“Season’s Greetings,” by Steve Stiles
Kurt Vonnegut likes a radio station that “satisfies the public’s right to know,” as contrasted with commercial stations that are “abject slaves of high-roller publicists and advertisers, keeping the public vacantly diverted and entertained.”

THIS ISSUE OF eI is in memory of my old friend from the 1950s, RAP, Raymond Arthur Palmer, his Other Worlds, and his flying saucers.

In the strictly science fiction world, it is also in memory of fan-to-pro artist Ronald Clyne and Michael Crichton.

#

As always, everything in this issue of eI beneath my byline is part of my in-progress rough-draft memoirs. As such, I would appreciate any corrections, revisions, extensions, anecdotes, photographs, jpegs, or what have you sent to me at earlkemp@citlink.net and thank you in advance for all your help.

Bill Burns is jefe around here. If it wasn’t for him, nothing would get done. He inspires activity. He deserves some really great rewards. It is a privilege and a pleasure to have him working with me to make eI whatever it is.

Other than Bill Burns, Dave Locke, and Robert Lichtman, these are the people who made this issue of eI possible: Victor J. Banis, Ned Brooks, Ronald Clyne, Nic Farey, Jacques Hamon, Jonathan Jensen, Stephen Jones, Richard Newsome, Dan Steffan, Richard Toronto, Peter Weston, and, from the Eaton Collection: Sarah Allison, Melissa Conway, and Rob Latham.

ARTWORK: This issue of eI features original artwork by Steve Stiles, Ditmar, Mark Schirmeister, and recycled artwork by Ronald Clyne, William Rotsler, and Steve Stiles.
Am I proposing a redistribution of wealth? You bet, since the wealth is being redistributed in any case, and often most crazily, and against the national interest. Am I proposing that we tax and tax and spend and spend? Yes, I am. Virtually every transaction is being skimmed already, and some private persons have done this at such confiscatory rates as to become as rich as smaller sovereign nations in a few years’ time. And they spend and spend. On what? On what?

--Kurt Vonnegut, An acceptance speech for Michael Dukakis,
“My fellow Americans: what I’d say if they asked me,”
The Nation, July 16, 1988

...Return to sender, address unknown.... 31
The Official el Letters to the Editor Column
Artwork recycled William Rotsler

By Earl Kemp

We get letters. Some parts of some of them are printable. Your letter of comment is most wanted via email to earlkemp@citlink.net or by snail mail to P.O. Box 6642, Kingman, AZ 86402-6642 and thank you.

Also, please note, I observe DNQs and make arbitrary and capricious deletions from these letters in order to remain on topic.

This is the official Letter Column of el, and following are a few quotes from a few of those letters concerning the last issue of el. All this in an effort to get you to write letters of comment to el so you can look for them when they appear here.

Thursday October 9, 2008:

Robert Lichtman: My fanzine reading got seriously behind after Corflu Silver, and as a result I’m only now making my way through the last three issues of el while I wait for the PDF of the newest issue to turn up. This is of necessity going to be somewhat piecemeal, but starting out with the April issue and Rob Latham’s article...

He makes reference to the Fanac.org site containing “a number of fan-histories-in-progress, including chapter notes for a book on 1960s fandom by Richard Lynch that I found particularly helpful.” Those notes have been there for the better part of a decade and no signs of a book appear imminent. Indeed, the Lynches folded their Hugo-winning fanzine Mimosa in 2003 and have largely disappeared from the fanzine scene. Dick shows up now and then on one of the Yahoo groups lists, but that’s the extent of his fanac as detectible by me. As was noted at the time Dick released those notes, they’re highly incomplete and contain any number of errors. Much of the energy, such as it is, toward projects such as this seems to have shifted to the on-line Fancyclopedia 3 (http://fancyclopedia.editme.com/) where editors Jim Caughran and Joe Siclari appear to be making slow but steady progress. I’ve contributed a number of updates to the project and would encourage others to have a look at it and see where they might be able to make a contribution.

Latham also writes in connection with Hugo nominees for best fanzine, “An online search of the Eaton holdings indicated that the Terry Carr Collection contained partial or full runs of all the nominated zines—with the peculiar exception of Carr’s own Lighthouse, which I would have to consult elsewhere.” He wouldn’t have to go far, as the Bruce Pelz collection indexing shows a complete run of all fifteen issues, including multiple copies of some. The reason Lighthouse isn’t in the Carr Collection is that Carol held back all of the fanzines Terry published at the time of the sale. They weren’t in the catalogue given to curator George Slusser. These days they’re on long-term loan to my collection, and I may have the
most complete set of Terry’s fanzines in existence.

Further on Latham writes of the presence in fanzines of “the permeability of sf to trends in the broader culture.” He singles out Susan Wood’s *Aspidistra*, Ray Fisher’s *Odd*, and Hank & Lesleigh Luttrel’s *Starling* as “vehicles of antiestablishment attitudes virtually indistinguishable at times from the contemporary underground press.” That sort of ignores the more fannish elements of those zines, but I get his point. One wonders what he’ll make of, for instance, the first “chapter” of Bill Donaho’s *Habakkuk* when he runs across it. The writings of Art Castillo alone make it stand out in the same light.

Finally, he notes *By British and Mood 70*, “two wide-ranging ‘fanthologies’ of British fan writing from the 1970s,” and laments that “no comparable volume of US material exists, at least to my knowledge.” I would hope that given the six months since this article was published, I’m not the first to point out that US fanthologies—mostly done by the year—began appearing with Guy Terwilleger’s groundbreaking *Best of Fandom* volumes for 1957 and 1958, and have continued with breaks through one collecting the best fanwriting of 1994 (and another covering British fanwriting only was done in 1995).

Not much to say at this point about the rest of the issue, in which I most enjoyed Jay Gertzman’s wonderful article on Charles Willeford. Oh, one more thing—in the lettercol Chris Garcia expresses wonderment that “Greg Benford studied under Edward Teller.” In No. 38’s letter column Chris notes that he picked up a bunch of old issue of *Trap Door* when he was in England on his TAFF trip. If he has No. 12, I commend to his attention Greg’s article, “We Are Everywhere,” which leads off with the line, “Edward Teller is a daunting job interviewer.”

**Saturday October 11, 2008:**

Lloyd Penney: Hard to believe, 40 *eIs*, and this is number 40. Congratulations on an impressive run. Let me have a look within, and see if I can think of anything that would make the locol. (Earl, I did it again. I missed issue 39 entirely. I will send this to you, and then get started on 39.)

My, what an evil Stiles illo on the front cover. I admit that my first thought was that she was cooking something to serve in the con suite. No kitties here, they went out with the first tray of hors d’oeuvres.

I get the feeling I may have skimmed your article about Iris Owens without realizing its significance. I’ll use myself as an example, and perhaps you can compare. I am a happily married man, 25+ years to Yvonne and we will end our days happy together. Yet... Not to take away from the relationship Yvonne and I have built up, but in my life, there are a few women who are very near and dear to my heart, and being around them is a joy and an excitement. There is the temptation to say, “if only...”, and have an affair in your mind, for I would never act upon that temptation. Yet, it’s there. I get the feeling that might also describe how you felt about Iris.

I eagerly await John Purcell’s report on how Jim Halperin is treating the Warner Collection. I’d like to see Greg Benford up here as a guest at Ad Astra, but no such luck.

I will study Chris Garcia’s article on the Denvention fanzine lounge. As he says at the end, he’ll be helping us at the Anticipation fanzine lounge in Montréal, and I haven’t run one since the one in Winnipeg in 1994. A couple of people who went to Chris’ lounge found it noisy, and perhaps too close to registration. I know where I’d like to have it in the Palais de Congres, but now to see where they’ll let me have it. I’m going to Montréal in about a week to have a look at the centre, and see where I might like to have it.

Some want the lounge in the middle of things, others want it off the beaten path. Some want a full room, others want a private room. I am going to try for a compromise. If we get our way, we’ll have both. I want a reading library, plus zines for sale, and freebies to pick up. Maybe some CDs with some pdfed zines on them as samplers. Once this trip to Montréal is out of the way, I can work further on what the room will look like, and what it will contain. Based on what Chris said about the amount of stuff he brings with him, I might have to courier some boxes of stuff to the Palais.

Hurray for the Eaton Collection, and the folks who make it work. Thanks to John Hertz, I sent the Eaton folks a copy of our CUFF trip report. Given the public perception of science fiction and those who enjoy it, setting up this collection must have been difficult to do, to get the message across about the literary and scholarly aspects of SF. It
is good to see that those who run the collection aren’t just going to sit in their offices, but travel about and be proactive and seen by the SF-consuming public. Another reason to want to go to Corflu Zed in Seattle.

I will consider the Eaton Collection as a place to send my own zine collection. About 25 Banker’s Boxes full of them, and probably about 20% of them are Canadian, almost guaranteed they won’t have. Their connection to eFanzines, Fanac.org, and the Hamon collection is just stellar. I wish other organizations could be as accepting and comprehensive... our local SF library, the Merrill Collection, sees itself as a bastion of literacy, and turns up its nose at fanzines. If only the Eaton had started their proactive campaign years earlier, the Warner collection would be there. I am certain that Jim Halperin, once he has had his look at the collection, and has done what he wants to do with it, will ship it off to the Eaton. I think he knows that the eyes of fandom are upon him.

To experience that thrill of discovery of something you always wanted, but never knew it... to find a literature that can propel you forward, and allow you a look at a potential future, to read something exciting, to let it take you out of yourself, and off to thrilling adventures just out beyond the Rim. What can compare with that feeling? I felt that in my teens, and now that I am on the edge of 50, I do miss it, and try to reclaim it by regularly going back to the tales that hooked me and took me away all those years ago. That thrill brought us all together, and sometimes, I think it is the loss of that something precious, and the attempt to find it again, that keeps us together to commiserate. We look forward with hope and optimism, and we look back with a sad nostalgia.

Dick Lupoff was lucky in that he eventually got to work in the industry he sought. I have worked in printing and publishing most of my life, but I’ve never been able to get as far as I wanted to. In reality, the publishing capital of Canada is New York.

Reading Jerry Murray’s near-autobiography seems to parallel your own adventures, Earl. “SLODGE” is the pretty typical story horny teens lived by in the past, but when you go looking on the Internet, you find fetishes you never knew existed, and many of them come from the Japanese. We’re pure as the driven snow compared to these happy perverts. Ooo, tentacle sex!

(Jerry mentions the Sinclair Lewis book that forced the meat industry to clean itself up... he might like to know that Maple Leaf Foods up here is having some serious problems with listeria bacteria, and it keeps cropping up in their products.)

As I read Jerry’s story of his trip into the porn industry, it looks like Greenleaf was the best of the bunch... honest business practices, and you paid well, too. Was this the secret of the company’s success, good business done in a shadowy industry? If Greenleaf had all these files of photos, does this collection still exist? Online anywhere? Just curious, y’understand...

Fully agree with both of you on Strunk and White. I have a reference shelf in my office, and I have the last two editions there. The earlier edition is one of the few textbooks I kept from university days.

Continuing to read... the good old days of sexual freedom, indeed. The world has opened up, while American is embracing a neo-Puritanism. Earl, could Greenleaf survive today? I’d have my doubts. The ’60s were all about embracing the land... I could see giving it all up to raise sheep. One fan I know, Ro Lutz-Nagey, did just that, gave it all up to raise livestock in Hawai’i. Porn today has no mystery, and so not much attraction for so many, and that’s where so many frustrations come to the fore in today’s society.

Today, with our near-ruination of the planet, more are going back to the land, and trying to live as green as possible, but it’s just not the ’60s again. If the stock markets drop any more, we may all be going back to the land, whether we like it or not.

**Tuesday October 14, 2008:**

Mike Deckinger: Steve Stiles contributed yet another, splendid cover on the October *el*. I don’t think he’s ever won a Hugo. If true, it’s criminal, and demands to be corrected in the future.

The Stiles cover uncannily captures the spirit and imagery of EC comics of the ’50s, before the Comics Code relentlessly sanitized and then expunged them. I can recall, with great fondness, meticulously collecting all the EC
titles, and treasuring them, until I gradually divested myself of them, in the intervening years. I’ve seen the hardcover reprints, but they can’t compare to savoring my own personal 52-page, 10-cent posted, issue.

Chris Garcia’s article on Fanzine lounges is more than relevant, in today’s convention-cluttered milieu. A functionary room combining fanzines to be leafed through, refreshments, and an opportunity to relax is essential at any major convention. One thing I’d caution against, is positioning it anywhere near the bar. The last thing you want are alcohol-soaked attendees stumbling through the lounge, in search of the bathroom, or more booze.

Another problem that may face lounge organizers is the inescapable fact that many of the best fanzines being issued today are in digital format, most commonly retrieved from “efanzines”. The only way to conveniently display them would be to print, and collate them on your own. Or have some computers available, which can then immediately access the latest on-line releases.

The Eaton collection articles are both enlightening and instructive. (And, incidentally, finally shed light on the identity of the elusive J. Lloyd Eaton). Over the years I’ve amassed a modest fanzine collection, dating back to the ‘50s, and a more substantial sf collection. It’s doubtful whether the fanzine collection has much cash value attached to it. If offered en masse, on eBay, I’d be surprised if it generated much interest. The magazines and pulps, conversely, do have considerable value and could serve as a goldmine annuity were I to cash them in to the highest bidder.

I’ve been poring over what my options would be in the coming years, as aging begins to take its toll. The approach Sam Moskowitz had is tempting; immediately sell his collection, upon his death, for top dollar, with all proceeds going to his survivors. In that sense, your beneficiary reaps the profit of years of compulsive collecting.

I’m still mulling over my disposal options at this time. I don’t feel pressured; presumably I have plenty of time to make an educated decision. But I’m glad to hear there is an added option, with transference to the Eaton collection, where I know my contribution will receive proper stewardship and dedicated management.

I’m wondering too, how the Eaton library is coping with the growing trend to produce fanzines only in digital, and not hard copy formats? Do they offer digital storage and retrieval for these products? Will their present accumulation ever be converted to electronic issues? There will always be some printed fanzines but I expect their number to decline with each passing year.

It’s unfortunate a saintly gentleman like Harry Warner, is being cited, with complete justification, as an example of graceless inaction when it comes to disposing of a sizable and valuable collection.

**Saturday October 25, 2008:**

Lloyd Penney: Here are comments on the missing *el39*. Not sure how that one got past me.

Hey, Steve Stiles, I have absolutely nothing against naked purple flyin’ women, and wouldn’t mind one flyin’ past right now. Not sure how much in the way of various pharmaceuticals I’d have to ingest, though...

Earl, the in memory of section is just getting too big. If only these great people would stop dying, we wouldn’t have to spend so much time mourning, and remembering fondly. If only we each knew our personal Best Before date.

My loc on *el37*...that photo you took of me and Yvonne just proves that the longer you stay married, the more you begin to look like one another, the shirts not entering the equation. With the recent successes of the Chinese space programme, I can see that Chinese SF may have it own Golden Age soon. Dreams about space, an oncoming industrial age... If we’re around long enough, Chinese SF may be big. And, I still haven’t got my copy of “The Drop”, and because I was dealing with students, I am told that I shouldn’t hold my breath.

Luros...lurid...coincidence? I think not. Some of those covers do look familiar, although I never did get a look inside.
Excellent profile on Milton Luros, and how publishing has always been about what people want. The only popcult reference I can remember to the nudist magazines were that Hawkeye Pierce received them occasionally in Korea in M*A*S*H.

I didn’t have many friends when I was a kid, so it took me a long time to learn about comic books. I rarely had more than a dollar in my pocket back then, so I only had a few comic books in my possession, and I stopped buying them because of the frustration my mother would regularly cause... I would read them several times, and put them in a box to become part of a collection, and of course, Mom would come along, figure that because I wasn’t continuously re-reading them, I must be done with them, and she thoughtfully threw them out, even after pleading with her to not throw them out, because I was saving them. After failing to understand why I’d want to keep them, I stopped buying them, and purchased one or two paperback books, usually comic collections or Ripley’s Believe It Or Not!, and I would enjoy them and hide them away. Eventually, Mom figured that I might like to keep those, asked to read them, and continuously broke the spine until she’d hand it back to me with pages falling out. Today, I own books, and they are mine. I am not loaning them out to anyone.

In the article about Sam Roth, H.L. Mencken is quoted as saying that some of Roth’s books would never be published in America. True back then, and surprisingly true today, in spite of the so-called sexual revolution. Is American society still so puritan that so many publications European society might take for granted still might get you arrested in the USA? As a Canadian, I’m caught in between American and European attitudes, and we’re a little less strict here. Also, if Roth was a bit of a masochist, it showed in regularly being assaulted and searched. I suppose that even negative publicity is still publicity.

Once I discovered fan publishing, I had thought of pro publishing to make a living and be in the heart of a publishing industry. There just didn’t seem to be any way to do it, and I learned quickly that this idea was an old one, and that it would be quite difficult to obtain quality work. What did I know? This was in the early ’80s.

My comments to you on el40 re Iris Owens applies even more, especially after reading el39. There are several young women who mean a lot to me, and spending some time with them is very special. It may be love, it may be infatuation, or just a special level of friendship, I am not sure. The one I love most of all, Yvonne, knows and understands how I feel about these other women, and perhaps why, and I am blessed.

