, as has been noted by everybody in the world including me, the chances of a reader finding good stuff from all the e-drek is slim. Another discouraging thing about e-books vs real print publishing is that bad writers can continue to churn out stuff with no editorial or public input that would otherwise let them know their stuff was no good. In older days, after dozens of editors and agents had turned down a would-be writer, usually (but not always), the wannabe scribe got the message that his material wasn't salable and moved on. Today there is no feedback that stops a person from turning out more and more stuff as e-books even if nobody except close friends and family bothers to read it.

I echo your thots about YouTube. I personally have plenty of things to do with my time without delving too deeply into YouTube, altho I find their postings of rare, long out of print music and silent films to be good stuff, even if I have to put up with commercials in front of each post (and sometimes in the middle as well). Sometimes the breaks necessary to get copyrighted material past their censors seems excessive. I recently tried to watch the Academy Award winning Tom & Jerry cartoon "Cat Concerto", but it was posted in six separate parts that had to be loaded separately (with 30-second commercials in front of each segment). Not worth it. I finally dug around and pulled out my old Tom & Jerry VHS tape with the toon as part of the collection.

The two wheeled rolling fortress from that 1916 mag was pretty ludicrous, clearly designed for front cover art appeal rather than any kind of realism. For whatever reason, a lot of popular science and mechanics magazines from the first half of the twentieth century featured two wheeled, or even one wheel vehicles, with articles trying to explain why those devices were going to be the transportation wave of the future. Makes absolutely no sense to me. Two wheels work just fine for one person bicycles, but not for any other practical transportation purpose. This also reminds me of the ever-mythical "flying car" that was going to supplant automobiles in the near & immediate future. Nobody seemed to even be worried about the potential for endless major accidents when drivers had to worry about maneuvering in three dimensions, let alone the fuel cost for such a contraption.

I plan on running more interesting views of what people in the past thot the future was going to look like in upcoming issues of the zine.///

## Darrell Schweitzer

I always feel guilty when a new issue of *Fadeaway* comes and I have not responded to the previous one. It is one of my favorite fanzines. Well, this time I can respond right away, to the David M. Shea article.

To answer his first question, yes, there are lots of people in fandom who want to write fiction. When I was twenty or so, I found myself surrounded by lots of such would-be writers among my contemporaries. Of these, I am the only one who has published fiction steadily for the past fifty years. PS Publishing brought out a career retrospective of my work in 2020. Two volumes. One of the stories was written in 1971. Meanwhile, one friend of mine has published five or six stories over the same period – some of them very good – but otherwise writes occasional, excellent research articles for everything from *The New York Review of Science Fiction* to *Shocked and Amazed*. Another has resumed writing poetry recently after decades of silence.

The old joke is that the writer must be committed – either to his art or to an asylum. I've known a lot of people who had the talent, just not the will to use it. I know someone who published two novels in the late 1970s, but nothing since, and doesn't seem to have the inclination to do any more. These were professional novels too, from a major paperback publisher. But they were highly derivative and were basically marketed to feed off the readership of popular writers of the day who may not be so popular now. It may be that my friend wasn't so much writing for art's sake as to gain the social standing of being a "pro" within fandom, and really had nothing to say. That is always a dead end, but this person had and presumably has the tools to do more. What is lacking is original subject matter.

I would have to agree with David Shea that the rude editor who said "Just write better" in response to the question of how to get past form rejections was out of line. The reality of the matter is that there is no magic trick to do this. Some editors have time or take the time to include short comments with almost all their



rejections. George Scithers taught me that. Working with him on *Asimov's*, *Amazing*, and *Weird Tales* I quickly learned that writing two or three lines takes scarcely more time than it does to attach a form and seal the envelope. This was in the days of paper manuscripts and mailed-in submissions, of course. Whoever actually read the story would write comments on an index card. This would not necessarily be the person writing the note. It wasn't hard to transcribe a few comments. When I had read the story and actually had something to say, I might go on at greater length and write a real letter. But editors do find themselves saying the same things over and over again when doing rejections, and so they often resort to forms or checklists, or, once computers and smart typewriters came, macros. These, I feel, we used with varying degrees of success. Some of our rejections may have sounded like they came from slightly bored robots. I tended to avoid those macros myself. It was easy enough to write something like, "This is too slow to start and there is really nothing new here."

The first rejection slip I ever got was from Frederick Pohl in 1967. I had sent a story in to *If*, certain with the absurd confidence of adolescence that I would sell it and make a hundred dollars. (Why I had that figure in mind, I have no idea.) The story came back in three days. There was a form attached. Fred had checked off "Learn your science from science books, not from other science fiction stories," and possibly something else too. It was excellent advice. Of course the story was not pro quality, though it was published in a fanzine (where it has languished in deserved oblivion ever since). By the time I was reading slush, I understood exactly what Pohl had done and that it had probably taken him less than a minute to do it. He got this four-page manuscript folded in a letter envelope. It was obviously from a kid. He glanced over it until he could find something useful to say, then checked off what he did and stuffed it in the return envelope. That manuscript got all the attention it required or deserved.

As for writing fanfic in the universe of TV shows, I confess I don't see the point. It is best for the new writer to use original ideas from the start. All writing is practice. It is better to practice with your own material, rather than something somebody else owns and which you can never publish commercially. I am often asked on those "How to get started" panels how you get to write Star Trek novels or whatever. The only answer is that this will come later in your career, after you are a well-established pro and a major publisher and a Hollywood franchise are willing to trust you to work with their properties. That kind of publishing does not have time for amateurs and people who are just learning to write.

