

Hard Science TALES

Fifth Issue

SCIENCE, Maybe

Arnie and I are avid television fans. Among the many excellent programs we watch, there's a piece of fluff called Breaking Vegas that describes various methods gamblers use to try to beat the house. Some are quasi-scientific, like card-counting, which changes the odds enough to give the player the advantage. Of course, casinos forbid the practice, and quickly oust any counters they catch. There are also out-and-out cheats, who use slugs, counterfeit tokens, and various mechanical devices to empty the coin hoppers. These are illegal practices, and the casinos are even less friendly to anyone who uses such forbidden methods.

It doesn't seem quite fair that merely changing the odds should bring down the pit bosses' wrath. It seems to me that mathematical probability is a pretty tenuous concept, at best.

Just because one plus one has always totaled two in the past does not mean it will always be true in the future. Just because this stone is shaped thus and so now, it doesn't mean it will be a minute later. Molecules which maintain a certain form most likely will continue to be the same. But not necessarily. Anyone who's ever come in on the short end of a million-to-one chance (for example, catching a childhood disease after adulthood) knows that the odds don't always play out just as they should.

But this shouldn't be much of a shock to anyone. After all, when someone says "Probably" we know they really mean "Maybe". And when they say "Maybe" it almost always means "Probably Not."



How Hi THE MOON

The western explorer Fremont used a thermometer to measure altitude. Since water at sea level boils at 212 degrees, and at about 150 at 5000 feet altitude, he boiled up a pot each time he wanted to know how high he'd climbed, and calculated the measurement by this cumbersome method.

Astronomical measurements are calculated by equally mys-

terious efforts, using such concepts as triangulation and counting on ones fingers and toes. It seems clear to me that no one really knows how far it is ITom here to there until they go to it with a measuring tape, or at least a pot of boiling broth.

Personally, I carry a measuring tape with me in my purse, to be prepared for just such eventualities. If the aliens invite me to take a ride, I'll be able to check exactly what's what, and finally answer the questions of distance which up until now have only been estimated.

I feel it owe it to science to do this. After all, I am a science fiction fan, and I know the world is waiting for me to cover these questions.

You may thank me now, if you wish.

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How I Found Fandom, part 5

As I reflect on the early days of the Ozark Science Fiction Association (OSF A) it's tempting to think of it as pure joy and fannish companionship. But actually, Ray was right when he said "It's full of bickering and backbiting."

Dave Hall and Hank Luttrell were clearly the leaders of the new group, and they started as friends. But their personalities were vastly different. Hank was quiet and almost studious in his devotion to science fiction. Dave on the

other hand, was like fire in a bottle, with tumultuous changes in attitude and opinion every day. The two of them quickly developed antipathy toward one another.

Hank could be counted on for long quiet talks about the latest novella, or serious discussions of the future, but not very much interest in politics. Dave flamed out almost every day, furious at current events, angry at other fans and indignant at perceived injustices.

OSF A was developing its schism even while the group planned for the first convention. Dave Hall and his closest friend, Paul Willis, came to visit our apartment a couple or three times a week. Paul was quiet and scholarly, and watched Dave's antics with amusement. Dave would hit our door railing against one fan or another, mercurial and dismissive of the worth of the zines he brought to show us.

Hank's friends were often the more mature and talented. Jim Reuss, for example, showed real zine skills. Paul Gilster had a light artistic touch. I believe it was Hank who brought comic fan Bob Schoenfeld to OSF A, although Bob quickly joined the group that hung at our house. Hank's own zines were a bit bland and unexciting, but extremely workmanlike.

The apazines that drifted over the transom during those early days were also tumultuous. One avid fan, Ritchie Benyo, pumped out a steady stream of badly reproduced personal zines which never failed to send Dave Hall into paroxysms.

Though Ray was dismayed by the quarreling, his eagerness to publish grew stronger daily. He cozened his cousin, Mickey Rhodes, a local well-known fine artist, into drawing a cover that depicted a headstone named "Odd", with a skeletal form rising from the grave. All we needed was a way to publish, and we'd be ready to begin.