Thank you once again, Earl, for these personal jaunts. I apologize for missing those issues that somehow got past me, but at least I can belatedly catch up with comments and reflections. I will make a special note for myself when the .pdf of el41 comes up. Looking forward to it.

**Wednesday October 29, 2008:**

Robert Lichtman: Steve Stiles’ skill in manipulating color in Photoshop has really improved rapidly! This Halloween cover on el40 is really well done. You’ve been doing good getting this series of his covers one after another.

Chris Garcia’s article on running a fanzine lounge offered me no new information, but that’s not to say he didn’t do a fine job of laying out the parameters of the task. I’ve never run one myself, but I’ve been an attendee at many and involved at times in helping out either by assisting in supply runs or taking a shift as the Fan Responsible. It is impressive that Chris has gotten so much experience in such a short period of time, and given his age he’s going to be a valuable resource for a long time.

The Eaton Collection material in this issue was extremely interesting reading, and neat to see a photo of Melissa Conway—with whom I’ve had correspondence off and on over a number of years concerning the fanzine collection there. The late rich brown and I worked off and on (and at great length, especially rich who, as you’ll recall, spared no words) with curator George Slusser to help him create knowledgeable essays on fanzines that were posted on their Website. Unfortunately, some of this seem to have disappeared or to have moved somewhere that I can’t find.
Some of it remains, however, as part of the “electronic exhibition surveying the Eaton’s fanzine holdings, entitled ‘FANAC,’” referenced in Rob and Melissa’s article. However, the link given there (in the paragraph just below the photo of the Ann McCaffrey material) doesn’t work—but it does if you remove the “/index.htm” at the end of it. There you are taken to the front page of what remains of Slusser’s work and can make your way around the electronic labyrinth available to you from there.

There’s also the “Fanzine Collections” page that can be accessed by going to the UC Riverside Libraries home page at http://library.ucr.edu/ and entering “fanzine collections” in the search window. Once at the Fanzine Collections page, there are short descriptions of the three primary fanzine collections (Terry Carr’s, Bruce Pelz’, and Rick Sneary’s) with links to fanzine cover thumbnails and short descriptions of the collections. There’s also a link at the bottom to Rob Latham’s article in el37. It’s a circular world, isn’t it?

I’m looking forward to meeting Rob at Corflu in Seattle next year. In the meantime, I’ve added Melissa to the Trap Door mailing list so that the Eaton Collection will be kept up to date on its holdings of my current genzine. They appear to have all issues to date with the exception of Nos. 18 and 19, at least so far as what’s catalogued on their Website is concerned. I don’t think I have spares of those issues (published in 1998 and 1999), but perhaps someone heeding your call in “Eighty Pounds of Paper” will provide them.

Dick Lupoff hits the right note for me, too, regarding the older SF magazines when he writes, “I think I enjoyed the editorials and the fanzine reviews and the letter columns as much as I did the stories.” Indeed, those are aspects of the pulps and the later digests that I find regretfully absent from the modern survivors. As I’ve related before, I first learned of the existence of an older fandom a couple years before I got involved by reading old pulps at a huge used book store in Hollywood, especially the letter column run by ol’ Sarge Saturn’s and the “Club House” columns by Rog Phillips. Somehow I didn’t connect this with the possibility that what I read of that was happening in the ’40s might have carried on. I never had fantasies of professionally editing a magazine myself, but when I got involved in the book publishing operation at The Farm I was very good at all aspects of it (production, editorial, and sales) and that led to my later employment with Paul Williams and his Entwhistle Books when I left the commune and moved to Glen Ellen. After that job went away thanks to the 1982/83 Reagan Recession, I continued to try to find work in the publishing industry in the Bay Area. Unfortunately, the reality of low pay hit home and I eventually ended up working in civil service for over eighteen years instead, where I enjoyed decent pay and incredible paid benefits (initially covering not only me but my four sons), and which led to the retirement-with-pension I live on today.

Dick’s mention of The Digital Wristwatch of Philip K. Dick reminds me of how much I enjoyed it when it first came out and I bought a copy at Other Change of Hobbit in Berkeley. I’m not surprised that it’s become a collector’s item since it has appeal to fans not only of Dick Lupoff, but also Philip K. Dick (as an “association item”), Philip José Farmer (who wrote an introduction), and George Barr (who did the artwork). Like Dick, “I wish I’d stocked up on copies.” It had occurred to me, but my income at the time didn’t allow that sort of speculation.

I didn’t expect at first to enjoy Jerry Murray’s “Slodge” when I embarked on reading it. Who is this, I thought—another obscure pornmeister brought back to tell his tales of sleazoid success back in the day. But before long I was captivated by his account of how he got involved step by step, and I ended up reading it with great enthusiasm all the way to the end. He must have been a terrific asset to Greenleaf because he can really spin a yarn. I hardly paused at all, although I mused when I came to his reference to the Hog Farm whether or not the one he encountered in Mexico—which he describes as “a mixed bag of lumbermen, dropouts, dopers, and idealists”—was the same one that grew up around the Bay Area’s Hugh Romney, better known as Wavy Gravy.

Looking back further, I particularly enjoyed Victor Banis’s “Oh, Gloria!” in No. 39—a really sweet and captivating tale. Tony Jacobs’s survey of “The Luros Skin Magazines” was interesting, and I don’t mean just the cover shots, ahaahahahah. Dick Lupoff’s comments on Hadju’s The Ten-Cent Plague made me almost interested in reading that book, but I think I’ll stick with Dick’s commentary instead. Where he wrote that “the last years of [his] comic-book addiction coincided with the grand flowering of the EC line,” I observed that was the conclusion of my own as well. I’d started out with funny animals in the late ’40s—first with Walt Disney’s Comics & Stories (to which my parents got me a five-year subscription when I was five years old and renewed it twice thereafter, well beyond when I was still actually reading it) and then all the others: Bugs Bunny, Tom & Jerry, Woody Woodpecker, and my favorite, Mighty Mouse. The ECs came along when I was entering adolescence and were just the sort of vaguely anti-establishment stuff I could get off on at the time. And finally, your “Hot for Harriet” was a really sweet piece of writing of which you should be proud.
And finally there was e138, an easy read for me because I skipped Alexei’s huge Heinlein article due to lack of interest. I enjoyed reading Pat’s and Graham’s pieces, and also Jerry Murray’s LAPB Show report and Frqnk’s inside look at his involvement in Milk. Victor’s piece didn’t grab me the way the one in No. 39 did, sorry.

Hey, I’m caught up.

Everything was beautiful and nothing hurt.

--Kurt Vonnegut, *Slaughterhouse-Five*
Who would have thought it possible? Certainly not me. Yet here we are, Bill Burns and I, closing out our seventh year of continuous publishing of *eI*. Surely something rather close to being a miracle.

And, it's that time again for us (along with a bunch of help from Robert Lichtman and Dave Locke) to wish all of you the very best for the Holiday Season. And, if you're really lucky, a toke or two to go along with all the rest of the goodies you're going to be consuming, courtesy of the incomparable Steve Stiles and Santa Sativa in the three special Christmas-wish illustrations accompanying this editorial.

And, while I'm speaking about Steve Stiles, it is also time once again to say that he is the single most significant ignored artist the field of science fiction fandom has yet spawned. If anyone deserves a Hugo for any reason, that person is Steve Stiles. I'd like to call your attention to the fantastic portfolio of Stiles artwork that Bill and I presented in last year's December Holiday year-end special at [http://efanzines.com/EK/eI35/index.htm](http://efanzines.com/EK/eI35/index.htm) PLUS the undeniable fact that Steve contributed FIVE of the six covers on *eI* during this year.

Isn't it time that someone besides Bill and me recognize his accomplishments and acts accordingly.

And, while I'm on the subject of overlooked greatness, there is Bill Burns himself, my ezine partner, who has been working long, hard, and diligently lo these many past years keeping efanzines.com THE ultimate online resource for fanzine publishing, research, and down-right enjoyment.

Isn't it time that someone besides me recognizes his accomplishments and acts accordingly.

Come on, you uninformed alleged sf fans who give Hugos to people totally outside the field...WAKE UP!!! Do your duty!
And while I’m still close to the subject of noteworthy fan artists, I’d like to call your attention to Dan Steffan’s incredible article “A Labor of Love” that is the center showpiece of this, the showpiece issue of eI for 2008. In it, as a writer and not an artist, Dan has evoked the very living, breathing image of fan-to-pro artist Ronald Clyne. And adorned that article with his selection of the many fantastic pieces of art created by Clyne. It is indeed a smooth, fast-moving, high-intensity, emotion-generating feature. Bill Burns and I feel honored and humbled at being able to present this brilliant piece of workmanship to you as a special holiday treat.

It is guaranteed to, as the cliché says; leave you in tears as you read it. Tears of pure joy for Ronald Clyne, that he was able to live his life the way he wanted it to be and to gather around himself everything that he treasured and held dear. Tears of pure joy that Dan Steffan could evoke such an image of the artist. Read it and weep....

Then...on a more sober note...at the close of our seventh year and with well over 350,000 visitors from all over the world to eI...41 issues, seven indexes, thousands of pages, cover scans, photographs, etc. at least something resembling one honorable mention acknowledgment would be most appreciated...in case there is anyone out there reading this who gives a damn.

And, with all that...gripes, compliments, and complaints intact...once again Bill Burns and I wish you and yours the very best for this holiday season.

May Santa Sativa drop a kilo of something very special in your Christmas stocking.

And, on a parting note, for Bill, Robert, Dave...and everyone else who has worked to make eI whatever it is...all of us promise to do much better next year.

---

It’s hard work. It’s not pleasant—just in solitude, writing. You can’t have anybody around. It’s a very lonesome business, and we’re social animals.

--Kurt Vonnegut, Knoxville News-Sentinel, 4/01
The Birthday Boy

By Victor J. Banis

She baked him a wheat cake, because that was his favorite. He'd have been happy with anything, of course, or even with nothing at all. The sweetest boy, everyone said so. Never a moment of trouble, never a word of complaint. What mother could ask for a more perfect son?

She had gotten him a new pair of shoes. It had taken her the entire year to save the money for them, and she had had to forego so much that the money could have provided for them; but this mattered, this was important, that they celebrate these young years of his, that each of the birthdays must be made special. It was all she could do. The poor are limited, but not in love, at least. She would do this, and if her husband thought her foolish, he did not say so, and for that she was grateful.

When the cake was ready, she went to where he was working in the shop with his father. He let the boy come in alone; this was her time, mother and son together. He understood. That was his gift. It was all he could give.

“How he has grown,” the other women said, and did not know that their words were like a knife in her heart when they spoke them.

He was a serious child, not given much to play or laughter, but when he smiled, as he did now, it was like the sun bursting through a bank of storm clouds. She could tell that he was delighted with the shoes, and the cake, which he especially loved. They ate it together, each crumb sticking painfully in her throat, but somehow, she managed to smile back at him, and if he guessed her pain, he did not remark on it, and only smiled more sweetly at her.

When the cake was gone, he put on the new shoes, and came to embrace her, and she had to fight the urge to cling to him, to hold him to her, because she knew that was foolish. You could not keep your boy a boy. No matter how tightly you held him, he would grow.

He kissed her brow and went out to show his new shoes, and she sat, the tears running freely now down her cheeks, her heart breaking within her. She did not look up when her husband came in.

He knelt on the dirt floor with her, and took her in his arms. His rough carpenter’s hands were astonishingly gentle. “Ah, Mary,” he said, wishing that he could take the pain away from her. “Don’t cry, my darling.”

“Oh, Joseph, Joseph,” she sobbed against his chest. “Another year gone by.”

He held her, and said nothing. What could he say? It had all been settled when the boy was born: those strange men, the lights—the time passed, and what would be, would be. He could not change any of it.

He could not help his heart aching, though, for the mother, knowing.

---

Q: Based on what you’ve read and seen in the media, what is not being said in the mainstream press about President Bush’s policies and the impending war in Iraq?
A: That they are nonsense.

--Kurt Vonnegut, 1/27/03, “In These Times”
A Chronological Bibliography:
The Legendary Victor J. Banis’ writings for eI

Compiled by Earl Kemp

01 – January 2003
“Paperback Virgin”
http://efanzines.com/EK/eI6/index.htm

02 – April 2003
“Godfather Virgin”
http://efanzines.com/EK/eI7/index.htm

03 – June 2003
“All Of Us Virgins”
http://efanzines.com/EK/eI8/index.htm

04 – August 2003
“Virgins No More”
http://efanzines.com/EK/eI9/index.htm

05 – April 2004
“Lady in Waiting”
http://efanzines.com/EK/eI13/index.htm

06 – June 2004
“Matinee”
http://efanzines.com/EK/eI14/index.htm

07 – August 2004
“An Afterthought to Love in Loon”
http://efanzines.com/EK/eI15/index.htm

08 – December 2004
“...My true love gave to me....”
http://efanzines.com/EK/eI17/index.htm

09 – December 2004
“To Bea or Not To Bea”
http://efanzines.com/EK/eI17/index.htm

10 – October 2005
“A Virgin Anew”
http://efanzines.com/EK/eI22/index.htm

11 – April 2006
“Adolf’s First Goose”
http://efanzines.com/EK/eI25/index.htm

12 – June 2006
“In Passing”
http://efanzines.com/EK/eI26/index.htm

13 – February 2007
The Internet has already become for a fortunate few (“spiritual scuba divers,” one is tempted to call them) a limitless ocean without bottom or shores. In whose depths one can breathe effortlessly—in and out, in and out. It is the habitat of the newest creatures to evolve in our part of the Milky Way—as enchanting and nobly bizarre as any giant manta or moray eel, say. They are recorded thoughts and feelings about what it is like to be a living thing.

--Kurt Vonnegut, 9/99
A Labor of Love
The Fantasy Art of Ronald Clyne

By Dan Steffan

When asked near the end of his life to describe his long career, Ronald Clyne was typically taciturn. “I was a self-taught artist/designer,” he replied, choosing his words with economy, and precision. “Later,” he added, “I designed book jackets for the major New York publishers, illustrated one book, and did about ten abstract paintings. My best design work, I think, is a series of about 100 or more LP record covers, done mainly for Folkways Records.” There had been other things along the way, too, but Clyne always preferred minimalism to verbosity and chose to edit the details of his 50-year career down to the bone.

In truth of fact, he was much more than his modesty would allow him to admit. Starting in his teens, he became a fanartist, a publisher, a pulp illustrator, a commercial illustrator, a book and album jacket designer, an architect, an audiophile, a lithographer, a fine artist, and an art collector. He also became the rare exception to the fannish rule of success—or lack thereof—Ronald Clyne was the fanboy that made it big.

Unlike most of his contemporaries, Clyne was—to quote a 1975 profile—“one of the few artists from the pulp period that went on to do bigger and better things and become financially successful.” He had defied the odds and had—as critic Robert Weinberg put it—“made the leap from the narrow confines of the genre to major success as a commercial artist.” The story of Ronald Clyne’s charmed journey from teenaged amateur to award-winning designer is a triumphant tale of talent, determination, and luck. It brought him the kind of success that allowed him to spend most of his life in the pursuit of esthetic beauty and meticulous order in all things, including the world around him—right down to the air he breathed.

Ronald Clyne was born in Chicago, Illinois on December 28, 1925, right in the sweet spot between Christmas and New Year’s. He started drawing at age eight and displayed an affinity for cowboys and Indians, and for copying the
comic strips out of the papers that his father, an advertising exec, brought home each day. Some thought him worthy of the mantle of prodigy, though describing him as a gifted amateur would probably be closer to the truth.

While still in his early teens, Clyne discovered the world of pulp magazines—he was attracted to them for their garish cover paintings, as well as the macabre stories inside. “I am not a widely read person,” he admitted to Stephen Jones, in a 2004 letter. Nevertheless, the fiction he read in those pulps, like *Amazing Stories* and *Weird Tales*, captured his imagination and inspired him to keep reading. “While young, I read mainly Poe, Lovecraft, Dunsany, [and] E.R. Burroughs,” he wrote—implying that there had been little else since, except maybe for a little bit of Kafka and Pinter—but other than those latecomers, he’d just never been much of a reader. “I am really a visually oriented person,” he said in his defense. Nevertheless, he spent his entire life surrounded by books. He had collected them, illustrated them, and designed their covers. They were an undeniably important part of his life, even if—as he claimed—he had not actually read that many of them.

The truth was that books served a different purpose for Ron Clyne than they did for most other people. They were really more like art objects to him. The ones that he designed were like blank canvases for him to fill and the ones that he bought were canvases that had already been filled by someone else. He loved them because of the artistic possibilities they offered him, not because of their literary merits. Over the years, so many books passed through his hands that he probably stopped seeing them as anything other than something to wrap his dust jackets around. It was a casualty of his profession.

![Le Zombie covers](image)

Drawn in 1942 and published early the next year, these two covers for *Le Zombie* were among Clyne’s first fanzine covers.

In 1941, Clyne took a portfolio of his drawings to the Chicago offices of Ziff-Davis Publications, then the publisher of *Amazing Stories* and its sister publication, *Fantastic Adventures*. His meeting that day with legendary editor, Ray Palmer, couldn’t have gone better for the young artist. Palmer liked what he saw and immediately bought two humorous spot illustrations from him, paying the princely sum of five dollars apiece for them. Ron was 15 years old.