The entry level is places like *Marion Zimmer Bradley's Fantasy Magazine*. This was one of the leading "small press" magazines of its day. It paid seven cents a word. It did seem to have strange and arbitrary requirements at times, but I bet you would have guessed that they "did not do" humorous stories about Jewish vampires, written in dialect, but I sold them one of those. My "Kvetchula" has actually been written for one of Ed Kramer's *Dark Destiny* anthologies. He wanted conspiracy stories, about vampires. When faced with requirements like that I tend to get silly. So I wrote a story about a Jewish mother vampire and her henpecked Dracula-fan husband, who go on a tour of Transylvania, get turned into vampires, and this does not improve her disposition one bit as they encounter the bureaucracy of the worldwide vampire conspiracy. Believe it or not, Kramer claimed he *already had one*. So I sent it to *MZB'SFM* and it reportedly had them rolling in the aisles. It remains one of the very few Jewish vampire stories ever written by a Gentile, though to be fair, my wife is Jewish and she looked it over to make sure the narrative voice sounded like her relatives, so I had my own CYC, Certified Yenta Consultant.

The point there is that a reject from a specialized anthology may not be unpublishable if you file the serial numbers off. I had a story accepted once for the Andre Norton & Robert Adams series *Magic in Ithkar*, which was indeed a shared-setting anthology. That volume was never published. With just a little tinkering, I made the story fit the setting of my *The Shattered Goddess*, and sold it to *Amazing*.

I also sold Marion a story about an order of knights who go very bad. There is actually a gang-rape in this story, just barely offstage, and the victim evolves into a goddess of vengeance. At one point, after the knights have committed a singular atrocity, the protagonist is left trying to justify himself morally to a crucified child. Given that most people who had not read the magazine assumed that it was aimed at 14-year-old girls, a story like that would seem pretty unlikely, but not only did I get away with it, I received a significant bonus when I won the best-of-issue vote.

Did *MZB's* really not publish bar stories? I'm not really sure. In any case, lots of other people did. George Scithers favored them. He had I even edited two anthologies of them around 1980, *Tales from the Spaceport Bar* and *Another Round at the Spaceport Bar*.

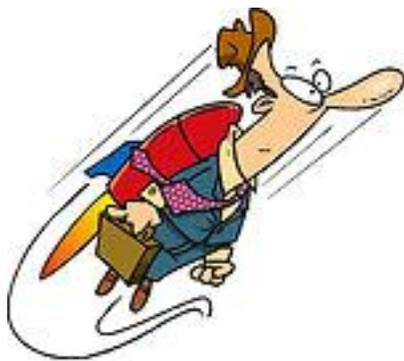
What you need to do is just find another market. If a story was rejected on the grounds of “We don’t do horror stories,” then find a horror market. There are lots of them. The small press magazine as we know it really came into its own in the 1970s, and horror zines in particular proliferated. Nowadays we still have them, and a lot more are electronic. Surely the first rule for writers must be that you do not give up after being rejected by the Big Three digests, *Asimov’s*, *F&SF*, and *Analog*. There is a lot more out there. You can have an entire career without selling to those magazines, and chances are you will.

One thing you *never* do is argue back with a rejection, particularly along the lines of “My story is clearly just as good as the crap you are publishing.” First of all, this is a subjective thing, so there is no way to measure. Secondly you have just insulted the judgment of the editor you want to buy your story (and show good judgment by recognizing your genius). You can’t win that way. Maybe David was a real close friend with Ann Crispin, but it sounds to me as if his long letter to her was a mistake.

As for the proposed book of new *People* stories, I would agree that NESFA should have replied, but then they are a service organization of fan volunteers, not a professional publishing company, so they don’t normally have to respond to submissions or queries. I once proposed to NESFA that they should publish a “museum” version of *Last Dangerous Visions* in six volumes (rather like their Roger Zelazny set, releasing one or two volumes a year). The idea was that the edition should contain all the stories, including the ones already published elsewhere, with the Ellison introductions, if they exist, and with the living writers writing little memoirs about Harlan. Use the 100 pieces of Tim Kirk artwork. A scholar would then have to introduce and annotate the whole thing to give context and explain the dated aspects. The result would not *be* the anthology we would have gotten if it had been published back in the day, but it would be an imaginative reconstruction of it, like one of those virtual reality reconstructions of Pompeii before the volcano went off. As I actually proposed this to a leading NESFAN in person, he quickly explained why that would be impractical. Too many estates. When they do something like their Cordwainer Smith volumes, they only have to do with one estate. This could involve dozens, maybe as many as a hundred. Just too much work. (There is also the consideration that as Baby Boomers age, the market for this anthology is diminishing day by day.)

Likewise an original *People* anthology would involve a lot of work (one estate, many living authors), and maybe they just didn’t think it would be profitable. (NESFA may be a service organization, but they still need to avoid losing money.) Small presses of that sort usually grind to a halt when they publish too many slow-selling books and find they have a warehouse full of backlist and all their capital tied up in them.

Overall, I’d say that what David Shea is describing is no more than what all writers go through. He seems to have been hitting his head against certain select brick walls without learning to go around them. Of course it is his life, and if he feels he is better off not writing fiction anymore, that is entirely his business. But I think he had gotten his foot in a few doors and could have continued if he really wanted to.



**Lloyd Penney; 1706-24 Eva Rd.; Etobicoke, ON; CANADA M9C 2B2**

Thank you for the newest *Fadeaway*, issue 67. It is a biting cold evening, with the promise of heavy snow soon, so being inside a warm home is best for getting caught up on things, like this letter.

I had never heard of Arthur Radebaugh, so I checked out some of the websites that highlight his life and work...beautiful stuff. I could suggest to one of the Detroit cons to perhaps host a display of his work for a future event. He wore capes, jodhpurs and a monocle? Sounds like he could have been a fan.