Finally, we learned of an ancient multilith printer and Xerox camera/plate maker that we could purchase, so we obtained a bank loan for \$1,000 to make the buy. We rented a basement room in our apartment building for \$10 per month, and set up the printer there. The temperature sensitive camera went into our bedroom, for lack of any other place to set it in our three room apartment.

The club continued to grow. Dave brought Ron Whittington, an almost surly reclusive youth who seldom spoke. I think it might have been Ron who found Chester Malon outside a movie theater; Chester was a skinny flame of un-disciplined enthusiasm who jumped into every club activity with unbridled lust for experience. And Chester brought in Douglas O. "Doc" Clark, a hairy hobbit-like man who constantly talked about other days-in fandom in an earlier era in St. Louis.

As the convention grew near, plans for the weekend dominated every gathering. Dave made the invitation to Ted White to be the Guest of Honor. Chester volunteered to be the on-spot trouble-shooter, to make sure everything went smoothly at the hotel. I recall that Hank contacted the book dealers he knew. Along with a local mail-order dealer who agreed to bring some wares to the event, Hank was able to attract Camille Cassadesus to come from Denver.

It was planned as a one-room event: Podium at the front, conversation area in the middle, dealer tables at the rear. Local fan Rich Wannan would bring his movie projector, and showings of episodes of Flash Gordon serials would fill any gaps in the program. The convention also rented a good-sized suite for a party. We were set.

The appointed day arrived. Chester went early to the hotel, to handle emergencies. He promptly disappeared, and wasn't seen until the convention was over. We asked why, and he explained he'd bumped into this girl...

Later I learned crash-and-burns were not unusual in con-workers.

I remember little about the convention itself, just a happy buzz of excited local friends, and a hand-full of out-of-town supporters. In addition to Camille bringing his wares from Colorado, Jerry Kaufman and Doug Lovenstein traveled all the way from Ohio. There were almost a hundred people in attendance, and we thought it was a jimdandy little gathering.

Other than our worry over the missing Chester Malon, there was only one bad thing I remember: Jim Hall, after having a couple too many drinks, made aggressive passes at all the young girls. For the entire weekend, we kept someone with him every minute, to guard against unthinkable problems. And, when he became a bit drunker, and even more rash in his actions, Ray took him aside and told Jim he'd beat the shit out of him if he didn't behave. This cooled him out for the balance.

Ted was, predictably, a great guest. But he really didn't get his full due honors at that tiny convention. Other than the open convention party in the club's suite, there were no after hour events of any kind. The locals didn't bother to rent hotel rooms, and frankly, we were such novices, we didn't know about room parties.

Ted was also short-changed at the ceremonials at the banquet. Ray agreed to make the introduction. But he knew nothing at all about Ted, and hadn't done his homework to learn more. He stood up and said, "This is a fan who needs no introduction" and gave none. Ted looked a bit surprised but went ahead and gave a nice speech about the joys of being a science fiction fan and a professional editor.

After the convention closed that Sunday late afternoon, many of us, including Ted and Robin White, jammed into cars and went to Mickey Rhodes' place for an unwind. Mickey's housemate Diana made supper - spaghetti and salad, as I recall- and we had the only really successful party of the weekend. There I sat raptly, listening to Ted's tales of fandom, and I felt I was finally at the door to that society I'd craved since I learned about it reading *Quantum*, *Opus/FanVariety*, *Odd*, and the other old fanzines. (to be continued.)

Alien Voices (Mailing Comments)

Der Fliegende Hollander (James Taylor)

I appreciated your discussion of internet radio. I've very seldom attempted to listen to the radio via computer, primarily because I didn't really know where to find what I'd like, and didn't want to spend the time exploring.

I'd be hunting music, if I were listening to radio on line. The political and news oriented stations you mention hold less interest to me because I've never been able to write and listen to talk radio at the same time. That's a talent I envy. And, too, I am not overly fond of hearing too much bad news at one time.

Of course, I assume I'm also missing a great deal of entertainment by not listening to online radio. I am particularly fond of Old Time Radio, and I'm told there's a rich selection of such available. Perhaps I'll do as you suggest, and do some browsing.