Not long after the publication of his first professional sale—in the November 1941 issue of *Fantastic Adventures*—his interest in fantasy fiction led him directly to fandom. And by the end of the next year—while he was also getting illustration assignments from Ray Palmer — Ron Clyne began drawing cover art for several of the Midwest’s best fanzines of the era, like Bob Tucker’s *Le Zombie*, and Al Ashley’s *Nova*.

Like his earliest pulp art, Clyne’s fanzine covers show the signs of an artist who was still learning his craft. Clumsy anatomy and immature experiments with cross-hatching and Finlayesque pointillism betrayed his inexperience and youth. Nevertheless, his talent showed signs of maturity far beyond his years and his covers began to stand out from his fannish contemporaries, like Jack Wiedenbeck and John Giunta. Only Roy Hunt, an artist from Denver, was skilled enough to give him a run for his money —producing a few excellent covers for Tucker’s *Le Zombie* that, by comparison, revealed the teenager’s lack of finesse and flexibility as an artist.
Fortunately, he had other skills that set him apart. His talent for intricate calligraphy and hand lettering gave his fanzine covers a sheen of professionalism that was lacking from most other fan art of the time. It was a talent that would follow him into his professional career, too—where his tasteful use of typography became the highlight of the hundreds of book covers and album jackets he designed.

Ron Clyne made his pulp magazine debut with this illustration from *Amazing Stories* from July 1943, followed the next month by this spot cartoon published in the August 1943 issue of *Fantastic Adventures*.

Two more examples of Clyne’s fanzine art from late 1943, a cover for *Le Zombie 54* and a back cover for *Nova 3*.

In the summer of 1943, following a job opportunity, Clyne’s father and step-mother moved their household across the country from Chicago to the Los Angeles area, where Ron entered his senior year at Hollywood High School, in the heart of Beverly Hills. Soon after school started, Clyne encountered an energetic freshman with a wacky sense of humor, and the unlikely name of Charlie Nutt. They were both transplanted Chicagoleans and, despite the difference in their ages, they seemed to have a lot of other things in common, including a love for *Weird Tales* and fantastic fiction. They instantly became friends. (Ten years later, Nutt would change his last name to Beaumont and carve out an admirable career in his own right, as a popular writer of short stories and scripts for television shows, like *The Twilight Zone*.) Nutt was undoubtedly impressed by his new friend’s professional accomplishments and steered him as soon as he could to a meeting of his local science fiction club, known to fans around the country as the LASFS.
The Los Angeles Science Fantasy Society had moved into a new clubhouse at 637½ South Bixel Street about six months before Clyne’s arrival, but the place had already acquired a kind of legendary status. “The description of the clubhouse we had read made it sound fabulous beyond belief,” remembered Alva Rogers, in an article written in 1970. It was supposedly “a spacious room with indirect lighting, carpeted floor, book shelves filled with books and magazines, and the walls were covered with original cover paintings by [Frank R.] Paul and others.” Rogers, also an budding artist, moved to LA a few months after Clyne did, to enroll in art school on the G.I. Bill.

“I could hardly wait to see it with my own eyes,” Rogers wrote. “At last, I would see real live fans in their natural habitat.” He was so excited at the prospect of meeting real fans in the flesh that he attended his first LASFS meeting the same day he got to town, even before he went anywhere near a classroom.

Unfortunately, the truth about the LASFS clubhouse was a little less fanciful and a lot more down-to-earth than he’d been led to believe. Another transplanted fan, Francis T. Laney, arrived at his first LASFS meeting a month after the starry eyed Rogers had, and he described the clubhouse a bit more realistically. “The room was a blend of pigsty and monk’s cell,” Laney wrote. “There was an austere and extremely dirty couch in one corner, and a rickety old square table covered with typewriters and loose papers. [...] A couple of ramshackle homemade bookcases filled with tattered magazines, and 25 or 30 uncomfortable folding chairs comprised the remainder of the furnishings. The shortcomings of the room and its contents were made even more apparent by the pitiless glare of six or eight naked light bulbs set in sockets around the wall. The floor was a welter of cigarette butts and other trash, not the least of which was the filthiest and most badly worn our rug I have ever seen.”

Harry Warner, Jr. confirmed Laney’s description in his history of Forties fandom, All Our Yesterdays. “Inside, its 20 X 30 feet of floor space was principally remarkable for its large collection of cigarette butts, the outcome of a ban on ashtrays in [an] effort to halt smoking in the clubroom,” Warner wrote. Nevertheless, starry eyed fans like Alva Rogers “thought it was magnificent.”

It is unclear whether Ron Clyne shared Alva’s enthusiasm or not, but once he showed his face at the club, he was welcomed and appreciated—especially by hungry fan editors. Despite of the crappy furniture and the bad housekeeping, the LASFS was at the peak of its activity and membership in the fall of 1943. Because of the war, fanzines were the club’s primary contact with the rest of fandom; a stream of both genzines and FAPAazines rolled off the clubhouse mimeo every month, including the club’s own, Shangri-L’affaires. The fanzine covers that Clyne had done for Bob Tucker and the other Midwestern fans were well known to the Bixel Street crowd, and by the time
Laney arrived in LA that November, Ron was already being courted by every publisher in the club.

The seventeen-year-old Clyne was described in *Ah! Sweet Idiocy* as “a very young boy, slender and delicate, who had a not inconsiderable artistic ability.” Laney went on to note that Ron’s “chief interest” was in fantasy art, “and I still remember how persistent he was when someone had an original or illustrated edition [that] struck his fancy. He would run the person wild making offer after offer, eventually running the price up to a fabulous amount.”

Clyne’s tenacity apparently extended to his artistic ambitions, as well. After his minor successes in Palmer’s magazines in Chicago, he was determined to move forward with his art career, using the fanzine covers he drew to hone his skills. “Ronald Clyne was a young and tremendously gifted artist,” Alva Rogers wrote in *Warhoon 27*, noting that he “contributed significantly to the general high level of art gracing the pages of LA fanzines in those days.”

“Ron Clyne, it seems, had had a number of originals he wished to publish through fan channels,” Laney reported. “And he invited all of the publishing members of the LASFS to come to his house one evening at 8:00 [so that] he could make an equitable division” of the artwork between them. A group of fans— including Jimmy Kepner, Phil Bronson, Bruce Yerke, Mel Brown, Walt Daugherty, and Forry Ackerman—had all agreed to meet at the clubhouse that night and carpool it over to Ron’s parents house in Beverly Hills. Everybody arrived at the designated
rendezvous spot on time except for Daugherty, who failed to show. Eventually the others got tired of waiting and went on without him. Arriving at Casa Clyne at the prescribed hour, the carload of LASFans soon discovered that they had been hoodwinked by the once missing Daugherty, who had—according to Laney—“not only sneaked out to Clyne’s ahead of them, but [he] had hogged every original that Clyne had” for himself. All the artwork was gone. And Daugherty, as Laney pointedly noted, “was not even publishing at the time.”

After that, whenever any LA faneditor wanted to publish one of Ron’s drawing in their fanzine, they had to make some kind of a deal with Daugherty first. At one point, Mel Brown had to go so far as to agree to take Daugherty on board as a co-editor of his ambitious fanzine, *Fan Slants*, as the only condition by which Daugherty would permit Brown to publish any of Clyne’s artwork—including the cover Ron had done especially for his first issue. At a later date, the ill-matched pair—according to Laney—nearly came to blows when Daugherty accused Brown of running off one of Clyne’s drawing on the wrong color paper.

The cover for the February 1944 *Fantasite 12* was Clyne’s first truly great fanzine cover and remains one of his best pieces of art from his days as a fan, while his illustration from the September 1944 issue of *Famous Fantastic Mysteries* proved that his newfound skills were leading him in the right direction, following the path set by artists like Hannes Bok and Rockwell Kent.

Only the occasional fanzine appearance by the brilliant Hannes Bok kept Ron Clyne from being fandom’s top cover artist during the early years of World War II. But that was fine with him. Ron was a life-long fan of Bok’s work as an illustrator, and kept one of his original illustrations—for Walter Kubilius’story, “Journey’s End,” published in the May 1943 issue of *Super Science Stories*—hanging in his house for over sixty years—even after he’d left behind all the other trappings of fandom.

When he wasn’t at his drawing board, Ron spent a lot of his time exploring Los Angeles’ many bookshops, looking for unusual and hard-to-find illustrated volumes by the great masters of the field. He bought them for their beauty and to inspire himself, but he also used them like they were textbooks; studying other artist’s styles and techniques.

Looking at Clyne’s illustrations from this period, you can see the influence they were having on him. His rendering had matured into a mixture of slick comic book brushwork and streamlined art deco graphics, and his anatomy now showed signs of pre-Raphaelite classicism. He learned about creating atmosphere from Englishmen like Arthur Rackham, Willy Pogany, and Sidney Sime—who was Lord Dunsany’s favorite illustrator. American artists—like Howard Pyle, N.C. Wyeth, and Rockwell Kent—taught him about heroic composition and how to capture a dramatic moment in time, and how to present it to his audience. It was an education ideally suited to a self-taught talent like Ronald Clyne, who feared—because of his age and the war in Europe—that he would probably never get the chance for a more conventional education in the arts.

It was during one of his Hollywood book crawls, in the spring of 1944, that Ron came across a copy of *Fantazius*
Mallare: A Mysterious Oath, an obscure first novel by Ben Hecht, published in 1922 and illustrated by an equally obscure artist named Wallace Smith. Hecht’s book—written just five years before he won the very first Academy Award for Best Motion Picture Screenplay for the 1927 film Underworld—was originally printed in a limited edition of 2,000 copies, most of which were intended for the collector’s market, but ended up instead being seized and destroyed by police. The book—“a novel of decadence and mystic existentialism”—had been condemned as needlessly salacious and Smith’s stark and erotic illustrations, in particular, were found to be objectionable.

In a review for a Berkeley literary magazine, the renowned author D.H. Lawrence pronounced Smith’s drawings to be “completely without irony, so crass, so strained, so would-be.” Hecht’s story didn’t fair much better. “There’s nothing in it but the author’s attempt to be startling,” Lawrence pronounced. “Fantazius Mallare is a poor, impoverished, self-conscious specimen.”

By the time the controversy ended, Ben Hecht and Wallace Smith had been fined $1,000 each and threatened with further legal action. Smith became quite dismayed by all the negative attention the book had brought his way and decided, as a result, to give up his illustration career altogether. He spent the last 15 years of his life writing adventure fiction and potboiler screenplays for Hollywood properties, like the “Bulldog Drummond” films. He died of a heart attack in 1937.

A decade later, Hecht turned the entire fiasco into the basis for a film called, The Scoundrel, which featured Noel Coward in his first starring role. The movie depicted the hellish environment found inside a pseudo-intellectual New York publishing house. “This unique fantasy film sets an acerbic atmosphere of backbiting and meaningless existence for literary types,” wrote one reviewer. But Hecht got the last laugh when he collected another Oscar for the film’s Best Original Story.

“The more Clyne thought about it,” Alva Rogers recalled, “the more he became convinced that these drawings deserved to be enjoyed by others as well as himself, and the few who were able to view his copy of this extremely rare book.” Inspired by the successes of two portfolios of fantasy illustrations that had been produced by Famous Fantastic Mysteries, “Ron decided to publish a portfolio of reproductions of the Wallace Smith illustrations on good quality paper, suitable for framing.”

“Ron carefully removed the illustrations from the book”—which he’d purchased for the staggering price of $24—“and turned them over to Reed for the reproduction,” Rogers continued. “This became an almost impossible task for Reed, who became thoroughly engrossed in the project.” As much a perfectionist as the young Clyne was, the
printer, too, got caught up in the quest to faithfully reproduce Wallace Smith’s delicate illustrations—which was no easy task because most of the drawings consisted mostly of fine white lines drawn on large black backgrounds. The trick was to run the plates through the press without over-inking them and filling in all the minuscule details of the drawings. But eventually the printer’s diligence paid off and he presented Clyne with a beautiful set of prints.

According to what Clyne told Richard Newsome in 2004, “[we] did all this without permission [from] Smith or his estate. Since [we] figured it was a non-profit venture reprinting old material, [we went ahead and] ran off 800 copies. No one ever contacted them about the rights.” Nevertheless, Clyne then wrote a short introductory biography of Smith—which he later admitted was probably co-written by his ersatz manager, Walt Daugherty—to accompany the drawings and then the entire package, once assembled, was placed in a simple paper wrapper that was imprinted with the book’s title. “In these reproductions of [Smith’s] ten drawings,” Clyne wrote in his introduction, “we give you a collection of the most unique and ritualistic line drawings; an echo of a great master’s genius.”

Two more prime examples of why Ron Clyne had become the premier fanartist of the war years, this cover for Andy Anderson’s Centauri 3 and a frontispiece for Jimmy Kepner’s Towards Tomorrow 1 were both published in the Spring of 1944.

“Ron’s primary concern was the wide dissemination of Wallace Smith’s drawings, rather than the making of money on the sale of the portfolio,” recalled Alva Rogers, in his Warhoon memoir. “The production costs were considerable, even in those days, and in order to offset them he solicited financial backing before launching the project.” Without stepping outside the LASFS clubhouse, Clyne managed to round up a group of financial angels to assist him with his dream project. They included Forry Ackerman, Andy Anderson, Myrtle Douglas (aka Morojo), Mike Fern, Paul Freehafer, Francis Laney, the future Charles Beaumont, Jimmy Kepner, Sam Russell, and the above-mentioned Alva Rogers—all of whom were thanked by Clyne at the end of his introduction. The ubiquitous Daugherty, on the other hand, was never mentioned. “We all felt it was money well spent,” Rogers added.

Rumor has it that Clyne—with the help of well placed adverts—actually sold out the entire print-run, with copies making their way into private collections all over the country, including a few Hollywood celebrities like famed director Fritz Lang. Today the portfolio is a highly collectible artifact, and copies—when they can be found—are sometimes priced as high as $1,000 apiece. That’s pretty good for a vanity project that originally carried a one-dollar price tag. Along with Jack Speer’s Fancyclopedia, the Fantazius Mallare portfolio was, in Alva Rogers’ opinion, “one of the two outstanding publishing events of 1944.”

By the time the Wallace Smith portfolio was published, Clyne had graduated from high school and had begun pursuing his career as a commercial illustrator in earnest. Even before his graduation, he had continued soliciting work from the pulp magazines. The new drawings he had done since leaving Chicago were much more accomplished than his previous juvenilia—especially when compared with the improbable cartoon that started his career. Many of
the awkward stylish gaffs that had once marked his earliest illustrations had matured into the confident brush strokes of a young professional. Proof of this can easily be found by comparing either of the covers he drew for Bob Tucker’s *Le Zombie* in 1942 with his cover for Phil Bronson’s *Fantasite 12*, drawn less than two years later. The difference is quite remarkable. The *Fantasite* cover looks like the work of an entirely different person and remains—to this day—as Clyne’s finest moment as a fanartist.

His hard work and dedication was rewarded, and by the end of the summer of 1944, Ron had added other pulp magazines, like *Planet Stories, Famous Fantastic Mysteries*, and the Grand Dame of them all, *Weird Tales*, to his list of clients.

![Illustration](image1.jpg)

These two illustrations, from the July 1945 *Fantastic Adventures* and the April 1948 *Amazing Stories*, show the strong influence of the pulp artist known as “Lawrence,” who produced covers and densely detailed interior art for both of Ray Palmer’s magazines, during the late 30s and early 40s. It was a style that Clyne clearly wished to emulate, but which proved to be unsuitable for his immature talents. These examples were obviously published long after the artist had executed them in about 1942 or 1943.

Each new illustration Ron drew was a little bit better than the one before it and the next was better than that, but his inexperience still betrayed him from time to time—giving the impression that he was occasionally in a little over his head. Many of his pieces during this period are overloaded with shading, crosshatching, and dramatic lighting; showing the strong influence of Lawrence Sterne Stevens (“Lawrence”) and Virgil Finlay. Each of these artists was well known for their sophisticated shading and stippling techniques—which gave their work a kind of graphic photorealism. But Clyne’s over-ambitious attempts to mimic their accomplishments only proved that he was clearly not in their league as an illustrator. Despite the tremendous progress he’d made in just a few years—Ron had yet to perfect his mastery over some of his artistic tools. As a result, his illustrations for *Amazing Stories, Planet Stories*, and *Fantastic Adventures* in 1943 and early 1944 seem cluttered and unnecessarily busy. Sometimes it seems like he just had to cover every surface in those illustrations with different textures and shading—often overwhelming the limitations of the cheap printing and cheaper paper that defined the pulp magazines.

That same summer, as Clyne began expanding his magazine work, he also started to investigate other opportunities in fantasy publishing and decided to send sample drawings off to August Derleth, deep in the wilds of Wisconsin. Arkham House—the imprint specializing in weird fiction that had been started by Derleth and Donald Wandrei in 1939—was still in its infancy and had published only half a dozen books before Clyne’s artwork came through the mail slot. Nevertheless, those few volumes had gained the attention of fantasy collectors all over the country. Arkham’s anthologies of stories by H.P. Lovecraft, Clark Ashton Smith, and other members of the so-called *Lovecraft Circle*—which included Derleth and his partner, Wandrei—had begun to sell out their print runs and
demand for similar volumes was creating a market where, before, there had been none.