Postcards – I haven’t been looking for them, last I saw any of them may have been in a hotel tuck shop. I remember the US Postal Service had a special rate for postcards, but I imagine that was revoked many years ago. SF conventions have graduated from using 8½x11” paper flyers to card stock flyers, and we tried heavy stock flyers as postcards to confirm registration years ago. I suggested to one local con committee that they use their promo cards as postcards, and mail messages and information to their members or potential members. They thought me quite mad.

Fanfiction...yes, I remember some of the original Trek fanfic. I also remember literally reams of photocopied stories, 500 to 600 sheets in size, all Cerlox-bound, and for sale in some of the early dealers’ rooms

I visited. Today, most fanfic is on a website. It's called Archive of our Own, AO3, and it won a Hugo Award for Best Related Work in 2019.

Greetings to David M. Shea, perhaps known better to some of us fanzine inhabitants as E.B. Frohvet. Good to see you again, David, it's been quite a while. I have dealt with snarky editors in the past, too. As I try to progress into becoming an SF editor myself, I promise I will try not to be too snarky. I remember the line about getting your ideas from a mail order house in Schenectady from Barry Longyear.

It sounds like I could spend a lot more time on YouTube than I already do, but then, I'd get nothing done. Nonetheless, I purchased a lifetime licence to download YouTube videos, and I do download when there is a show we'd like to watch...but on our TV. Fortunately, our flat screen has a USB port in the side, and we can watch some excellent stuff in our living room instead of the computer room.

I am not extensively familiar with the Gamergate controversy, except that I know Brianna Wu was quite a major part of this. Brianna is married to fan and author Frank Wu. I have seen some of the [Fanac.org](http://Fanac.org) interviews live, but they are also stored on YouTube for easy finding and viewing.

In the local...there are too many feuds going on in just about any aspect of any hobby or interest. Sometimes, we just don't play well with others, and I have been taken to task just for writing that in another fanzine. I handle those feuds, whether I share that interest or not, by withdrawing to a certain extent. I figure there's enough heat without light, my opinion at this time is not needed. There is also the reminder that no matter your interest, you are under no obligations to participate in that interest's fandom.

My thanks to Rich Dengrove. Gigs come and go; I am winding up a 3-day gig (now spread over two weeks) with the business magazine, and with the progress of the pandemic, I might be able to get back to making some nice money working the registration desk for local conferences and trade shows. And recently, the CBC announced the return of radio-style drama, but it won't be on the main radio networks, but on their Gem service.

### **David Shea; 4716 Dorsey Hall Dr. – Unit 506; Ellicott City, MD 21042**

I guess my view of Massachusetts is Boston-centric. For no reason I had supposed that Oxford was in the general Boston region, like Wakefield where I lived as a child. I see that I was mistaken; you're in the central part of the state. Grafton is just up the road. I hope it is a nice place than the town of a similar name in the Henderson story ("Angels Unawares", 1961).

There is also a Grafton, Wisconsin. And another Dalton, in Wisconsin. I don't know how many Oxfords there may be in the US, but I have identified at least eleven.

Recently while reading Thomas Moore's book *Soul Therapy* I found the observation: "A story has a will of its own. And knows best when to be told." Perhaps we ought to stop thinking of stories as a commodity to be bought and sold. Maybe the difference between fiction and non-fiction is less clear, and there's a gray area between those extremes.

Even in my limited experience, I had more than once found a story taking off in a direction I had not anticipated, or a secondary character suddenly stepping up to claim a wider role. Sometimes I wonder at what point in writing LOTR Tolkien realized Frodo's central destiny; or if he knew that from the start, and just had to work with it.

I was not previously familiar with Arthur Radebaugh. Clearly he had an artistic vision well in advance of his time.

I get post cards once in a while. The other week I received one from Trinlay Khadro, with a drawing of hers on the front. Though I do see your point; that traditional picture post cards have almost disappeared. You're probably right that texting has filled that place.

Very impressed with the presentation of my article. I was quite struck that you located the cover of MZBFM #7 in which my story appeared. I had to buy a copy for myself; they forgot to send me one.

Apologies to Rom Imes, but way more about YouTube than this reader wanted to know.

As to Jefferson Swycaffer's theory that movies are "getting better"; it seems to me that mostly people are remaking the same films over and over. Another Jurassic Park film—by now I'm rooting for the dinosaurs!...and another Spider-Man, Godzilla, Fast & Furious—how many is that for that franchise, 9? 10? Or, consider the Hallmark Channel, which entire stock in trade is an endless series of "romance" movies, every



single one of which can be described with the same two sentences: a couple meet cute and fall in love. They are invariably young, white, pretty, and heterosexual. For the “Christmas” variety, after “meet cute” insert the phrase “in December” and you’re covered.

The films I have on video may be mediocre, but at least they are differently mediocre. Consider a scene from Year of the Comet (no, it’s not about comets, it’s about wine). A young woman yells out the window at her would-be suitor...

Maggie: You have no idea what I want.

Oliver: What do you want?

Maggie: A man who really loves me.

Oliver: That’s me.

Maggie: Bullshit!

There was a comparison of Trump to Caligula. My comparison would be to Mussolini: a vain stupid thug who believes in simple answers to complicated problems and is convinced of the brilliance of his own ideas. And that’s coming from someone who is not a Democrat, and no great fan of Mr. Biden.

//I think writers of fiction have many different ways of developing their stories. I understand that sometimes everything just flows right out with all the connections in place, and sometimes the story unfolds as the author is creating it. Frederick Pohl always said he started a story with a basic idea but then let the characters and the situations change as he started writing the thing. On the other hand Lester del Rey came up with a story idea, then proceeded to break everything down, chapter by chapter, incident by incident in a completely detailed outline, and after that was finished, he then wrote the story exactly to the outline. For most of his career Algis Budrys wrote everything first draft, with absolutely no changes of any kind. In fact to make things go faster he dictated the story into a tape recorder and then either he or his wife transcribed the story to paper and zipped it off to the publisher. C. S. Forester, most famous for his Horatio Hornblower stories, related that after he had written down the story, his interest in the tale stopped completely. He never had any interest in revising, or even rereading the material after he had finished the final chapter.