Vegas Notion (Ross Chamberlain)

Giving the vote to everyone is certainly a brave social experiment. I often have heard the argument that it is destined to fail because the uneducated voters will inevitably outnumber the well informed, leading to choices that are ill-advised and short-sited. I think it's too early to know if this is actually true, although I certainly do note social problems that arguably may point to this.

Yet I stop short of agreeing with your recommendation that every voter be tested to establish worthiness. These tests have been misused so much in the past that I doubt our ability to keep them fair and equitable. There's always someone who's trying to shape the destiny of someone else.

Some people may not be well prepared to vote on current issues, but may have made decisions along party lines. Or, they may be essentially unlearned about contemporary events, yet vote according to endorsements (as in, The New York Times recommends this, so I support it.) I think they should have the freedom to do this.

You and I are of an age, and we share a lot of attitudes, including your feeling that explicit language can be overdone. Yet I abhor censorship. If everyone were properly educated, perhaps we'd find a better balance between what you describe as gutter language and more restricted language. As you say, it's a matter of taste.

One of my favorite beliefs is that we'll evolve into homo superior, with big brains, good manners, and perhaps some psi-talents as well. In my youth, I thought this was just around the corner, based on our developing skills of empathy. Now I am less sure.

Bat Signals (Teresa Cochran)

As science fiction fans, I suppose all of us are anxious for some kind of reply from the cosmos, some indication that we are not alone. As such SETI fascinates me, being one of our best hopes for discovering alien life.

But I am sure I'm not alone in speculating that the aliens may be even less friendly, less altruistic than we are. Our history of dealing with each other shows that we're not good with strangers; the strong always grabs what the weaker has. As we dream about meeting beings from other worlds, we dream about what we may get from them - knowledge, riches, invention, long life, peace, or maybe a cure for the common cold. I wouldn't be too surprised that they have similar dreams about what they can get from us, if they ever actually find us. Perhaps they're hunting for food.

You say you've been reading science fiction for 25 years. How did you happen to discover the genre? Is there any particular type of science fiction you prefer over the rest? Who is your favorite author?

Softcore Fantasy Adventures (Arnie Katz)

It's true that we don't identify ourselves as much with individual clubs as with our city fandom, and not that as much as with fandom itself. Whether I'm in St. Louis, New York or Las Vegas, I'm still a Fan, with the kinships to other fans that implies, and with loyalty to the larger group, not the individual cities, and even less the individual local clubs.

The mathematics of fandom is daunting, since it proves that the odds are very much against anyone becoming a True fan and reaching that center core of the hobby. One in four million is worse than my chance of getting hit by lightning, or finding a meteorite in my back yard.

And yet, here I am. Shows you that what I said on page one is true: the laws of probability can't be counted on for much protection against disaster, or for fostering the hope of something wonderful. Like fandom. To me, despite the overwhelming odds against it, it seems extremely easy to be a fan. I'm not sure what that says about the science of numbers.

Wood Pulp (Woody Bernardi)

I suppose the isolation of Las Vegas from its peer fandoms in Los Angeles, Phoenix, Denver and Salt Lake City is the reason that the group developed as it did. The fact is, there were quite a few very active science fiction readers here, with virtually no contact with outside fan groups. Several people seemed to know, in a vague sort of way, that there were other fans. But no one really made contact, or participated in the national group until Arnie and I joined Snaffu.

I've always admired your recruiting abilities. I don't think I've known anyone else in fandom who was better at attracting new members to the group.

Jojadoq (Lori Forbes)

Actually, Lori, you write very well. It's natural to be self-conscious, but you needn't worry about seeming stupid or boring; you are neither.

I didn't realize you came into SNAFFU through the Skinny Dugan meetings. I really liked that pub, and consider it the best public meeting place of any of the clubs

I've attended. Meanwhile, The Tap Room (where the VSF A Sunday Socials are held) is winning similar affection from me. I much prefer private back rooms to the public areas of book stores.

I'd say it was a lucky day for us, when April dragged you to a SNAFFU meeting. I hope you'll soon be finished with your studies, so you can attend more meetings in the here-and-now.

What does Jojataq mean?

Midlife Crisis (Linda Bushyager)

What a pretty job of publishing. I love your template.