“I sent August Derleth a sample of my work,” Clyne told Victor Dricks. The art he’d sent “looked more like a comic book illustration than a fantasy design [but] he liked it and commissioned me to do a dust jacket.” Derleth had probably been aware of Ron’s work already—because of his other pulp and fanzine art—but his timing couldn’t have been better. Arkham House was in a period of expansion and plans were being made to increase their productivity in the post-war years—Derleth ended up publishing as many books in 1944 as he had in the previous five years. Up until that time, he hadn’t used any cover artist more than once and was quite pleased at the prospect of finding a new artist who could help him with their increased publishing schedule.

Virgil Finlay had done their first cover, Frank Utpatel their second, and Hannes Bok had drawn their third. Derleth had wanted more covers from Bok, but was initially rebuffed by the notoriously jaded artist because he had been disappointed by the quality of the printing on his cover for Clark Ashton Smith’s *Out of Space and Time*. Finally they struck a bargain, of sorts. Bok had expressed the desire to paint full color covers that were far more accomplished than those the pulp magazines were interested in publishing. He longed for the opportunity to have control over his work—instead of having to abide by the low expectations of most of the art directors he’d encountered in his career.
Derleth encouraged Bok to pursue his ambitious plans and gave him total control over the look of his dust jackets, but explained that the downside was that the war had made four color printing very expensive and good quality paper stock almost impossible to find. Printing covers like those Bok envisioned was something that was beyond Arkham House’s means during the war years and that Bok would have to wait until after VE Day to see them in print. This meant that the covers he was producing for Derleth in this period—including his astonishing dust jackets for William Hope Hodgson’s *The House on the Borderland* and Robert E. Howard’s *Skull-Face and Others*—would have to wait until 1946 to see the light of day.

Among Clyne’s earliest assignments for Derleth was his cover for the first collection of his Solar Pons short stories under the new imprint of Mycroft & Moran, for whom Clyne also designed the deerstalker logo. Also presented here is his third cover for Arkham House, for the book *Witch House*—all three were published for the first time in 1943.

Ron Clyne, on the other hand, was more than happy to work in black and white for Derleth and proceeded to design and draw his first book jacket for Derleth’s own collection of short stories, *Something Near*. Shortly after sending off the finished artwork, Clyne took a trip back to the Midwest and while there, paid a visit to Derleth at his home—known as “Place of Hawks,” -- in Sauk City, Wisconsin.

“Clyne visited me here,” Derleth wrote in a December 1944 letter to Hannes Bok. “Yes, and I think he has definite talent, though I believe his talent extends, as does yours, beyond the [dust] jacket field. His spirit seems good, his ambitions and hopes very high. I expect him to visit again before he takes off for either New York or the Army, he does not yet know which.” Ron’s youthful earnestness apparently brought out Derleth’s paternal instincts, in addition to his editorial ones. “I felt he got something out of his visit, which is good; he is young, and impressionable. It would be too bad if he were impressed by the purely meretricious.”

Despite his concerns for the young artist’s sensibilities, Derleth expressed his confidence in Ron’s work in that same letter to Bok. “I would like to feel able to depend chiefly on you and Ronald...for jacket work especially. I need artists on whom I can depend. Utpatel, my good friend from a nearby town, is a good artist,” — Derleth had thought enough of Frank Utpatel a year or two earlier to commission him to design the well-known logo for Arkham House’s title page that is still in use to this day—“but I can’t depend on him. He can think of more excuses—and I am genuinely patient— than any character I could create solely for the purpose of inventing excuses. And after so long, I simply lose my patience, and that is all.”

With Bok and Clyne as his primary artistic bullpen, August Derleth hoped to avoid any further disappointments in the book cover department. And then, in a display of faith, Clyne’s new admirer asked him—much as he had with Utpatel—to design the logo for his latest publishing venture, Mycroft & Moran—an imprint devoted primarily to collecting Derleth’s own Solar Pons mystery stories. He also commissioned Ron to design the cover for M&M’s first book, *In Re: Sherlock Holmes*, which appeared in early 1945 and sported the new deerstalker logo on its title page.
It was these projects for August Derleth that Clyne believed to be the actual beginnings of his professional career. “It began,” he said, “in 1945 or shortly before. I had had material published in science fiction and fantasy magazines before this time, but I trace the beginning of my career from about this point.”

Despite such a declaration, Clyne’s first Arkham House cover—for Derleth’s *Something Near*—was a bit of a letdown. While definitely more accomplished than Frank Utpatel’s first cover—or Frank Wakefield’s—it was very minor indeed when compared to Finlay’s cover for *The Outsider and Others*, or Bok’s fuzzily printed cover for *Out of Space and Time*. Even Howard Wandrei’s cover for his brother’s book, *The Eye and the Finger*, outclassed Clyne’s freshman effort.

The drawing itself is a transitional piece in the artist’s evolution; the figure is beginning to mature, but the overall appeal is marred by poor composition and needless crosshatching—though the overall design is redeemed by Ron’s considerable talent at hand lettering.

Although a significant milestone in Clyne’s career as a fantasy artist, his real artistic breakthrough happened in the pulp magazines—especially in the pages of *Famous Fantastic Mysteries*. That is where his technique really began to evolve. Before that time, his drawings had always been defined by a steady, hard-edged line. There was a kind of unemotional precision about his early pen work that resembled the mechanical line associated with technical drafting. His rendering sometimes lacked spontaneity and could often be described as cold and stiff. But once he started working for *FFM* everything seemed to change.

These two illustrations from the December 1944 and the April 1946 issues of *Famous Fantastic Mysteries* showed the qualities of high design and economic execution, both techniques that Clyne learned from studying artists like Rockwell Kent. His new elegant line quality and stylized design components made these illustrations among the very best of the artist’s career in fantasy art.

Clyne’s new illustrations for Mary Gnaedinger’s magazines presented a shift away from that stiff style of drawing and began to show the obvious influence of artists like Rockwell Kent, one of the 1930s most distinctive illustrators and designers. Kent’s work combined the naturalistic esthetic of the English Arts and Crafts movement with the stylistic modernity of Art Deco. It was uncluttered and graphically striking. Early in his career Kent had gained some renown for his humorous illustrations—drawn under the name “Hogarth, Jr.”—where he employed a very fluid, playful style of drawing. That loose, rolling pen line followed him throughout his career and influenced many modern illustrators besides Ron Clyne—including Ron’s favorite pulp artist, Hannes Bok.

Where previously his illustrations seemed burdened with too much needless detail and unnecessarily complex composition, his artwork for *Famous Fantastic Mysteries* was cleanly stylized and subtly drawn. Like Bok, he had
finally learned the advantages of “less is more” when it came to drawing pulp art. Clyne’s illustrations for Lord Dunsany’s “The Highwayman” (December 1944), as well as his art for Algernon Blackwood’s “The Willows” (April 1946), are beautifully rendered illustrations that were—without a doubt—his best work to date. Each lovingly evoking the classical nature and tone of the stories themselves. The mechanical quality had vanished from his line art and had been replaced by a much more expressive way of drawing that echoed the work that Kent had done ten or more years earlier—in books like Moby Dick, (1930) Canterbury Tales, (1932) and The Complete Works of William Shakespeare, published in 1936.

His newfound expressionism and fluid drawing style followed him throughout the remainder of his brief career as a pulp artist, and well into his work as a book jacket designer. In fact, his illustration in the October 1948 issue of FFM—arguably his final piece of art for the pulps—was drawn in such a lively line that it reminds me of the freewheeling pen and ink drawings that the great Jack Gaughan did at the peak of his career, in the Sixties and Seventies.

Clyne’s first and only pulp magazine cover painting appeared on the April 1946 issue of Weird Tales and his final illustration for Famous Fantastic Mysteries, from the October 1948 issue, both show his near mastery of his abilities. The cover painting is fused with rich blues and greens and browns which recall the Technicolor adventure films of the artist’s youth, while the b&w illustration features a fluidity of line that pointed the way to what might have been, if Clyne had not abandoned the pulps for success in NYC.

By the time Ron’s first Arkham House cover appeared, he was ready to leave pulp art behind. “In the following few years it seemed as if I was doing just about every dust jacket for Arkham House,” he told Victor Dricks in 1975. He did, in fact, design nine of the next thirteen dust jackets they published in the two years that followed his cover for Something Near—four of them in 1945 alone. “It was all a labor of love for me. I don’t remember what I was paid for them, but it couldn’t have been very much—maybe $30 to $50 each,” he lamented—but that was still a big step up from what he’d earned working for the magazines.

A few months after the end of the Second World War, Clyne celebrated his 20th birthday and his family was once again packing up their household for another cross-country move, this time settling in a neighborhood outside of Manhattan—in the borough of Queens. Ron’s father had followed his advertising career to New York City in hopes of improving his chances for success. It was an ambition that was shared by his son, who had embraced the move with enthusiasm and optimism.

Ron knew that New York was the only place in the country where he was going to be able to make a credible living as an artist and that meant that once he got there he needed to meet people and making connections. To that end Ron once again sought out fandom’s incestuous tentacles. It made a lot of sense for him, as a newcomer in the publishing capital of the world, to use whatever contacts he might have to further his career. And the best place to
network and make connections in the fantasy and sf publishing business was at local fan club meetings—where most of the area’s professionals and fans regularly got together to socialize.

This arrangement suited Ron just fine. His parent’s marriage was beginning to fall apart and he was ready for some independence—even though he continued to remain very close to his father, who had always encouraged him. But the time had come to strike out on his own and—according to Harry Warner’s *All Our Yesterdays*—while attending the first NewarKon in March 1946, Clyne asked local fans “to try and find him an apartment” of his own.

Two more of Clyne’s covers for Arkham House from 1946. *The Doll and One Other* shows his skill at calligraphy and a brilliant contrasting black and orange color scheme that makes the cover stand out on a shelf even now, more than 60 years later. *West India Lights* was one of the first hints that the artist’s interests might be moving towards primitive symbols and forms.

It was around this time that Ron finally met Hannes Bok. He’d missed meeting him in Los Angeles—by the time he’d moved there from Chicago, Bok had already been living in New York City for almost four years—but made sure that one of the Futurians, like Damon Knight, introduced them to each other this time around.

The effusive Bok recognized a kindred spirit in Ron and, in turn, introduced him to some of his bohemian friends who lived around the edges of fandom’s mainstream. Among them was Paul Dennis O’Connor, a bon vivant art collector and book dealer—and the man behind The New Collector’s Group, whose main claim to fame was the publication of two posthumous volumes of fiction by Abraham Merritt, both lavishly illustrated by Bok.

For a time, O’Connor—who presented himself as a fantasy connoisseur and an intellectual—hosted a regular salon of like-minded people in his big Central Park West apartment, where he lived with his wife and her ailing father. It was here that Ron Clyne often socialized with Bok and others, like Mahlon Blaine, Boris Dolgov, and Joseph Dunninger. “The Amazing Dunninger,” was a successful mentalist and magician, famous for his mind reading act. Known as “The Master Mind of Modern Mystery,” Dunninger, had a long career on stage, radio, and television. He was—according to Walter Gibson—the model for *The Shadow* and he was also one of Bok’s most ardent patrons and, no doubt, the life of any party.

It was at one such soiree—Clyne told Richard Newsome—that he witnessed the magician’s amazing powers, in person. “He said Dunninger demonstrated a magic trick [...] in which he had Clyne go into a hall and pick a random book out of the bookcase and turn to a random page, and note the [title of the] book and the page number.” Ron then put the book back on the shelf and rejoined the other guests. “Then Dunninger told him what the book was and the page number, too.” Clyne was astounded, but was never able to find out how it was done.

This social swirl kept up for a couple of years, during which O’Connor lived lavishly and, eventually, published the
two Merritt volumes in 1946 and 1947. But by the time the second book was published, the truth about Paul Dennis O'Connor was becoming quite clear to Bok and his friends. O'Connor was not what he pretended to be, nor was he to be trusted. Unfortunately, the revelation came too late for Bok—O'Connor reneged on all the payments and royalties he had promised Bok, in exchange for the writing and drawing he'd done for the Merritt books. Having apparently sold all of the copies of the books, he then pocketed all of the money—giving the notoriously impoverished artist not so much as a cent for all his work.

This original illustration by Clyne’s favorite pulp artist, Hannes Bok, was drawn in 1943 and came into Clyne’s possession soon afterwards. The two artist became friends in 1946 and his admiration for Bok never faded. Also seen here is a Bok portrait of “The Amazing Dunninger,” drawn that same year. The three of them shared drinks and companionship throughout the late Forties.

“What a guy,” Bok told interviewer John Vetter. “When he left New York—he had to. He was tossed out [and] he took half of New York with him. I couldn’t believe what a pathological liar he was. He invented the word.” According to Bok, O'Connor had once—without his knowledge—posed as the artist’s agent and secretly sold some of Bok’s artwork to Weird Tales. He kept all the money that time, too.

After moving to Denver in 1948, the true story about Paul Dennis O’Connor came out. He was, in fact, a life-long con artist, thief, and gigolo named Robert Young. The swanky uptown apartment where he held court had belonged to his ailing father-in-law, and his marriage was strictly one of convenience. He had married his wife not for love, but to gain access to her family fortune. In fact, O’Connor was actually—by Clyne’s own account—“very gay,” and hid it from no one. After the father’s death, O’Connor transferred his wife’s bank account into his own name, packed up his books, and moved to Colorado under cover of night. According to Emil Petaja’s biography, And Flights of Angels, O’Connor stayed true to his reptilian ways right to the end by taking a stolen portfolio full of Bok’s paintings with him when he left town.

It wasn’t until 1968 that the law caught up with Paul Dennis O’Connor, who—to quote The San Francisco Chronicle -- was also known as: “Robert D. Young, Paul A. O'Connor, Dennis O'Connor, Robert Finkelstein, and Jackie Mayes.” The article referred to him as “a one-time Fisherman’s Wharf waiter who now runs New Collector’s Gallery,” where he had, apparently, tried to sell a retired Army intelligence officer $130,000 worth of bogus paintings by Monet, Renoir, Signac, and Picasso. The article noted that “Young, who was not available to comment, had already been arraigned on charges of receiving and possessing jewelry stolen in two burglaries.”

Once he settled in New York, Ron decided to leave pulp magazine work behind him and concentrate on producing book covers. Fortunately, he’d brought his Arkham House commissions with him and wasted no time in producing some of the most accomplished fantasy art of his career. Bok’s second Arkham House cover —for Frank Belknap Long’s The Hounds of Tindalos— appeared during Clyne’s relocation to the East Coast, but after that Ron resumed his position as Derleth’s most prolific cover artist and 1946 went on to become his most important year at Arkham House.
That year Clyne produced dust jackets for *The Doll and One Other* by Algernon Blackwood, *West India Lights* by Henry S. Whitehead, *Fearful Pleasures* by A.H. Coppard, *The Clock Strikes Twelve* by H.R. Wakefield, and *This Mortal Coil* by Cynthia Asquith. Each of them is striking in its own way, but two of these covers proved to be instrumental in the growth of his career.

Two of the most important Arkham House covers of Clyne's career. Each led to more work with bigtime publishers and paved the way for his distinguished career as a book and album cover designer; not to mention his first and only book illustration job.

It started in early 1947, when his cover to Arkham House's *This Mortal Coil* was included on a list of the 50 best book jackets of the previous year. That new notoriety led almost immediately to new design commissions from other small publishing houses, like Argus Books, who published the anthology, *Pilgrims Through Space and Time* by J.O. Bailey, and The Herald Publishing Company, who produced Clyne's first full-color book cover on *Dark Music and Other Spectral Tales*, a collection of ghost stories by Jack Snow.

The *Pilgrims* dust jacket features a striking art deco tableau that once again recalls the influence that Rockwell Kent had on Clyne. But when it came time to paint the cover for *Dark Music*, he decided to go in an entirely different direction. Combining his growing interest in renaissance woodcuts and tapestries with this admiration for artists like Albrecht Durer and Arthur Rackham, Clyne produced a painting that looks like an antique image of a pilgrim of another kind—solemn, pious, and about to be attacked by bats. Yet, the image is subtle and beautifully rendered and shows Clyne’s increasing mastery of his medium and, again, uses his considerable calligraphy skills to great effect.

Within a year, he was designing book jackets for publishers like Doubleday, Farrar, Straus, & Giroux, Henry Holt, Macmillan, Oxford University Press, William Sloane, and many of the other reputable publishers in New York. Before long, Arkham House would become only a small part of his commercial output.

Then there was the cover to *Fearful Pleasures*, which led directly to his first—and only —serious commission as an illustrator. “Someone saw that book and offered me a commission to illustrate a book of Voltaire’s short stories,” Clyne recalled in 1975. “I grabbed it and eventually [was] led out of the fantasy field and into commercial art.”