I think this is part of the reason that writer workshops and panels at conventions about writing don’t really meet the needs of most would-be authors. Writing fiction is a personal commitment, dependent on a lot of things that happened within the writer’s own experience, shaped by his views of the world and his reactions after reading other stories over the course of his lifetime. Advice can be offered about acceptable story telling techniques, format, eliminating aggravating redundancy or clunky style sentences, but the actual creation process is entirely up to the person writing the story, and that really can’t be taught.

There are plenty of new movies and TV programs being produced these days that are not the same old-same old. I don’t think it’s fair to hammer the people who make movies and TV because they develop material for a specific market. The Hallmark Channel creates romance stories because there is a vast market for that kind of story. Romance stories comprise the overwhelming bulk of fiction novels sold, and the romance category has solidly dominated book sales for well over two centuries now. Complaining that people want to see more sequels to popular movies is akin to complaining that comic books continue to turn out new issues about the same central characters, or that detective novels always deal with murder mysteries that the protagonists always manage to solve, or that westerns are set in the old west, or that sea stories are set in a watery environment.

Fiction invariably deals with human beings in relationship to events and considerations that react or reflect with human beings, and as has been noted many times before, the basic nature of human beings has not changed in the thousands of years we’ve been around. Even science fiction or fantasy stories that propose to deal with totally non-human creatures and environments must be written in terms that will interest and be understandable to the human beings reading the story, or else it’s just gibberish that no editor would published and nobody would ever read/watch/listen to.

I personally think Caligula Trump is the perfect description for our new prez. I don’t think Trump has the brains or charisma to be an American Mussolini. Not that he wouldn’t like to be tho. Becoming

President For Life with dictatorial powers and legions of adoring followers is apparently his ongoing ambition.

I suspect Rob Imes' article about YouTube would have been more interesting if you actually had a computer and had checked out YouTube for yourself. You have stated in the past that you do not own a computer, altho perhaps that has changed. YouTube has emerged as a very viable and influential forum to present information, commentary, ideas, as well as offering previously rare and often very expensive music, film and literature over the internet. I myself am only a casual user of YouTube, but I am impressed by the availability of things like rare popular music, and silent movies that would cost a fortune to experience otherwise.///

**dann.lennard@gmail.com,**

I was going to write an LOC about FADEAWAY #66 but I took so long to get around to it that #67 popped in my mailbox before I sent it off! So here are a few random thoughts on both issues.

Tom Feller's overview of THE THING in #66 was very informative. I still rate John Carpenter's version as the best of all the film versions and it's one of my all-time favourite movies. I enjoy its claustrophobia, paranoia and nihilism. The cast is terrific, too.

The one thing I miss most about this pandemic is travelling around to various second-hand bookshops and book fairs, so I enjoyed Gary Casey's report on visiting Mr K's in Greenville, South Carolina. Sadly, these types of stores are heading the way of the dodo thanks to eBay and the increasing move to digital media. Of course, zines are going the same way, too. Exorbitant international postal rates don't help the cause either, but that's a whole other thing.

I'm glad you enjoyed reading Black Max. I grew up reading the British weekly comics like Battle, Valiant & Lion, 2000A.D. and the controversial Action. However, Thunder! came and went before I started getting into the weeklies in 1974. I've read a few recent Rebellion comics that revived the character and it comes across as an intriguing concept, but I haven't checked out the original series.

Rebellion is doing a great job of reprinting neglected classics from this era. I recently read The Best Of Sugar Jones, written by the prolific Pat Mills and featuring gorgeous art by Rafael Busóm Clúa. It was originally published in a girls' romance comic from the mid-1970s called Pink.

There wasn't quite as much in #67 that caught my attention, but I liked Rob Imes' extensive article on his experiences with YouTube. I started going to the site soon after it launched but really got into using it around 2014 when uploaders were able to post videos of lengths longer than the previous maximum of 10 minutes. I recall watching 1982 cult classic LIQUID SKY, which had been uploaded as one 90-minute file. After that I was hooked and began watching heaps of old movies on YouTube, then branched out into video podcasts, music concerts, old radio shows and more. I'd say the site is my No. 1 source of entertainment these days. I use it far more than streaming services and I haven't watched a real TV channel in several years.

YouTube isn't perfect by any means - I know there's a lot of trivial drivel, hate speech, disinformation and all-round crap, but if you avoid that and search for what you're interested in, then it's pretty damn amazing.



**Ken Bausert** [passscribe@aol.com](mailto:passscribe@aol.com)

Thanks, also, for your latest (#67) issue; an interesting read as always. Regarding post cards: I happen to have a huge post card collection of used and unused vintage cards; I love reading the messages which often depict a different world than we're used to. They're in albums so it's easy to show them to other people who often find them fascinating as well. I don't think there are many young post card collectors waiting in the wings for them so I'm not concerned with their monetary value. I also save the modern cards that people send me from their vacations and other trips to parts unknown; probably my pack-rat DNA. I guess I'll have to just toss those if and when I decide to move, but I'll keep the vintage cards for as long as I can.

While you're probably right in assuming very few people send post cards anymore, there are still a few who do (I received several this past year (from people who know I enjoy them) and another just recently. And, while fewer places may be handling them anymore, I still see them in the gift shops and convenience stores here

in Florida – especially touristy towns like Tarpon Springs or attractions like Homosassa Springs Wildlife Park. And, you can still find them nearly everywhere in NYC, of course. Just walk down Mott Street, in Chinatown, for example, and nearly every shop that isn't an eatery will have a rack of post cards outside.