Since I was there when you arrived, I especially enjoyed your memoirs. Actually, NyCon3 was my first world-con, too. I don't remember meeting you there what I recall most is the impact you and your friends had when you started publishing and attending conventions in Pennsylvania/Ohio. As you say, there was a definite shortage of women in fandom, and your group hitting with an entire bevy of college-aged beauties was like a special gift from Ghu to fanzine fandom, or at least that's how most of the young men I knew felt about it.

I envy you, that you were introduced to science fiction so young - the fifth grade seems about perfect!

I've always been sorry that I was too old, when I was introduced to the genre, to really appreciate Heinlein juveniles, or Edgar Rice Burroughs. I must give the latter another try one of these days; perhaps I can look at him through the blur of second childhood.

I think your bio downplays one thing that always has impressed me - you have been a Mighty publishing fan. And I am delighted to see you publishing again, here in SNAPS.

Love "Let's Conform". You clearly show how short a distance it is between disliking someone else's avocation and prohibiting it, and how unpleasant that step is.

Flipper (JoHn Hardin)

I'm happy to say, JoHn, that you make a pretty good ditch-digger. Congratulations on your first issue - see, it wasn't hard at all! And, you didn't get muddy hands.

Flipper is a great fanzine name. It reminded me of those old flip-book, Little Big Books, I think they were called. The best had little illustrations in the lower right hand corner of every two-page spread, so that when you flipped through the book front to back, you'd see a little action movie. It was just such a book that started Poplar Bluff fandom, way back before-the-before. Duggie Fisher collected them. He was also a fire truck chaser (living next door to the fire station made that a natural) and one three-alarm had him on his bike, going to a fire in an adjacent neighborhood. There he saw a guy near his own (teen) age, and flashed on the thought, "He might have number so-and-so; I'll ask him." So he rode up, introduced himself to Max Keasler, and Poplar Bluffs fan history was begun. O by the way, here's a Mystery: Max did indeed have the number Duggie was hunting. This

tiny evidence of clairvoyance signaled import of Poplar Bluff fandom, probably indicating the cosmic significance of the fact that *1* also came from there.

I rarely if ever listen to an album from start to finish. Back in the pre-CD days, I used to do that more; now we invariably set our changer on random, with five disks in the hopper. I do recall that the Beatles' Sgt. Pepper album was designed to be heard that way. And a damn fine album it was, too. And several of The Incredible String Band albums are easy to think of as continuous programs. Santana's Supernatural makes a statement when played as a whole. Probably many other albums do the same.

I think eventually all mankind will be vegetarian, as we come to a more humane relationship with animals. But a lot of us aren't ready for that big step yet. Still, it's one of the best things we can do for our health, if only to get you to quit eating chorizo, and me to give up barbecue. At the least, the vegetarian diet means you are bound to lose weight and reduce cholesterol.

Something Really Remarkable

Just Happened This is so amazing,

I'm still gasping in disbelief. When James Taylor and JoHn Hardin showed up at

the last Veggrants meeting, they brought in a stack of large boxes. I thought little about it-the gang's been stockpiling boxes for books for the library project-until Arnie said, "You better go look to see what's happening!"

I walked into my dining room/office to discover them unpacking a brand new computer tower! Much to my surprise, they were in process of installing a handsome new computer for me!

It seems that when they'd worked on my computer in past months, attempting to debug it, and later to install the CD Write drive that Billy Pettit gave me, they learned how short on memory the aging machine is. And though I knew nothing, they decided to Take Steps.

I'm completely flabbergasted to report that James and JoHn, with a combination of cash and computer cache, have gifted me with a new Pentium 4 processor that is faster than greased lightning, with more memory than a Harvard Don.

This week JoHn is spending some noon hours doing the installation, moving the material from my old hard drive to the new one, attaching the CD Write, and all the other hard work that will make my computing up to seven times faster than it's ever been before.

I am Fantised. I am Amazed. I am Grateful.

And I can hardly wait to begin working on the new configuration. The next issue of Hard Science Tales will be seven times better, I am certain of it!

And hopefully, I will be seven times smarter. But no one, no where, no way, could have seven times better friends than I! I am the most fortunate of fans!

This issue is dedicated to James & JoHn! Thanks, guys!