The book, *The Shorter Writings of Voltaire*, was published in 1949 as a part of the Rodale Press series of books called, “The Story Classics.” These books were limited-edition volumes that collected rare short stories by classic authors like, Flaubert, Chekov, Voltaire, Longfellow, Dumas, and many others. Each was decorated with original illustrations in a variety of styles and disciplines. With this commission, Ron Clyne found himself in the company of established illustrators like Fritz Eichenberg, Jan Balet, and Arthur Wragg—as well as fine artists like painter Richard Lindner and sculptor George Rickey, during each man’s brief time as a commercial illustrator.
Similar to the famous Heritage Press Limited Edition Club—started in 1929—the books published in Rodale’s “The Story Classic” series were sold by subscription only and were limited to print-runs of between 2,000 and 3,000 copies each. For their volume of Voltaire stories, Clyne produced a dozen three-color illustrations that have a bold graphic quality that are reminiscent of old woodcuts and engravings. The pictures often feature forced perspectives that turn heavily patterned floors and walls into flat planes that stir up memories of Persian murals, Germanic woodcuts, and the decorative designs of Walter Crane.

The quality of Clyne’s Arkham House covers led him to other publishers who wanted to use his exploding talents to provide covers for their own fantasy oriented books, meant for more mainstream audiences. The success of Pilgrims Through Space and Time and Dark Music and Other Spectral Tales, both published in 1947, led Clyne to commissions from every important publisher in New York.

In the book’s afterward, “The Artist’s Thoughts About His Illustrations,” Clyne wrote: “In planning the illustrations, I was guided by the fact that writing and drawing are separate art forms and both, if they are to be successful, must fully realize their own potentialities. My attempt was to create designs with enough strength, not only to illustrate the stories graphically but to have an existence of their own, as pictures.”

He went on to explain that he had “done illustrations which do not necessarily illustrate a specific scene, but which strive to reinforce […] the character of the story as a whole.” He then described the research that went into the artwork; studying the costumes and settings he needed to capture his vision. “In the arts,” he continued, “I believe limitations should be recognized and cherished; that is, attention should be paid to what is naturally expressive to the medium.” He concluded by saying that his “drawings are inventions and formations: interpretations, not imitations, of nature.”

Obviously impressed by his new discovery, Ron’s publisher had this to say about him in the book’s “About the Artist” entry: “Ronald Clyne is doubly entitled to the sobriquet of ‘prodigy’,” despite the fact that “he is entirely self-taught, having attended not a single formal lesson in any art school since his birth in Chicago, Illinois.” He is, Rodale wrote, “deeply saturated with a love for fine art [and] ventures in the field of painting, and has tried to inject some of the sincerity and depth of fine art into his applied work. Since he was never academically trained, he draws upon allied arts for his ideas, believing that they are all essentially interrelated and throw much light on each other.” Finally, Rodale concluded that Ron “feels that any improvement in his work must be due to his own severest self-criticism and to the ardent belief that good pictures are a necessity, not a luxury of life.”

That was a philosophy that Clyne would carry with him for the rest of his life. He was, according to many who knew him, a perfectionist who never let his own mediocrity go unchallenged or unchecked. “I am a visually oriented person, and self taught in all things,” he explained to Stephen Jones. “Taste,” he continued “is never taught in any
art school—and such a thing is what I [always] focus on.”

The year after the publication of *The Short Stories of Voltaire*, the book’s editor, J.I. Rodale started *Prevention* magazine to promote his ideas about health and longevity—it is now the 11th best-selling magazine in the United States. *Prevention* made him even more successful and allowed him to build his publishing empire into what is now the largest publisher of health and fitness books in the world. Despite these achievements, J.I. Rodale became an overnight, nationwide celebrity in 1971 when he unexpectedly died of a heart attack during a live broadcast of *The Dick Cavett Show*.

![Two of the dozen full page illustrations by Clyne that decorated the pages of *Voltaire: Shorter Works*, published in 1949. It would turn out to be the artist’s only full scale book illustration commission of his career. The illustrations themselves rely on the vocabulary of antique woodcuts and medieval illustrated manuscripts for their inspiration and are similar to the works that Leo and Diane Dillon would produce more than ten years later.](image)

Even though his career was growing, Ron wasn’t ready to leave his genre work behind him quite yet and he continued to regularly design covers for Derleth throughout the Forties, but the look of them was changing fast. Typography had begun to play a much stronger role in his designs, while the pictorial content was shrinking and becoming more abstract. As the Fifties approached, his dust jackets became more stylized and modern looking—some might even say, mainstream.

Clyne’s first all type cover appeared on his 13th Arkham House book, *The Fourth Book of Jorkens* by Lord Dunsany, published in 1948. It was a book that Ron was happy to sink his teeth into. According to Victor Dricks, “Clyne was an avid fan of Dunsany and devoted a great deal of time and effort to his design for the book. Almost four years earlier he had illustrated Dunsany’s “The Highwayman” for *Famous Fantastic Mysteries* and Clyne—who admired Dunsany in much the same way that Bok adored Merritt—considered himself lucky indeed to be given a second opportunity at illustrating the British fantasist.”

The design itself consisted of tiers of near perfect calligraphy that surround a decorative panel inscribed with the author’s initials. The style of that cover—which owes much to the designs of the English Arts and Crafts movement, and the work of William Morris in particular—was in much the same vein as those being created by other designers for mainstream publishers. Scribner’s used a similar motif on the cover of Alan Paton’s classic, *Cry, the Beloved Country*, which was published the same year as Clyne’s *Jorkens* cover. He used the concept again in 1948 when Derleth commissioned Ron to come up with a standardized cover design for his latest project, *The Arkham Sampler*, a quarterly small-press magazine devoted to fantasy and weird fiction. Clyne’s final design was a tour-de-force of expert hand lettering surrounded by a simple frame that enclosed both the crisply rendered logo and that issue’s contents. Each subsequent issue’s design was identical to its predecessor—except for the evolving contents.
listing and the color of the paper it was printed on. Each of the magazine’s eight issues was published on a different color paper stock—until it ceased publication at the end of 1949.

Clyne’s book cover designs during this period were totally contemporary with the work being produced by other designers and made his work seem very cutting edge and of the time. It lead to yet more commissions from New York publishing houses. The same sensibilities and beautiful calligraphy was used to great effect in Clyne’s cover design for The Arkham Sampler, in 1948 and 1949.

That same year, his cover for S. Fowler Wright’s The Throne of Saturn featured another variation on the Dunsany design, but this time the decorative panel was deconstructed into a simple geometric design that was used to separate the book’s title from the author’s credit. It was elegant and downplayed the salacious genre imagery that had, until that time, been such a big part of Arkham House’s identity.

1947’s Not Long For This World was an old fashioned cover illustration that relied on spooky imagery for its appeal, whereas the two books from 1949 utilized elegant lettering and simplified designs for their visual impact. The cover to H.P. Lovecraft’s Something About Cats may well be Clyne’s most elegant cover design for Arkham House, whose other book covers occasionally strayed towards the sensational, instead of the subtle.

Also published in 1949 was Clyne’s strikingly sophisticated design for the cover of H.P. Lovecraft’s Something About
Cats. “I consider Lovecraft to be the all-time finest writer of supernatural fiction,” said Clyne—a fan of HPL’s fiction since his fanboy days. “And I jumped at the opportunity to design the dust jacket for *Something About Cats.*” The final cover design is sublime in its simplicity; featuring black and white calligraphy and a stylized drawing of a reclining feline, printed on a neutral colored vellum. It is perhaps the most elegant cover of his fantasy career.

Changing tastes and financial setbacks brought Arkham House’s production to a crawl as the new decade began. They published only two books in 1950 and 1951, and both featured covers by Derleth’s old undependable friend, Frank Utpatel—his first work for them in ten years.

When Clyne returned to working for Derleth in 1952 everything was different. Those intervening years had brought him work from practically every major publishing house in New York, where he achieved success and a reputation for work with a kind of quiet dignity and elegance. By the time of his return to Arkham House, his designs had evolved away from his beautifully eccentric calligraphy in favor of the tasteful use of classic type fonts, and subdued graphics. Now, more often than not, the art was either a photograph or abstract shapes that offset the surrounding typography. The new simplicity of some of those later designs—like the cover for 1952’s *Tales from Underwood* and 1960’s *The Abomination of Yondo*—reflected Clyne’s growing obsession with African primitivism and tribal art from places like the island of New Guinea.

Fortunately, when executing the cover for 1957’s *The Survivor and Others*—a book of unfinished Lovecraft bits and pieces that were brought to life posthumously by Derleth—Clyne was moved to produce one of the most striking and original illustrations of his life. It features a bold, modernistic interpretation of the oldest horror cliché in the book—a dying tree and a withering house. It is stark and modern and unlike any other illustration by Clyne that I am aware of and it is definitely among his most effective efforts as a graphic artist.

Clyne’s last actual illustration for an Arkham House cover—but not quite his last cover—appeared on Nelson Bond’s *Nightmares and Daydreams*, published in 1968. It featured a perfectly realized pastiche of an old woodcut to accompany the type—similar to his highly stylized illustrations for the book of Voltaire stories, drawn almost 20 years earlier. But while it made for a highly decorative book cover, it offered little else artistically. That same year also saw his return to Derleth’s Mycroft & Moran imprint, where he provided a few final efforts out of respect for his aging mentor, as opposed to any real desire he may have had for the work.

Ronald Clyne’s final Arkham House design appeared in 1969, on the cover for *The Folsom Flint and Other Curious Tales* by oldtimer Donald H. Keller. The cover itself features a telescopic photo of the fabric of space that spilled off the edges of the dust jacket, interrupted only by the perfectly placed logo and credit line. It is slick and totally
professional, but gone are the days of glorious beasts and heroes. Gone are the dreams of a career as a fantasy artist, having been replaced with—of all things—success in the Real World.

“I look back at my career as a fantasy artist with a touch of nostalgia,” Clyne explained in 1975. “I was fortunate to escape from the trap as an illustrator to become a commercial artist.” For him, success meant freedom. The freedom to control his career, his environment, and his esthetic life. It meant he was able to do the work he wanted to do, live where he wanted to live, and surround himself with art and music—answering to no one but himself.

“I tried to avoid going to an office, so I just did what I wanted to do,” he said in an April 2005 interview about his career. “I wanted to pursue what I was interested in and what made me happy. My main income was book jackets designed for the major New York publishers. Doing book jackets still gave me the chance to make a living without going into an advertising studio and doing commercial ads for toothpaste.” A comment no doubt inspired by his father’s many years in the advertising rat race.

These two covers appear to be the final genre illustrations of Ronald Clyne’s career. Most of his works during this period, and later, were typically typographic designs with no pictorial content or featured found photographs as part of their presentation. Having given up drawing for modernist painting and printmaking in the Sixties, these covers were a rare return to the world of pen and ink.

“[For a] few years it seemed as if I was doing just about every dust jacket for Arkham House. It was all a labor of love for me,” and definitely not for the money. “I don’t remember what I was paid for them but it couldn’t have been very much—maybe $30 to $50.”

“That’s why I left the field. I didn’t want to end up doing hack work for $5 and $10 for the rest of my life,”—which was exactly what he’d been paid in 1945 by the pulp magazines. With the rare exception, Clyne never went anywhere near the fantasy field again. He spent most of the latter half of the Twentieth century designing book and album covers for the best-paying companies in the business—creating covers for books by everyone imaginable, from Carlos Fuentes to Edmund Wilson and everyone in between, including Eldridge Cleaver and Clyne’s old friend, Charles Beaumont.

In 1971 he briefly crossed paths with the ghost of fandom when he received an assignment from Harper Collins to design the cover for *The Universe Makers*, an anthology by his old acquaintance, Donald Wollheim. Coincidentally, that book features a rare original illustration by the artist on its cover. By that time he had confined his artistic endeavors to fine art painting and printmaking—a few of which eventually turned up on album covers. But for this book he apparently made an exception and the result was probably the last genre-related drawing he ever produced. Not that they’d forgotten him at Arkham House.
Clyne had stuck with them as long as he did out of loyalty to August Derleth, but eventually even that hadn’t been able to keep him interested. “I received a letter a year or so ago from the new owner of Arkham House,” Clyne said in 1975. Jim Turner had taken over Arkham’s helm from Donald Wandrei shortly after Derleth’s death in 1971. “They wanted to commission another dust jacket from me. They offered me something ridiculous like $50,” he recalled. “I told them no.”

It was no surprise that he turned them down, really. His other professional commitments kept him as busy as he wanted to be, especially his flourishing work as an album jacket designer. And they would be, in the end, what he is most remembered for.

Although he had done record jackets in the late 1940s for Columbia Records and other smaller labels, it wasn’t until 1951 that his design universe began to exist primarily on 12” by 12” pieces of cardboard. It was around this time that Clyne became acquainted with Mo Asch, the head of Folkways Records. Asch had seen some catalog covers that Ron had drawn for Sam Goody—a New York record store —and asked Goody who had drawn them and immediately called Clyne about working for him. “Mo asked if I’d do a cover for him,” Clyne said in a 2004 interview about the history of Folkways. “He knew I was doing record covers for other people, but I said, ‘Sure, be glad to.’”

“I did that first Scottish folk song album, and then he just continued giving me more assignments. He never mentioned price. He never mentioned how fast I should do them, or what I should do. Nothing like that.
“Of all the work I’ve done commercially, that’s the one I enjoyed the most, because I had freedom. I didn’t have to deal with an art director. I didn’t get instructions I’d be forced to follow. It was all up to me. I was the art director—Mo Asch didn’t interfere at all. And that really pleased me,” Clyne happily recalled. “I gave him very low prices because of that. It was my own private art gallery.”

(See more clips of this videotaped interview and many examples of Ronald Clyne’s album covers at the Folkways website, sponsored by The Smithsonian Institute: http://www.smithsonianglobalsound.org/archives_15.aspx )

Between 1950 and 1981, Ronald Clyne designed more than 500 album covers for Folkways Records—nearly 25 percent of all the records issued by the label in it’s nearly 40-year existence. A milestone that could be matched by few, if any, of the artist’s contemporaries. “Clyne’s use of carefully considered typography, layout, and image is outstanding in its simplicity and beauty,” wrote John Nixon in the catalog notes that accompanied a touring exhibit of Clyne’s Folkways covers. “His body of record cover designs encompasses a wide diversity from the ethnic to the experimental, reflecting the inclusive spirit of the Folkways label.”

“I didn’t realize it at the time, but I was the perfect person for Folkways covers because I was into world art,” Clyne explained. And indeed he was. Having discovered the beauty of primitive tribal art in a long defunct Manhattan gallery in the early 1950s, he became fascinated by the genre known as Oceanic art—particularly artifacts from the island of New Guinea. “New Guinea art tries to capture the spirits,” he said in his Folkways interview. “I’m very conscious of line in art. And one of the things that characterizes New Guinea art is curvilinear lines.” Clyne said that they represented “the tribe’s spiritual belief in ancestors and ghost worlds—crafted from woods, straw, and shells.”
These primitive totem-like carvings have a graphic quality about them; their deeply incised features cast sharp shadows that are reminiscent of comical childhood nightmares. Their long, sad faces seem to stare at you out from the wood—with exaggerated expressions that were coaxed with stone axes from the natural shapes of the trees from which they were sculpted. Clyne bought his first “important” piece—called a Sepik shield—in 1956 and then gradually began importing other similar items. He kept the cream of the crop and sold the remainder, using the proceeds to continually improve his own collection. He spent much of the next 45 years hunting down and selecting the most exceptional examples of the form that he could find and amassed—in the end—a personal collection that was worth in excess of half a million dollars.

In 1966, Ron and his wife Hortense moved into a futuristic home that he had designed and had built in Brooklyn Heights, with the expressed purpose of displaying his valuable collection. “From the outside, the house looked a bit shabby and worn,” wrote Stephen Jones, after he visited Ron and his wife in 2005. “But inside it was totally different. [...] Once you entered, you found yourself in a series of minimalist, monochromatic rooms, adorned with giant statues from New Guinea which he had collected over forty years, decorated with sound-muffling materials and wired for the latest ultra-sophisticated hi-fi equipment.”

A photograph from the August 2000 issue of *Interior Design* shows a corner of Clyne’s office, complete with statuary and a state of the art speaker system for playing music. The modern painting over the desk was painted by Clyne himself in the 1960s. Photo by Andrew Bordwin

According to *Interior Design* magazine—which featured the Clyne’s house in their August 2000 issue—Ron “resolved to do everything pertaining to the interiors himself,” after architects had failed to “please the householders.” As a result, Clyne created a home for himself, his wife, and his art collection that was as eclectic and calculated an art object as any of the pieces he displayed within its walls. The magazine notes that with the exception of a “glass-topped coffee table by Poul Kjaerholm,” and a modernist sofa and armchair acquired years earlier, all the furnishings in the house were designed by Clyne, as well.

When asked by the article’s author, Monica Geran, “whether his interior spaces were designed for art or visa versa, Clyne declared firmly that they were ‘composed together,’ as indeed is apparent from the prevailing inter-relationship of scale, form, colors, and usage.” Adding that his “main quest was for simplicity, followed by the
dictum that there was to be no ‘overloading’ of any one sector’ of the house. A portion of the living room was specially constructed to include a rare set of decorative carved corner posts from a New Guinea long house, while the rest of the living quarters were given over to the display of other stunning examples of Oceanic art, mixed with modern paintings by Ad Reinhardt, Douglas Freed, Power Boothe, John Loveless, and Clyne himself.