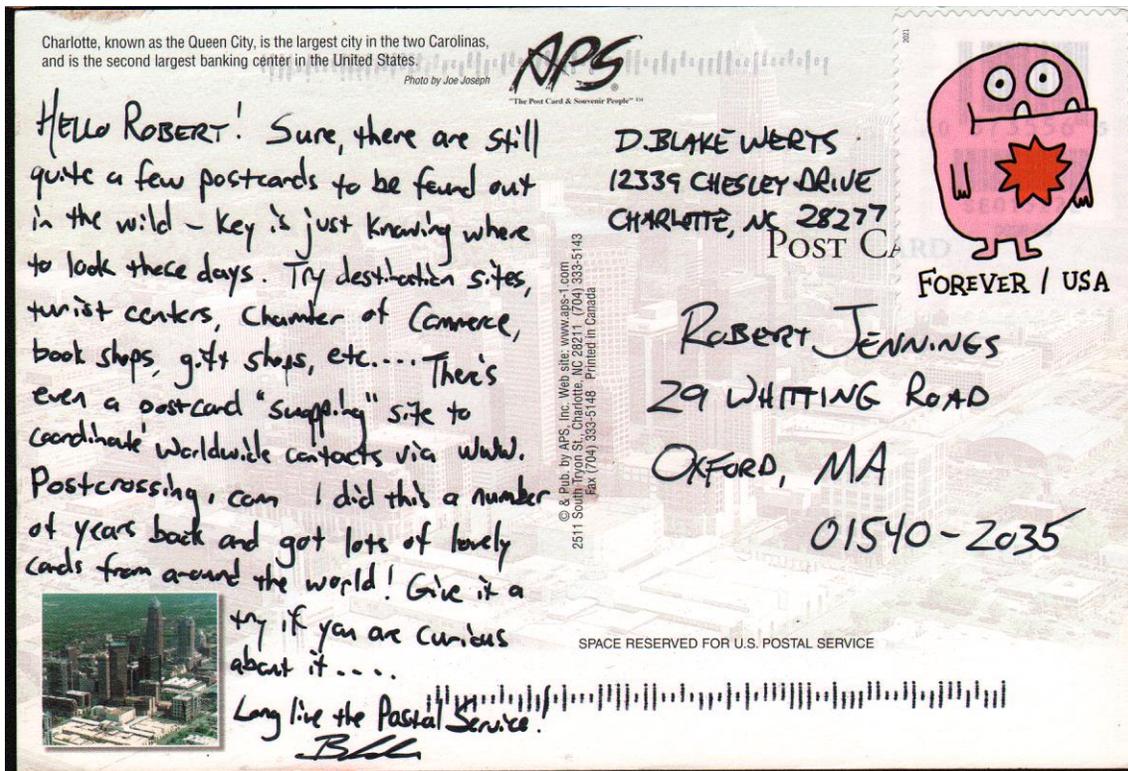
I loved David M. Shea's article about writing and trying to get published. I tried my hand at submitting a few stories in the past and, just like with photography, it's hard to break through when you're up against already successful and/or well known people. I did manage to get two articles printed in photography magazines, back when I was heavily into that medium. Similarly, I tried sending some of my better photographs to a stock agency, and had them accepted for possible use by clients, but none were ever used and no royalties ever found their way to me. After a while, with both writing and photography, I decided to continue doing both because I enjoyed doing them and not waste my time trying to get paid for them.

As for the "idea factory" in Schenectady: I laughed out loud at that one! Yes, people can certainly ask some stupid questions. I recently reviewed a set of headphones I bought, and as part of the review site, other prospective buyers can ask questions that they hope the people who bought the item already can answer. My headphones came in three colors (I bought the black). So some idiot submits the question, "What is the best color to buy?"

Rob Imes' very thorough piece on YouTube was right up my alley; I currently watch more stuff on YouTube than I do on the regular channels (I have the app on my smart TV in Florida and it's part of my cable provider package in NY so it's not like I'm viewing stuff on my phone or iPad). But the ads have become extremely annoying lately. Yes, I know, they're trying to pester me into signing up for YouTube Premium at \$15.99 per month so I won't have to put up with the ads. But, being the rebel that I am, I feel obliged to hold out for as long as I can. Anyway, I appreciated learning so much more about YouTube from Rob.

**Actually, D. Blake Werts has the definer answer to my question about whatever happened to postcards, as follows---**





Rich

Dengrove; 2651 Arlington Drive, #302; Alexandria, VA [richd22426@aol.com](mailto:richd22426@aol.com)

Let's start my LOC on *Fadeaway 67* with your article on Arthur Radebaugh. In Arthur's time, the 'great future' was streamlined. These days, we don't see the future that way. Do we see it at all in our mind's eye. We're more ambiguous about it. It no longer is a horn of plenty. Still, it should have a style or a bunch of styles.

It's a big step from Arthur Radebaugh to post cards, but it is the next article. They're still with us. Enough people are selling them in one way or another. Amazon claims to sell post cards, as does Etsy. All the office supply places claim to as well. Still, are any of these post cards the ones you are nostalgic for? I don't know.

Now having gotten on the subject of post cards, I want to narrow the topic to a specific type of post cards. I remember post cards of the New Jersey air force - a bunch of mosquitoes. And a similar post card may have served as an inspiration. Someone took a mosquito off a post card and tried to get it approved as Mississippi's State flag. ...No way.

From post cards, we go to short stories. This article was by a David M. Shea, who wrote a novel as well as short stories. However, we will only talk about his short stories. After reading that article, I'm glad I don't send them out anymore. Not that I should have been published - I was a miserable writer at the time - but the editors were exactly as you remembers them: arbitrary, capricious and ridiculous. Anyway, by the time we wrote, the bottom had probably fallen out of the short story market for several decades.