The house was—like everything Ron designed—clean, tasteful, and uncluttered. Sparsely furnished with nearly invisible built-ins, recessed lighting, and a stark color scheme that were all selected to showcase the extraordinary sculptures and paintings he held so dear. To some visitors the house sometimes seemed to be needlessly austere and cold, but it was Clyne’s idea of perfection. “Walking into his home,” Victor Dricks wrote, “is like stepping from the nineteenth to the twenty-first century—bang! Future shock hits you like a brick wall and you stagger as you adjust from the time lag.”

It looked like a set from 2001 or A Clockwork Orange; a mixture of clean futuristic lines and minimalist decor. Even Clyne’s state-of-the-art stereo system and his extensive CD collection were hidden from view, housed in specially designed cabinets that served as both furniture and as room partitions—as was his studio workspace. The entire house was equipped with a top-of-the-line speaker system that was mathematically calibrated to take full advantage of the building’s acoustic qualities. It even had an electronic air filtration system that was installed to eliminate the need to ever open the windows. It was an architectural fantasy that has often been imagined, but has rarely been achieved. It was a modernist’s house of the future. It was science fiction.

This abstract lithograph print was produced by Clyne in the 1960s or 1970s and eventually wound up on the cover of the 1980 Folkways album, Poets Read Their Contemporary Poems - Before Columbus Foundation.

Following his retirement in the late Nineties, Clyne spent his time fine tuning his environment and streamlining his life even further. He had always sought a kind of perfection in his life and he had always used his wits and talents to accomplish that ambition—so why would the inevitable end of his life be an exception?

He organized and cataloged the products of his career and pared down his possessions to the essentials. He gave away what was left of his book collection to visitors and friends—except for seven volumes by Lord Dunsany. He even made arrangements for the sale of his priceless New Guinea artifacts upon his death. He’d lived a life of premeditation and precision and he saw no reason to leave any loose ends behind him. He would leave behind a legacy that he was proud of—he considered his work for Folkways Records to be the peak of his career—and remembering that would have been enough for him.

Nevertheless, the work he did in his late teens and early twenties kept coming back to haunt him. Not that he repudiated those works —far from it—but at the end of his life he considered them rather inconsequential and
barely relevant to the person he’d become. But from time to time someone would pop into his life with a hand full of
crumbling pulp magazines or a couple of his—now very expensive—Arkham House books and he would find himself
—like Michael Corleone—pulled back into a world he had tried to leave behind.

“I look back at my career as a fantasy artist with a touch of nostalgia,” Clyne often explained, but he was extremely
critical of most of his early work. From his perspective, those faraway days were but the beginning of a career that
had expanded far beyond the pages of Planet Stories. He considered the drawings he’d done as a teenager to be the
work of an amateur and unworthy of serious attention. (He would have considered this article decidedly
unnecessary, for instance.) In 2004, when Stephen Jones asked Clyne if he would autograph some of his old pulps
and book covers, he was surprised by the reply he got. “Frankly, “ Ron wrote, “I don’t see the point of my
autographing your magazines; I wouldn’t bother if I were you—but I will do so if you wish....”

During their correspondence, Jones also suggested that Clyne should consider attending that year’s upcoming
World Fantasy Convention—which was to be devoted to the history of Arkham House—and offered to organize a
program appearance where, he assured Clyne, “he would be mobbed by fans and collectors who probably didn’t
realize that he was still alive!”

Like the Pegasus on the cover of Pilgrims Through Space and Time,
the horse on the cover of Night's Black Agent, and the horse in one
of the interior illustrations for Voltaire: Shorter Writings, were all
sired by one of Clyne’s greatest inspirations, Rockwell Kent

“I would not be interested in going to the World Fantasy Convention,” Clyne replied. “I am afraid I am too weak to
walk that much, as well as not being too involved in admiring fans. Flattering, yes, but it is my nature not to require
admiration.”

Nevertheless, when Jones visited Clyne in the spring of the next year—to attend that same World Fantasy con -- the
artist and his wife greeted him warmly with wine and cheese, and a framed copy of a lithograph, as a gift. He still
had no interest in mingling with fans, but he did patiently sign all the Arkhams and pulps that Jones had brought
with him. And as a final gesture, offered to give him the last books left on his shelf—his Lord Dunsany books.

It wasn’t that Ronald Clyne lacked sentimentality about the Good Ol’ Days, it was more that he was, and had always
been, his own toughest critic. He found it hard to believe that there was any joy lurking in those early drawings.
When he looked at them, he saw only the defects—the imperfections. If someone presented him with a copy of
Robert Bloch’s The Opener of the Way, he didn’t see the second book cover of his long career; he saw what he
considered the worst fantasy drawing of his long career. If a fan admired his bold, Art Deco Pegasus on the cover of
Pilgrims Through Space and Time, he couldn’t appreciate the simple beauty of the drawing, because when he
looked at it he thought of his cover for Fritz Leiber’s Night’s Black Agent. It also featured that same basic steed—
minus the wings. And then he’d think about an illustration in the Voltaire book, where the stylized horse puts in yet
another appearance—this time with a saddle. But worst of all, he knew that each time he looked at one of those horses, he was really looking at the old Rockwell Kent illustration that he’d stolen them from in the first place.

In his most self-conscious moments, those old pieces of pulp art were the final remnants of his life before he had complete control over his destiny. They were naïve and unsophisticated and proved that he was once those things, too. They were the product of an imperfect dreamer who, in Clyne’s own eyes, didn’t really achieve order and success until he stopped drawing altogether and concentrated on his mechanical skills as a designer and art director. And why was that? Because Ronald Clyne the designer didn’t think Ronald Clyne the illustrator was good enough. He didn’t think he deserved any attention for what he’d done.

In the end, he’d only kept one of his drawing from those years—the original art for his cover to H. Russell Wakefield’s *The Clock Strikes Twelve*. It was, in his opinion, “my best drawing from the book jackets.” Perhaps that was because it *didn’t* reuse that damned Deco horse once again, or maybe it was just because this one was purely his own artistic vision and because of that, he could stand to look at it every day.

To those visiting Ronald Clyne’s ultra-modern home, that drawing was the only public acknowledgment of the imperfect work from a once imperfect youth, but it wasn’t the only relic hiding about the premises. There was also his original Hannes Bok illustration—“one of his best, I think”—which hung in his bathroom during the last few years of his life. Clyne loved that picture and saw the talented Bok as an example of what *not* to do if you want to have a successful life in the arts.

Clyne believed that most of his own drawings had failed because they said nothing. They were empty vessels. Not so for that Bok illustration. “It’s primitive, it’s illustration imagery, but that Bok is one of his drawings which I think comes closest to pure art. Art capable of standing alone without a story,” he explained to Victor Dricks.

“Bok came closer than any other artist in the field to achieving pure art. He was, I believe, a better illustrator than even Norman Rockwell. But he lacked the understanding that is necessary in order to do really ‘serious art,’” he lamented. “That’s why I left the field behind, because I didn’t want to end up doing hack work for $5 and $10 for the rest of my life.”
Ronald Clyne didn’t want to go out like his mentor. He didn’t want to die in a fourth floor walk up in Harlem; having spent his life without the ability to control his own destiny. He didn’t want to live and die in uncertain chaos. He wanted instead to be in control of every aspect of his life and career, and with determination, vision, and some good luck, he ended up doing exactly that.

He lived where and how he wanted to. He did exactly the sort of work he wanted to, and surrounded himself with the unique beauty that had bewitched and inspired him for most of his adult life. He filled the filtered air around him with the music that had become the soundtrack to that long life, and when his time had come to an end, he was ready to leave. He had everything under control.

“It was never more than a labor of love for me,” he said in 1975. “As I grew older and lost my interest in reading fantasy and science fiction stories, I gave up illustrating them also. Perhaps, as a result, I haven’t had to work at a steady job since 1947.”

When Ron Clyne died at the age of 80—on February 26, 2006—I imagine that he was probably all set to leave when Death’s bony finger rang his doorbell. Ron would most likely have been waiting for him, sitting alone in his pristine living room, surrounded by carved totems from the other side of the world. His bags would have been all packed—his identical starched shirts arranged next to his perfectly pressed slacks and polished loafers—and he would have been listening to some Indian classical music, or perhaps some ragtime, while his wife Hortense sat in the next room with a list of people to call, waiting for her cue. And then, she would quietly let it slip out that the extraordinary man who had once built a perfect world at 44 Willow Street in Brooklyn was gone.

After his passing, many would remember him for his brilliant book and record designs, especially his monumental work for Folkways. Less than a year after his death a traveling exhibit of some of those album covers toured galleries in New Zealand to great acclaim, and his collection of Oceanic art was in the hands of sympathetic museums and collectors—as were his two remaining pieces of fantasy art. His wife had done everything that he had expected of her, and now Ronald Clyne—who devoted his life to art and beauty—would be remembered for a long time to come by historians, students, and future designers as an innovator, a visionary, and a man who never let anything stop him from realizing his dreams and doing it his way.

And now, with the help of this article, Ronald Clyne the fanartist and pulp illustrator will be remembered, too. Hopefully, he won’t mind too much. It was, after all, just a labor of love.

* * * *

AUTHOR’S NOTE: I would like to thank the following people for their invaluable assistance in making this article possible—especially Stephen Jones, Robert Lichtman, Cuyler W. Brooks, Jonathan Jensen, Richard Newsome, and from the Eaton Collection, Sarah Allison, Melissa Conway, and Rob Latham. And a special thanks—in advance—to Bill Burns who had to deal with the many, many, many jpegs of artwork that accompany this article. And lastly, I’d also like to give big love to all of those who have written about Ron Clyne in the past, and upon whose shoulders I have been standing since I started this project. Thank you all, especially the silver tongued devil himself, who prodded me into doing this in the first place. I hope it was worth it, boss.

Offered by a friend of Kurt Vonnegut as the two returned from Europe following their World War II soldiering. Vonnegut asked this man what he had learned from his wartime experiences, to which his friend replied: “not to believe my government.”
Six Hours With Ronald Clyne

By Richard Newsome

Brad Verter and I met at 11:10 a.m. on January 18th, 2004 for a prearranged lunch meeting with Ronald Clyne at the St. George Hotel in downtown Brooklyn, to walk over to Clyne’s house on Willow. We walked through a lightly pelting freezing rain and slushy streets, sliding down the steep hilly sidewalk of Joralemon Street, to Clyne’s residence. His wife Hortense, a charming, earthy, no-nonsense black woman, let us in, and we took off our shoes to avoid tracking slush over their hardwood floors.

Hortense amused herself until lunchtime at 1 pm, while Ron Clyne entertained us. He mentioned that he was planning to replace his $1,400 pair of stereo speakers, and Brad expressed an interest in buying the old ones when he discarded them. They made a tentative arrangement for Ron to contact Brad when he got his new ones. Brad later told me he would be hard-pressed to buy such expensive speakers unless Clyne gave him a good price; he said $500 would be about as high as he could go. Clyne never mentioned a price and they left it at that.

Clyne and Brad talked for a long time about hi-fi stereo and acoustic issues and Clyne demonstrated aspects of his stereo system and showed off his “corner bass traps” (if I have that right) and the intricate system of sound baffles on his ceiling.

Clyne designed his own home and had it built (in 1964 I think) for $51,000. It’s a duplex and there is a tenant on the other side who pays $2,500 rent a month. Clyne told us this is his only income although in some regards he and Hortense seem to live like millionaires. His father was in advertising and moved around. I got the impression that there was not that much money in Clyne’s family and that he was self-supporting after he left home.

Clyne’s family left Chicago during the war to move to Los Angeles. They settled in Beverly Hills and Clyne attended Hollywood High where he met the young Charles Beaumont. Clyne spent only his senior year at Hollywood High. (I failed to ask if he did military service although he would have been the right age for the big call up for the invasion of Normandy. However, I learned later that he had not served in any branch of the military).

Clyne said he was 78 years old, which implies that he was born in 1925 if I am not mistaken; so he would have graduated in 1944 unless he skipped a grade. Hortense said that because he had scarlet fever and German measles as a child he acquired immunities that made him impervious to colds, flu, and the infections he might have picked up in the tropics when he was in New Guinea. He said he made 12 trips to New Guinea to buy art, starting in the 1960s and continuing up to the early 1970s. In 1975 they sealed the country off to the international art trade and wouldn’t let any more artifacts out of the country so he never went back after that.

He got many of his pieces of New Guinea native art from two Catholic priests, missionaries in different parts of the country. One of them was a Father Bouw (sp?) who *gave* Clyne an enormous collection of New Guinea shields, spears, totems, and figures, without asking any more for them. He wouldn’t take money for them and he just gave them away to Clyne. Clyne disposed of most of them to other interested people in New York without becoming a dealer, and kept the best pieces for himself. I would say that if we saw everything that he has about three dozen pieces altogether, or less. He had two big wooden “house posts” designed to hold up one corner of a longhouse, and beautifully carved into big grotesque figures with long tongues, horns, etc. They are excellent pieces and he says that after he showed one of them to the director of Oceanic Art at the Metropolitan Museum, he was approached by a dealer that the director had spoken to and offered $500,000, which he turned down. This piece is in his living room and about 8 feet high. He has high ceilings.

He also has a big drum made out of a hollowed tree with the inside burned out and a grotesque totem head carved into one end. It’s in excellent condition and he wasn’t afraid to pound on it to show us the drumming noise.
He had all these things shipped by sea in wooden crates, packed in jungle foliage for protection. He has a short movie that one of his friends made showing him unpacking a truckload of crates when it arrived in front of the house. This was circa 1964 and the movie shows a much younger Clyne, looking as handsome as a movie star, and Hortense.

The other Catholic priest he dealt with was a Father Heinemann (sp?) a missionary who was based in Germany. Fr. Heinemann sold pieces for the support of his missionary order and people in the know came from all over the world to buy from him, although it was done very quietly in order (Clyne thought) to avoid raising questions about exploiting the natives. It wasn’t advertised in any fashion, you just had to hear about it on the grapevine and then go to New Guinea to see Fr. Heinemann at the mission.

Typically Clyne would pay about $800 for a big piece. Today these pieces are worth $100,000 and more. Clyne regretted that he let so many pieces go because he really did not have room for them in the house. He also regretted not building a bigger house, and he blamed the contractor. He got a permit to add a third story (it’s a two-story house) from the Landmarks Commission and then discovered that the load-bearing walls in the cellar would not take the extra weight, so it never got built.

He bought the house lot for $5,000. His family moved from Beverly Hills to Kew Gardens in Queens around 1945 (he is hazy about dates) and then several years later (early 1950s?) he and his father moved out together to Brooklyn, leaving his stepmother (I think she was a stepmother). Clyne said she was a cold woman who took no interest in him though his father always encouraged him, and finally his father left her. Clyne and his father lived at various addresses around Brooklyn Heights, on Remsen Street was one I believe and I think he may have lived on Joralemon a few blocks from his present location. He has lived in Brooklyn continuously since he left Queens, and in the same house on Willow (presumably) since he built it 40 years ago. He said there were six building lots on that block and Leonard Garment, Nixon’s adviser, bought two of them.

He showed us a great many clippings and proofs of artwork he did for fanzines and prozines in the 1940s, including Famous Fantastic Mysteries (he saved several issues he was in), Weird Tales, and fanzines like Le Zombie and the Fantasite. He knew a few people in the LASFS, and mainly connected to it through Walt Daugherty. It was Walt Daugherty who helped him put out the Wallace Smith portfolio of artwork from Fantazius Mallare (if I’m not mistaken about the title). This was 10 drawings printed on slick paper, reproduced from the book, plus a one sheet introduction signed by Clyne and mostly ghostwritten (or at least collaborated on) and edited by Walt Daugherty, and a paper portfolio wrapper with lettering taken from the book. They did all this for love of doing so while ignoring things like rights and permissions. Clyne never had any contact with Smith and didn’t know much about him; he just loved the drawings.

Clyne gave us the last remnants of the duplicate overrun prints—between two and a dozen of five of the drawings plus a single copy of a sixth, with 4 drawings (I think) not represented at all, and then he later remembered where he had salted away three complete portfolios for his old age and gave us one. This was extremely kind of him and he did not ask for anything in return. Brad admired a Charles Beaumont book with a nice inscription to Clyne and Clyne gave it to him in exchange for Brad buying lunch.

Because the weather was so foul Hortense refused to drive. Brad didn’t have his car with him so we ordered Chinese take out from a restaurant called Andy’s, on Montague (at Henry St., I think?). Ron Clyne had the Paradise Shrimp that was marvelous and I had an excellent General Tso’s chicken—this was very good stuff worth a trip to the restaurant some time. I mean to go there when I have a few bucks some time, and perhaps get the shrimp again—it was in a very tasty mayonnaise-based sauce.
Clyne drew the dust jacket art for the Charles Beaumont book so it was an association copy. Later, we saw an inscribed copy of an August Derleth poetry book published by Decker, with cover art by Ron Clyne, for sale in the Heights Bookstore for $40. Brad didn’t buy it because the jacket was shot and Jon White (who we called up by cell phone) didn’t think he could supply a jacket.

Clyne didn’t save any of his old dust jackets, as far as we could tell, although he drew dozens of them for Arkham House. He started drawing jackets for August Derleth through the mail, and says Derleth gave him a free hand with the jacket design and never changed anything, although he didn’t pay much.

Clyne made two trips up to Sauk City to visit Derleth, and saw him a third time when Derleth made a trip to the East Coast in the 1960s. He said Derleth had a big amazing house and knew all sorts of people who were constantly coming and going at the house, so that there were always things going on. He had the impression that Derleth was bisexual although Derleth never made a pass at him. He said Derleth had a good-looking houseboy—an attractive young fellow—and that he wondered whether Derleth had a sexual thing going on with the houseboy. He said there was no wife there and he didn’t recall Derleth being married, and I told him that if I recall correctly I believe Derleth married a 15-year-old high school girl in the mid-1950s. But he liked Derleth and said Derleth was a nice fellow and he enjoyed visiting him. He did not recall the enormous bed which Moskowitz mentions but he did recall being impressed by Derleth’s enormous desk.

It was rumored among Chicago fans in the 1950s that Derleth was a bisexual pedophile with a particular taste for illegally underage teens. Ronald Clyne was fortunate when he met Derleth in person that he, while still a very young man, was much too old to get a rise out of Derleth’s lusts. –Earl Kemp

Clyne was very lucky and managed to get a contract with Folkways Records to design album covers for them. He showed us a file of proofs of the 100 or more album covers he did for Folkways. Most of them graphics, some photographs taken by Clyne, some photographs found by Clyne at the New York Public Library or Library of Congress photos which they copied and used as jacket art—they were able to use Walker Evans photos from the Library of Congress collection without paying anything, (perhaps because they were taken under the auspices of the WPA?). I would say only 10% or so of these had original drawings by Clyne. All during the 1950s he had been cutting down on the amount of illustrative drawing he was doing, and in terms of his fine art output he was doing paintings influenced by Ad Reinhardt, of an abstract or minimalist nature. He knew Ad Reinhardt and had Reinhardt do a painting for him—he wanted a red or blue one and Reinhardt was going through his black phase and said “But I only have black ones”—at any rate the one he eventually acquired passed through his hands and went on to Peter Brant. Reinhardt’s paintings were only a few thousand dollars at the time.

Clyne had not known Bok when he lived in Los Angeles but finally met him in New York along with Bok’s friend Paul Dennis O’Connor, who held social salons in his big apartment. O’Connor was very gay and quite a career criminal, but that wasn’t revealed until later.

Bok was definitely gay and rather peculiar in numerous other directions, affecting witchcraft, could not turn left—but made right turns until he was pointing in the direction he wanted to go—and other unusual quirks. They were amusing, as was his little-old-lady gayness, inoffensive, and not intrusive in relationships. He was a great host and it was always a thrill visiting him.

His constant companions and best friends were the lower-middle-class stay-at-home housewives who freely roamed the apartment building where Bok lived and Bok was, if anything, a perfect member of their tenement social club. Bok, in his correspondence, frequently described those ladies and gave them funny names and illuminated his letters with drawings of them, their cats, and their activities. As well as Abner, Bok’s favorite rat among the many that shared his small, cluttered, fourth-floor walk-up apartment.

It was these same ladies, Bok’s best friends, who, upon Bok’s death, raided his apartment like a plague of locusts. Tiptoeing around Bok’s still warm body, they pilfered and looted everything of value especially including all artwork down to Bok’s numerous, idea-filled sketchbooks. Then, with only a backward glance, they left the room, closed the door behind them, and notified the authorities that “a dead pauper was inside the apartment” But what else are best friends for…?

My memory piece about Hannes Bok is “The Widdershins Man” in el12, February 2004. –Earl Kemp

Clyne felt that he and Bok shared a number of similar interests, most notably that of homage to Maxfield Parrish.
because of Parish’s use of muted colors, spatial relationships, and ethereal, alien-worlds landscapes.

Clyne said Bok was gay but he was discreet and low profile about it. He said he never made any passes at Clyne and Clyne was somewhat wary of him at first. At that point in his professional career, Clyne had come into close contact with three very active gays, Derleth, O’Connor, and Bok, and none had hit on him. That he mentioned this at all means it had some significant effect on him.

Clyne showed us his copy of the Korshak book on Hannes Bok *A Hannes Bok Treasury* (1993), pointed to a black and white painting, and said he had owned that one once and he couldn’t recall what had happened to it. He had a nice Bok drawing or engraving on the wall but no other Bok artwork. He said Bok had certain psychosexual neurotic blocks or quirks in his artwork relating to his homosexuality and he flipped through some Bok pictures trying to find an example to show us, but he didn’t find one. Failing to find an example to point to he never explained what he meant. I was somewhat sorry I didn’t pin him down on this.

Ron said he never met Harry Smith while he was at Folkways. Ron apparently only went in to Folkways to get assignments and took the work home. He didn’t care much for the Folkways records although he is a huge audiophile, but he liked the Fugs album Folkways put out—thought “Slum Goddess” and “Nothing” etc. were hoots. Ron Clyne’s musical taste runs heavily to classical music, jazz, ragtime, and lots of medieval music. He had half a shelf of lute music alone. He also has some avant-gardeish, twelve-tone sort of music that Hortense does not care for.

Clyne said he designed everything in the house himself, except for some of the furniture such as the couches and chairs. But he designed the dining table we ate on, for example. It is made of lightweight modular pieces that convert to desk space against the wall, and pulls out to make a dining table. It was not bad. Clyne had it custom made but never tried to market any of his designs. He said his father once tried to market fabric designs he had done but people could just pirate them and not pay him, so nothing came of that and he gave up on design. He was of the opinion that business people were generally unscrupulous. He said Moe Asch never paid any taxes, everything was off the books and under the table and he would just throw up his hands when IRS agents came around to talk to him. He said then this supposed non-profit business (Folkways Records) was sold to the Smithsonian for a great deal of money (which is why the Smithsonian now owns Harry Smith’s recordings).

Recently, December 29, 2003 if I recall correctly, Ron had a serious accident in which he fell and hit his head on the sidewalk. He doesn’t know what happened. An ambulance came and there was blood and they had to cut away his clothing, including a very expensive topcoat that he had just gotten from Germany. Hortense didn’t ask until days later why they had to destroy the expensive coat to get his clothes off, and they said the coat was not worth more than his life. “I should have told them,” she said, “that they don’t know how much he paid for that coat.”

Ron was hospitalized but is now out and around and about and seemingly quite chipper, although he had one brief dizzy spell while turning around to look at their cat while we were there. But he seems quite healthy and held up better than I did for a six-hour visit. They are a little bit concerned about his health but he seems quite spry for 78. His memory was better on this visit, and he spoke with a good deal more clarity about things that happened 60 years ago, than on our first visit to him last year.

He spoke at one point of not being able to do some of the things he wanted as a young man in the 1950s “because I wasn’t making any money yet.” He has not saved much of the stuff that has passed through his hands and doesn’t seem to have much in the way of archives and files. His home is a showcase and it was featured a couple of years ago
in a article in *Interior Design* magazine devoted to his house. He said the photographer was high and messed up the first batch of photos and had to come back and shoot the house again.

Brad and I were there six hours. He gave Brad a lot of advice about house building, since Brad is presently renovating a house he bought. Ron Clyne says he is a perfectionist and he gave Brad advice on many minute details of construction, such as what sorts of house paints to buy, what kind of wood to use on the floors, etc.

Ron says he has put science fiction and LASFS far behind him these days. He doesn’t retain much of that era and his life then, and except for the memories of people like Bok and O’Connor, he doesn’t remember much of it. He couldn’t recall Francis Towner Laney or *The Acolyte*.

He is not much of a reader, he says, and generally never read the books he did jackets for. He doesn’t have a lot of books and the ones he has are almost all relating to Oceanic art and New Guinea.

In addition to the Oceanic art he has a number of paintings—actually, they are multi-media abstract collages, I suppose, or constructions—by an artist named Robert Yoder, whom he has never met, who cuts things up (like road signs) and glues the pieces back together again in new abstract patterns.

There were no signs that he and Hortense ever had any children and Brad says (I didn’t hear or don’t recall this) that he has an arrangement with a dealer to sell his collection of New Guinea art after his death. The house would be empty without it. There is a lot of open space in the house and no clutter, just a few nice things with lots of white space surrounding them.

There is probably a good deal more I could add to this if only I could remember it! He said that of his family he was the only one with an artistic or musical bent. I never learned anything about Hortense’s history.

Dated January 18, 2004

Postscript—I never saw Ron Clyne again. These are my original rough notes, cleaned up for spelling and grammar. I failed to mention that Clyne also spoke about the death of Michael Rockefeller (allegedly eaten by headhunters) and rumors he had heard from his contacts in New Guinea about Rockefeller’s fate. I don’t know why I failed to include this in my notes. I don’t recall now what he said but it was very interesting and appeared to conflict on some key points with the official version of Rockefeller’s death. Dated 2006.

---


---

TV drama, although not yet classified as fine art, has on occasion performed marvelous services for Americans who want us to be less paranoid, to be fairer and more merciful. *M.A.S.H.* and *Law and Order*, to name only two shows, have been stunning masterpieces in that regard.

--Kurt Vonnegut, 1/27/03, “In These Times”
Clerihews Forever

By Nic Farey

E C Bentley
Mused while he ought to have studied intently
It was this muse
That inspired clerihews

So wrote cruciverbalist Michael Curl, referring to the originator of the eponymous poetic form. Edmund Clerihew Bentley (1875-1956) needing a diversion from his studies at St. Paul’s School in London, at age sixteen concocted the first of this as yet unnamed genre, as follows:

Sir Humphrey Davy
Was not fond of gravy
He lived in the odium
Of having discovered sodium

The second line was later changed to “abominated gravy” (much better, I think) when this was published in 1905 in Bentley’s Biography for Beginners, a collection of poems illustrated by his lifelong friend G. K. Chesterton. (Intrepid Googlers will be able to find a free scanned copy of this fine work at an address too long to list here but which begins http://2020ok.com/books/ ...)

Bentley’s “introductory remarks” encapsulate both the content and form:

The Art of Biography
Is different from Geography
Geography is about Maps
But Biography is about Chaps

In form the clerihew (named as such by the OED in 1928) is a meterless four-line verse with the rhyming scheme AABB, the first line most usually being a person’s name, and its overall intent is to parodically or satirically eulogize its subject. In some ways it is the poetic equivalent of a caricature, embellishing upon some quirk or identifiable characteristic in brief but telling fashion. The original index of Biography for Beginners is described as an “Index of Psychology”, pretty much hammering home the point that the best clerihews should provide within their brevity great insight into the foibles of their subject. Bentley prefaces the “Index” as follows:

In all work of a biographic character it is important to make copious references to as many as possible of the generally-recognized virtues, vices, good points, foibles, peculiarities, tricks, characteristics, little weaknesses, traits, imperfections, fads, idiosyncrasies, singularities, morbid symptoms, oddities, faults, and regrettable propensities set forth in the following table.

revolting display of”, “Tartufe, willingness to regard as moral exemplar”, “Untruth, plausible, ability to frame”, “Veracity, departure from”, “World, the next, neglect of prospects in”, “Y.M.C.A., unfitness for” and “Zealous pursuit of pleasure at the expense of soul”.

This quite thoroughgoing analysis of Sir Christopher (suggesting perhaps that Bentley didn’t think much of him) is derived from:

Sir Christopher Wren
Said “I am going to dine with some men.
“If anyone calls
“Say I am designing St. Paul’s.”

Perhaps at this point I should interject a perhaps similar (though kinder) fannish example, which I feel shows both an ability (and a foible) of Claire Fishlifter:

Claire Fishlifter
Is quite the fannish grifter
And has never been known to snooze
When someone says “Let’s shop for shoes”

I remember a conversation with Mark Plummer after this was written, where I explained to him that I’d had some problems with constructing his own encomium in the same vein, since what I might have come up with involved rhyming “Croydon” with “hoyden”, which we both agreed would be rather a bad idea, actually.

However, I have now remedied this lack:

The Sainted Mark Plummer
Found fandom one long-ago summer.
We are not sure who is to blame,
But since then he’s not been quite the same.

Whilst the “rules” of clerihew construction do not admit to any strict meter, I’ve always felt that there should be a certain cadence to them. Many scholarly analyses suggest that the third and fourth lines are typically longer than the first two (the first is almost by definition the briefest), and I tend to agree, my feeling being that this imparts an air of progressive development. Bentley himself, however, more often produced clerihews with lines of more or less equal length, as in “TIZIANO VECCELLI”

When the great Titian
Was in a critical condition
He was carefully nursed
By Francis the First.

Titian, incidentally, has been a subject of worth to more than just Bentley, as in the limerick:

While Titian was mixing rose madder
To paint a lewd nude on a ladder
The condition of Titian
Indicated coition
So he ran up the ladder and had her.

As an aside, limericks are often grouped along with clerihews, both as nominally “comic” verse and because they are also often biographical in some way, even if
There was a young scribe from Japan
Whose poetry never would scan
He said “Well, you see
“The big trouble with me
“Is that I always try to get as many words into the last line as I possibly can.”

The clerihew, despite its apparent unstructuredness, would not seem to lend itself to this kind of playfulness, in fact I cannot recall seeing any examples of such modification. I therefore wonder whether, in coming up with the following clerihew with coda, I may have achieved, if not a first, something of a rarity:

Graham Charnock:
Like an old grandfather clock
Which has stopped, but he still may
Be right just two times a day.

(“Oh, no!”, says Pat.
“It’s once, if that.”)

Mention of Mr. “Fuck Off” hissell recalls Earl's pic of the man in concert in eI31, supervised by Ted White, which in turn recalls the following, probably written after the carving of some deep-fried chicken:

Ted White
Was here the other night
Which seems only fair
Since I’ve stayed many times in his bedroom spare.

Rather than illustrate the above with yet another dashing photo of the Eminence Grise, I thought I’d scan in the cover of this surprising (and rather charming) find in the local used bookstore, an emporium I am happy to frequent (if rather more pecuniously challenged upon exit). Incidentally, the Earl Stanley Gardner collection (of Perry Mason novels) is going rather well, thanks for asking: 28 or so down, 56 or so to go. Now there’s an article in the making: from the first novel in 1933 to last the last (non-posthumous) in 1969, the Mason stories represent a cultural history of the period to a large extent. (I was particularly fascinated by a sequence which in part depends upon a person’s concealment of their part-Chinese ancestry, a fact which at that time would have rendered her unacceptable in Society.)

Gardner (Earl Stanley)
Wrote of a lawyer so manly:
The indomitable Perry Mason
Whom many lesser characters would be based on.

The use of more than one name in a clerihew is not at all uncommon, as shown by Bentley’s own “TIZIANO VECELLI” above, which is by no means his only example, viz

After dinner, Erasmus
Told Colet not to be “blas’mous”
Which Colet, with some heat
Requested him to repeat.
My own first attempt at this kind of “double biography” derived from a disagreement between two noted English fen, either perpetrated or reported in LiveJournal (I forget which).

Douglas Spencer
Needs no man as his censor
Least of all Simo
After all, what the fuck does he know?

Of course if you didn’t know (or I hadn’t told you) that these two were fannish worthies, the verse is of little relevance. Rather more stefnal is the following:

Edward John Carnell
Edited “New Writings in SF” very well
But may have said once, at least
“Who will rid me of this troublesome Priest?”

(The photo of Chris Priest here is, I think, more or less contemporaneous with his appearances in New Writings, i.e. around the time of The Inverted World. Carnell’s photo is rather older.)

My own rediscovery of the clerihew form was prompted by a contest run some years ago by ZZ9 Plural Zed Alpha, the HitchHikers’ Guide to the Galaxy fan club, many of whose early members I met and enjoyed the company of in my early days of fandom, sharing their commitment to inspired lunacy and extreme socializing, though not necessarily the commitment to furry toys, which nevertheless inspired:

Zaphod Beeblebrox
Thought outside the box
But remained unawares
He would give rise to Beeblebears.

Other clerihews emerged the following December (or perhaps the one after that) under the general title If It’s Christmas It Must Be Clerihews, and containing the following seasonal observation, also alluding to my not-quite forgotten sub-Cockney speech pattern:

Scrooge, Ebenezer:
Not exactly yer diamond geezer
I was surprised that Bob Cratchit
Never split him with a hatchet.

Also in that list appeared the following:

Anthony Charles Lynton Blair
About the rest of us does not care
But just watch his nose go “woosh”
Up the ass of G W Bush.

The clerihew, like any self-respecting art form (especially ones with occasional satirical intent) can thus be applied to social commentary, as in:
The Almighty Pfizer
Is a strange prioritizer
They cannot help if with cancer you are sick
Yet have drugs for restless leg or floppy dick.

In fact, Pfizer is not responsible for Mirapex, the “restless leg syndrome” drug, but let’s just allow them to stand for drug companies in general and not be so fucking picky, OK?

Comic verse of all kinds has often been noted for its joy in wordplay. Limericks, expectedly, have been noted for this, as in this example:

There once was a fisher from Michigan
Who said “I must go back and fichigan”.
He cast out his line,
Caught a fish every time
And fish was his favorite dichigan.