Nonetheless, let me tell you about my greatest success. I wrote a story about an evil carrot. I didn't bother with plot, character, etc. It was a total whimsy without rhyme or reason. The victim of the carrot was an old guy named him Quentin Catheter. A lady somehow heard about my tale, and wanted to read it for Toastmasters. I gave it to her and told her to be my guest. For me, this was my greatest success: someone actually liked my story.

From writing for editors, we go to the subject of YouTube. This article was written by a Rob Imes. He shows there are a thousand and one things you can find on YouTube: do-it-yourself videos, old time movies, music of every kind, comics of every kind, and countless topics too numerous to mention. You not only get as many topics as a reference library but you get people's opinion of them all, including those online, the audience and the author.

I have one question, though: can't YouTube videos be copied by video editing equipment? It need not take a feature of YouTube to copy them. I imagine if I just copy something for my own use, who would know? On the other hand, I can understand why YouTube wants to stay in good graces of the copyright law.

In addition, I have a comment about Rob's comments. I tend to agree with them so they don't bother me. Of course, I am sure some of them would annoy an incredible number of people in this polarized time.

I guess that finishes my comments on Rob's YouTube article – and the rest of the articles.

Now we come to letters. Since I'm tired of writing, I will limit my comments to one a letter writer. Otherwise, I could write a letter the size of Fadeaway.

Jefferson F. Swycaffer. Am I woke? No. I'm not a reactionary either. I yearn for the time when right and left could all at least talk to one another. We now have the extreme right and the extreme left. And their words are getting violent. In fact, sometimes, they turn to real violence. In the old days, when I was in college, I thought we were too polarized. But, remembering back, right could talk to left.

Gary Brown. I understand that sharpening scissors is not cost effective. However, some people are into the scissors they have now. And they get them sharpened when their previous sharp edges turn dull. I don't do that, though. When the edges of my scissors get dull, I throw them out.

Bill Plott. When I saw Colonel March of Scotland Yard, it was free on Amazon Prime Video, and very watchable. Now I find that it costs \$20.99 to see it whether you belong to Amazon Prime or not. On the other hand, while it says that money is for one season, you can watch all 26 episodes. I think it's worth it. Don't watch any of it, though, unless you want to purchase it or individual episodes

Richard Dengrove. I will skip comments on myself. I also will skip your comments on my letter and my comments on your comments. I see you published both of them. Bob.

Lloyd Penney. Once again, I will say because Lloyd was the editor/copy editor/proof reader for a book, he is a member of the science fiction publishing industry. In some ways, in fact, he's better than a science fiction writer. They're a dime a dozen.

That's all, folks.

///Several other readers pointed out that there are still plenty of picture post cards out there for the public to buy; you just have to look in different places for them these days. Sometimes it comes down to looking in different parts of retail stores too. Several local drug stores still carry picture post cards of the region and even including some comic cards, but they are stacked in a special (very small) section of the greeting card department. My view was a classic situation of out-of-sight, out-of-mind; even jumping to the assumption that the category was pretty much gone. The category has definitely shrunk in this new century, but picture post cards are definitely still around.

Sometimes it seems to me that the modern political factions of extreme lefties and extreme right wingers in the United States in many ways resembles the ancient political groups known as the Reds and the Greens in the Byzantine Roman Empire. No matter what one group supported, the other automatically opposed it, whether it had any merit or not. The groups were essentially political gangs, using chariot races, athletic contests, and public entertainment platforms to become weapons in their relentless hateful attacks on one another. Whole families were automatically born either in the Green or the Red factions, and it was expected that all their children and their relatives would stay true to the fanatical core support of the group they were born into no matter what happened politically in the real world. Respect, or attempts at reason, or even communication with the opposing faction was considered a breach of faith with your own group.

Arthur Radebaugh was a future visionary who looked for incredible advancements in technology as being pivotal to the future happiness and security of human civilization. He turned many of his advertising contracts into promotions for his futuristic concepts. I will be running more of his incredible art in upcoming issues of the fanzine.

As I have mentioned before, it is very difficult these days for a writer to get established in the field of fantastic literature. In addition to there being precious few venues that will actually pay an author for his or her work, there are vast numbers of wannabe writers out there, more than ever before, and they can only get their stuff out thru self-publishing as digital books. That doesn't mean that their

works deserve to be published, or that anybody will actually read those self published stories (let alone pay to purchase them), but it does mean that a lot of bad writers as well the few good ones are being sucked into the maw of self publishing because there aren't enuf professional publishers to support the new comers. Established book publishers will automatically take a book written by a pro with an established track record over a new untested author.

Kickstarter and other crowd sourcing efforts are generally un-successful for supporting the publishing efforts of new writers, but it sometimes does work for people with a publishing track record. For example, recently Brandon Sanderson started a recent Kickstarter campaign to get four of his new upcoming books published, hoping to raise a million dollars for the effort. His team was not sure that they would ever reach such a grand goal. As of right now, that crowd sourcing campaign has raised \$31,000,000, and there is still a week to run in the campaign, so clearly there is support for writers who have proven their appeal to readers.///



**Bill Plott, 190 Crestview Circle, Montevallo, AL 35115**

That was a really interesting article on Arthur Radeburgh, whose art work was extremely interesting. It reminded me a lot of the kind of illustrations that appeared in magazines like *Mechanix Illustrated* and *Popular Science* when they were running articles on what to expect in the future -- like our jet packs and flying cars. Fascinating stuff. There are so many authors and artists out there who are largely forgotten now. In researching my baseball books, I spent a lot of time in microfilm of *The Chicago Defender*, one of the nation's top

black newspapers. I became very intrigued the fiction writers and artists who helped fill those pages, people we never heard of who were producing good work in a small niche market. I just bought a book on black pulp era writers. I understand that one on a major cartoonist is coming out in the fall.

David M. Shea wondered "how many people in SF fandom have tried fiction writing." I would think a rather large number of them. At least that was the case when I first got into fandom in late '50s and early '60s. I seem to recall that many of my friends were writing fiction. It was certainly something I tried my hand at. I had a few stories published in fanzines, but I soon realized that my strong suite was nonfiction.

And that segues into his final remarks: "Writing non-fiction is easier than writing fiction. You just have to present the facts in some reasonable order. It's about truth. In fiction you have to invent the facts and keep them consistent." Well, we hope non-fiction is about truth. What has happened with the arrival of the internet flies in the face of that sometimes. Still, I am like David. I can take collections of facts and arrange them in a coherent manner. Every novel I read blows me away. I don't understand how a novelist can come up with a compelling story and fill it with characters and places straight from imagination. I am awed by mystery writers who can make an assortment of red herrings fit into the whole piece. One drawback with non-fiction comes when facts dry up. I have for years researched the life of pulp writer (mostly westerns) Tom Roan. His real life appears to have been quite adventurous but I have hit many dead ends trying to substantiate those adventures. I haven't given up but I could sure use some more provable facts!

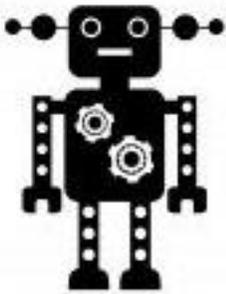
Robert Imes consumed about two-thirds of this issue and that is two-thirds that I barely scanned. I have looked up a few songs on YouTube and I have gone to occasional links from a couple of correspondents but it is not something that interest me much at all. I do acknowledge that an extraordinary amount of information and tutelage is available on YouTube, but I cannot sit and watch a lot of video on the computer. I get really pissed when I want to look something up in a troubleshooting situation and cannot find a printable version, only videos. Still, my hat is off to Rob for a marvelous piece of research.

**Heath Row; 4367 Globe Ave.; Culver City, CA 90230 USA**

Earlier this year, I received a copy of *Fadeaway* #67 through the National Fantasy Fan Federation's franking service. I quite enjoyed the cover and other artwork by, and information about, Arthur Radebaugh. His

approach to combining the fantastic and “designs for modern living” was wonderful, and that picture of him in his converted van studio suggests he lived the life of Riley. I’ll have to look for more examples of “Closer Than We Think.” His work does work well in newsprint!

Your commentary on the fate and future of postcards gave me food for thought. I still enjoy sending and receiving postcards, sometimes finding them too short for proper correspondence but useful for sharing places I’ve gone to with friends and family. (I also pilfer hotel stationery for use when it’s available.) When I receive a postcard, we usually post it to the refrigerator, and when we clear space for more, we set them aside. We have quite a sizable stock of postcards—used and unused—that we’ve accumulated over the years, and I’ve occasionally picked up sets related to The Onion, DC Comics, and the like. In fact, I’ve been tempted recently by a set issued late last year by Clarkson Potter: Dungeons & Dragons—Archival Art from Every Edition, an intriguing 100-card set. Per Diem Printing offers a fun set of 25 vintage comic book covers, as well as one featuring covers from Weekly World News. Must. Not. Acquire!



But I think the reason for the decline of postcards is clear: Texting, email, and social media. Usage of postcards has probably declined in step with general correspondence and letter writing as people have adopted new ways of communicating and sharing their experiences. I’d wager that below a certain age, perhaps indeterminate, people are more likely to post to Instagram or Tiktok a highlight from their experiences than to send a postcard. Of course, such general sharing is more passive and less personal than sending someone specific a postcard intended just for them. So it goes. Personally, I prefer letters like this—even writing letters of comment as though I might mail them even if I email them as an attachment. I write differently in letter form than I do in an email. I’d be curious what Dale Spiers of Opuntia has to say—or has said—on the matter.

David M. Shea’s exploration of fans who write and why they stop also gave me pause. Over the years, I’ve pursued various forms of writing as a vocation and avocationally: journalism, professional writing, and different kinds of fan writing: reviews, columns, interviews, articles, even poetry. I’ve received multiple rejection letters from Asimov’s for poetry submissions and one from Weird Tales for a short story that I’m currently workshopping with the N3F’s Writers Exchange. I ended up publishing most of my rejected work in apazines, which is a fine outlet for me, but I might turn to sending work to other people for consideration for inclusion in their fanzines. One fan editor friend recently said, “Your poetry seems fine; I don’t know why Asimov’s would reject [it]. I’d be glad to get some of your poems.” There’s something rewarding and validating about someone else publishing your work even if it’s not paid. These days, I write for work, for a scholarly journal, and for apazines and fanzines. But fiction is something I’ve largely avoided. Stories take more time for me than other forms of writing, and as a dilettante, I often tire of story ideas before I complete a piece. Workshopping my rejected Weird Tales story is an attempt to push past that tendency.

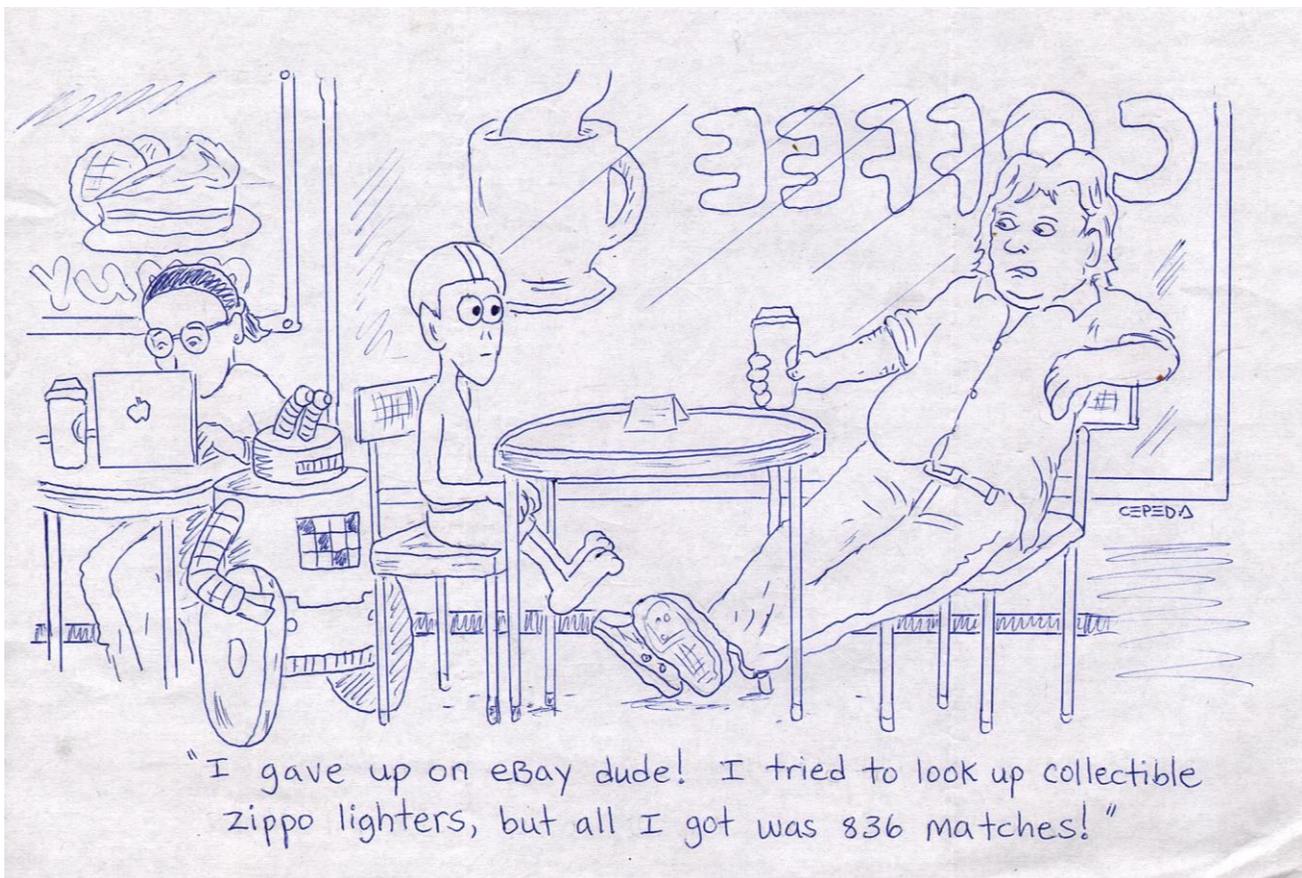
As a relatively long-standing employee of Google, I was fascinated by Rob Imes’s analysis of changes in YouTube over time. I met the founders before the video platform’s acquisition, and I’m sometimes curious what they think about its evolution over time. I mostly dip into YouTube when I’m looking for something specific, like a movie trailer, music video, or an old cartoon. During the pandemic, I’ve been watching David Lynch’s daily weather reports with some regularity. And I briefly experimented with posting video blogs of comic book reviews in order to repost the transcriptions as reviews on my blog and elsewhere. That didn’t last long, but it was a fun spurt of creativity. (I even bought one of those halo lights and a decent microphone in my enthusiasm. Silly man.)

But I haven’t given as much thought to the evolution of the platform—or its video ecosystem—as Imes has through a fannish lens. His walk through of notable fandom-related content, including a mention of Ian Shires, came close to inspiring me to make notes of things I want to check out. But to be honest, video is not my preferred mode of entertainment or learning. I’d rather read or write. So I chuckled at his admission of not including links on purpose and might not even end up exploring any of what he commented on, despite the wide range of options related to fandom.

Regardless, Imes’s commentary on YouTubers’ efforts to emerge as experts or people knowledgeable on a given topic is worth considering. If video—or podcasts, for that matter—become the most widely used mode of communicating information, what happens if the people making the videos or podcasts don’t know what they’re talking about? Other newcomers won’t be able to discern the quality of information they’re

receiving. Robert Beerbohm's concerns are valid: "You have a lot yet to learn if you think you can teach about the history of comics." Somehow, leaving comments and posting response videos hardly seem adequate. Certainly, if online video's your thing, there's a ton to explore. That's pretty cool.

I found the letter column rich and rewarding. Your exchange with Lloyd Penney on the culture wars encroaching on fandom (or as Bill Plott put it, "feud-dom") was interesting, and Gary Brown's recollection of the SyFy Channel's rebranding made me chuckle. I winced, too, at the time, but the network was able to make a go of it. Imagine an alternate world in which it became the Skiffy Channel or Scientifiction Channel! I also enjoyed Plott's remarks on Archie comics. I try to buy a digest or three whenever I see them at the grocery store—to do my part to help keep them firmly ensconced by the checkout. While it's true that Archie has modernized many of the series leading up to and related to the television show *Riverdale* (Mark Waid had a hand in that), they seem to respect their history, even if they're a bit uneven in terms of what decades they showcase. After all, old Archie is the best Archie. And I appreciated the back and forth on the uneven quality of Alpha Video's film transfers. Last night, a friend and I watched *The Red House* on an Alpha DVD, and the transfer was actually quite good—at least better than many of the Mill Creek DVDs I've accumulated over the years. While Alpha Video's DVD covers rank among the most garish I've ever seen, *Fadeaway's* back cover was a delight. Just imagine the gyroscope and accelerometer necessary to maintain the balance of such a vehicle! Preposterous and wonderful. Like all the best things in life.



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