My own “wordplay” clerihew (with which C Fishlifter claimed to be “very impressed” while also expressing a liking for her own) pleases me as much for its inherent fannishness as much as anything else, being incomprehensible to mundane people:

The Blessed Bobbie
Thinks FIJAGH
Whilst a different wife
Might say FIAWOL

(BB, by the way, has much the same attitude to published photos of her as does Uncle Johnny.)

I have yet to see a clerihew incorporate a Spoonerism (but don’t let that stop you from writing one), but I am nevertheless inevitably reminded of the Spoonerist poem in Monty Python’s Big Red Book which ends with the line:

“While silling by my windowflutter / Biny little tirds”, and thence to John Stuart Mill’s namecheck in The Philosophers’ Song, to Bentley’s own assessment:

John Stuart Mill
By a mighty effort of will.
Overcame his natural bonhomie
And wrote “Principles of Political Economy”.

While the original intent of the clerihew was biographic and historical, I have shown above that it can also be used for social commentary, a reflection of current events, and even some sense of hopeful prognostication at times:

Max
Has what the average fan lacks
Despite no sense of couture
She has an eye to fandom’s future

I expect I’ll get thumped for that at some point.
In conclusion, then:

**EARL KEMP:**
**AN APOLOGIST FOR HEMP**
**AND IF YOU ARE A CORFLU SINGER**
**HE MAY GIVE YOU THE FINGER**

Good arrers!
Nic Farey
November 2, 2008

The telling of jokes is an art of its own, and it always rises from some emotional threat. The best jokes are dangerous, and dangerous because they are in some way truthful.

--Kurt Vonnegut, 9/18/02, *McSweeney's*
Cover Stories

or

Four tales of Space and Time

By Peter Weston

This first story isn’t particularly exciting, but it sets the scene. There I was in the book-room on Friday afternoon at this year’s Eastercon – a pretty big room, by usual standards – making a preliminary sweep of the tables, when I came across a couple of lads who were selling Ace Doubles. Not something you see very often these days at British cons and these were really cheap – just £2.00 for titles with blue-&-white spines and £3.00 for the older, blue-&-red spines, so I ended up buying quite a few.

The one I was particularly pleased to get was The Big Time, by Fritz Leiber (backed with The Mind Spider and Other Stories) which I bought for the cover, pure and simple. This is one of my personal Hall-of-Fame favourites and naturally I have the fancy Easton Press leather-bound edition, but the Ace cover for Big Time was so absolutely right that I simply had to have it, you know the feeling. And it accurately shows a scene about three-quarters of the way through the book, when Kaby the Minoan girl twists a dial on the Minor Maintainer and Bruce, Beau, Sid, and Sevensee the Venusian satyr (from one-and-a-half billion years in the future) are slammed down to the floor by about eight gravities. (Cover #1)

Who was the artist? It doesn’t say but Emsh, I should think, and for the rest of the con I went round showing the book to various people who all agreed that yes, it really was a great cover, though they might just have been humouring me, I suppose.

But, and this leads into the second story, those lads weren’t just selling Ace Doubles, they had a good selection of British hard-backs as well, including some I hadn’t seen for quite a time. I fiddled around a bit and then picked up a title which made me laugh out loud. I showed it to the lads and they thought it was pretty funny, too, and since they only wanted £2.00 I bought it, again just for the cover.

The book was Four for the Future, a compilation of four stories put together by Harry Harrison and published in Britain by MacDonald in 1969. Nothing particularly amusing about the book itself, of course, but the dustjacket….

Someone at MacDonald had this idea of producing the series with a uniform-style of typography (John Berry, are you listening?) on the dustjackets. The author’s name and title would be reversed out in Cooper Bold/Italic against a solid-colour background, with the letters ‘SF’ also reversed and taking up the bottom two-thirds of the cover. Each title would be distinguished by a different solid colour and with a unique piece of artwork fitted into the outlined letters. It worked quite well with titles like Joanna Russ’ Picnic on Paradise and Larry Niven’s Neutron Star. (Covers #2 & #3).

But when the unknown artist came to Harrison’s book I guess he was running a bit short of ideas. Or maybe he was fed-up with the rotten pay and wondered what he could get away with while the commissioning editor wasn’t paying attention. The result is one of the most atrocious pieces of cover art you’ll ever see, which back in 1969 would have had a good chance of running foul of the obscenity laws if anyone had cared tuppence about science fiction.

Just look at the thing! (Cover #4)
This leads me neatly into the next story, also concerning a cover. When I came home from the con I took a scan and sent it along to Harry Harrison with the following message:

‘At the Easter convention I picked up a copy of the MacDonald edition of *Four for the Future*, mainly because of the God-awful cover! I’m sure you remember it, but see the attachment. I imagine your reaction was one of consternation when you saw what some gormless artistic-type person had inflicted on the book!’

Harry answered by return:

‘Yes – isn’t that one of the worst covers ever! But the Faber cover for *Transatlantic Tunnel* was even worse! Like a decayed intestine. It was so bad my then-agent Hilary Rubenstein told Faber if they did another jacket that bad he would pull all his clients from their SF list...’ (Cover #5)

Curious, I checked eBay then sent Harry another note:


(For those who can’t be bothered to look, the entry reads as follows: -


And finally, here’s something truly amazing. At the Eastercon I developed a completely new – and pretty much useless – psi-power.

It all happened late on Sunday morning at Gerry Webb’s champagne room party. I must say that Gerry certainly is no slouch when it comes to high-class hospitality; no blonde Russian girls showed up this year (I’m not kidding) but he’d thoughtfully laid-in several crates of expensive fizz, and every ten minutes or so he’d snap his fingers and the lovely Mali would rush into the bathroom and return with yet another bottle. It was quite a merry little occasion
For no particular reason we started talking about science fiction, as you do, and the way SF writers never quite follow-through on their concepts, and this reminded me about something which had bothered me, fifty years ago when I read *The World of Null-A*. I mean, didn’t mad old VanVogt say that his protagonist, Gilbert Gosseyn, had an extra brain? Now, since most people’s heads are pretty full with the standard-issue organ, what’s always baffled me is *where did he keep it?* 

“In his boot?” suggested Tony Berry, helpfully. “In hyperspace?” asked Bill Burns. But as usual Gerry had an answer. “He had an extra-large head,” he explained. “The book’s up there,” he said, pointing to the top of a wardrobe about two feet away from where I was standing. “Look,” he added, taking down a copy of the 1950 Grosset & Dunlap edition and showing me the cover, “I bought this from Andy Richards’ table this morning.”

Well, that’s a coincidence, I thought! But sure enough Gerry was right, the dust-jacket artist had worked out that two brains would need a fair bit of extra cranium-capacity, so he’d given Gilbert Gosseyn a puzzled expression and a forehead about eighteen inches high. Great for following complicated VanVogtian plot-twists, I suppose, but not so good if he ever needed to wear a crash-helmet. (Cover #6)

“I fancy that,” said Dave Langford, “I bought the other one this morning,” and he took out an identical copy of the same book from his briefcase, which he’d previously put on the floor at my feet.

I looked at Dave’s case, then at the top of the wardrobe, and realised that if you drew a straight line between the two it would pass right through my head. Obviously this was no accident. Some mysterious force had manifested itself, something previously unknown to physical science. Otherwise, without any prompting, why had I started talking about *The World of Null-A*, something I hadn’t thought about for decades? Could there be some sort of extra-sensory organ of perception which responds to the particular mental *essence*, or *flux*, emanating from old science fiction books? Did I have an exciting new super-power which had been lying dormant all these years until it had been triggered when my brain accidentally came between those twin sources of powerful radiation?

Suddenly, everything fell into place. Back in the old Brum group in the mid-sixties I’d always rather enviously wondered how Cliff Teague had managed to build his SF collection so quickly. I’d even written (in jest), that he “could smell science fiction at a half-mile radius”. But maybe it wasn’t a joke at all. Perhaps he really *could* do that, maybe Cliff had been born with this new *psi* power which I’d only just activated!

If so, big deal! What use is it to me now, forty years later? I’ve found all that stuff now, and done it the hard way!

---

I was put in a ghetto—science fiction—which serious critics need never read. My education was technical ... and the prejudice is that anybody who knows how his refrigerator works can’t possibly be an artist.

—Kurt Vonnegut, Knoxville *News-Sentinel*, 4/01
The Man From Tomorrow

By Richard Toronto

John Keel was royally pissed when Raymond A. Palmer’s front door shut abruptly in his face one chilly New Year’s eve in Amherst, Wisconsin. Keel had made the trek to Palmer’s idyllic country farm hoping for an interview. Palmer, known fondly to devoted fans and friends as “Rap,” was editor of *Flying Saucers* magazine, the first trade zine ever to have the words “flying saucer” in the title. Rap was something of a living legend—or rogue, depending on your point of view—as a publisher of pulp science fiction and flying saucer zines. Long story short, Keel went back to his motel that night empty handed. Palmer’s son, also named Ray but with a different middle initial, recalled the long ago incident.

“We used to have New Year’s parties at the house. About 60 to 80 people would come. One year, around seven o’clock at night, just as our guests were arriving, this guy (Keel) comes to the door. He wants to interview my dad. And my dad said ‘Well, we’re having a party and I just don’t have the time.’ Normally my dad would always sit down and talk to somebody. Well this guy got all mad ... and he left. Since that time he never wrote a nice thing about dad.”

Keel, a former writer for TV, is best known for his speculative UFO books with Fortean overtones. Hollywood even bought movie rights to his book *The Mothman Prophesies*, casting Richard Gere as John Keel. Though it must be interesting to see Richard Gere being you on the big screen, this has nothing to do with our story.

Some years after the front door incident in Amherst, Keel published a scathing article titled *The Man Who Invented Flying Saucers.* It concerned a certain science fiction fan who went on to become the editor of a very famous science fiction pulp magazine. The editor eventually warped the minds of readers throughout the land with talk of flying saucers and malevolent entities living inside the Earth. Through these and other clever means the sf editor created a flying saucer mythos that still haunts us on TV “sightings” shows and in scores of Whitney Strieber books.

The editor—purely by accident Keel noted—tapped into the psyches of millions of Americans to implant the shape, source and behavior of flying saucers—simply by writing about them. As an added bonus, the editor sold more copies of his sf magazine and got a big fat raise from his boss for doing so. Something called The Shaver Mystery seems to have really ticked Keel off too, and he ranted about that with escalating disdain for several paragraphs.

In any case, the article was a hit, if not hit *piece,* and became source material for other writers who spawned subsequent articles that have transformed the sf editor into a kind of Svengali to mentally disturbed crackpots everywhere, who believe aliens from space control their thoughts. Long story short—if it were not for the sf editor, there would have been no flying saucers as we know them; no abductions, no underground bases, no alien probes, no men in black, and come to think of it, probably no X-Files.

That editor, Keel wrote, was Raymond A. Palmer, the diminutive but spunky host of that New Year’s Eve party in Amherst.

At this point, one might pause to ask just how a pulp science fiction writer could possibly become the cultish leader of millions of gullible ... What? Who? Have I ever heard of L. Ron Hubbard?? Jeez. Okay, let’s move on.
To get to the bottom of this alleged plot to invent flying saucers, we should take a closer look at the source of all the hoopla; the man who by his own admission was the world’s first flying saucer investigator. He was a mystic, a libertarian, did not support labor unions and was a foe to what eventually became known as Establishment Thinking. He was a pioneer who fought hard for what he believed in, if, indeed, he believed in anything. And he did. Too much and too little has been said about Ray Palmer, both pro and con and yet he remains an enigma to sf history. After his death in 1977, the bulk of his monumental collection of UFO case files was purchased by CUFOS, the flying saucer research organization founded by Dr. J. Allen Hynek of Illinois University.

Flying saucers were not Rap’s only interest by any means. He was one of the first to bang the drum on the dangers of atomic testing and its debilitating worldwide fallout. He suspected it was altering the weather. He wrote extensively about the Atomic Energy Commission and questioned the charter under which it operated in such articles as “The Truth about Atomic Energy” in Mystic magazine:

“This is an article you should read very carefully,” he warned. “...because it is the most important article you will ever read! ...its purpose is to challenge those men (soldiers, politicians and scientists) who have taken the destiny of the world into their hands.”

Rap used this kind of rhetoric in all of his crusades. His fiery intensity made it seem important, and he wanted readers to pause and think. Maybe not accept, but at least give it a thought. It was emblematic of Palmer’s “larger social responsibility” as Rap biographer Jim Pobst put it.

“My father’s pet peeve about many people was that they did not think for themselves,” Palmer’s son explained. “He promoted space travel, education, genetic engineering, clean air and water, less destructive pesticides, equal right for the Indians, proper care of animals, a government that protects individual freedoms. This list can go on and on.”

Then again, Rap glommed on to crazes too, “stunts” as he called them. Like the time he discovered the real Jesse James...alive at 101 years old, who gave Rap $10,000 to tell his true life story; or Admiral Byrd’s secret 1947 flight over the North Pole; or the NASA photos he ran in Space World magazine that proved beyond a doubt that the Earth was hollow, with holes at the poles. NASA pulled his press privileges after that.

During Rap’s editorial heyday there was no OMNI or Discovery, so Rap filled that need with tales of scientific discoveries, flights of fancy, and establishment cover-ups.
To figure out exactly what went on in Rap’s world, we must dig deep into the brittle, yellowing pages of 60-year-old pulp magazines.

**The Milwaukee Miracle**

Palmer was born in Milwaukee in 1910, nothing unusual about that. And for seven years it stayed that way, until finally we see young Rap playing in the street near the family home – with a large milk truck barreling down on him. The truck broke his spine and a spinal disease set in. The accident forever altered the world of science fiction. It is said he had the first spinal graft. His childhood became a series of unsuccessful operations followed by years of recuperation. Several of those years were spent laying face down in a canvas-and-steel-pipe “Bradford frame,” an early 20th century torture device according to Rap.

“I was...able only to move the lower part of my legs, my arms, and my head,” recalled Rap in his memoir.

He grew only a few inches after the accident, and while other kids attended school and whileed away their summers at the local swimming hole, Rap spent his youth in the torture bed, reading books. “At intervals totaling more than five years” he got his education from a tutor sent by the Milwaukee School Board and from books delivered weekly by the Milwaukee Public Library.

He devoured crates of books covering a wide range of subjects, like math, archeology, history, mythology, physics, and the emerging literary genre called science fiction. These were years when Rap dreamed of better things – a fantastic world of tomorrow foreshadowed by the imaginations of science fiction writers.

He also practiced what he called mental healing. This was not “faith” healing, since he believed in neither “fate” nor “faith.” Doctors predicted his imminent demise from time to time, but Rap used his developing mental powers to prove them wrong.

“All during my life, beginning most specifically at age nine when I promised my weeping mother that I wasn’t going to die in 24 hours as the doctor had just assured her, I have had this confidence that I could ‘do things’ I wanted to do...through sheer determination,” said Rap. 5

To hear him tell it, Rap read his first issue of *Amazing Stories* magazine in 1926, and that same day mailed off his first sf yarn to Hugo Gernsback, *Amazing’s* editor. When Gernsback replied with a $40 acceptance check, this may have been the moment Rap knew he would become editor of *Amazing Stories*. After all, *Amazing Stories* is where the popular science fiction movement began. Or, as Frederik Pohl once said, “In the Beginning there was Hugo Gernsback, and he begat *Amazing Stories.*”

Rap’s earliest recollections of his fannish past drifted back to 1924, when “…the first SF began to appear in the old *Electrical Experimenter.*” 6

Rap was what you would call a “true fan”—a fan among fen. In fan-speak of the era he was considered an actifan who never gafiated from fandom’s fold, though he was often considered a fugghead by other fen who started many a fanfeud with him over his editorial policies. 7

He is credited with publishing the first fanzine—*The Comet*. He started a lending library—The Science Correspondence Club—loaning books to would-be writers in the sf field. He founded the Jules Verne Prize Club in 1933, a short-lived precursor to the Hugo Awards. Members could join for a mere 25¢. And in the early ’30s he was a founding member of a group called the Milwaukee Fictioneers. Robert Bloch, a former member, recalled that it was “…a writers’ workshop before the term was even invented.” 8
As an organizer, editor, and writer, Rap “... worked off enough fannish energies to give him the $100 prize in a Gernsback contest on ‘What I have Done to Advance Science Fiction’,” said long-time sf fan Harry Warner Jr. “He blamed hard work with fandom and science fiction for causing him an eight month stay in a sanatorium.” 9

And so it came to pass that the boy who would not live to see his 10th birthday became editor of Amazing Stories at the age of 28. Thanks to arcane knowledge learned during his Bradford frame days, Rap charted his life’s course early on. “It is as though Life is a blueprint, but a design that you manufacture yourself!” he said. 10

In 1938, the year of his hire at Ziff-Davis—the new owners of Amazing Stories—Rap had been employed as a sheet metal worker for the P.J. Lavies Company, installing aluminum roofs and gutters. He installed furnaces and clothes chutes too, and even kept the company books to boost his meager income. From a dingy rented room he cranked out pulp fiction for sf and adventure magazines, selling occasional work to Shade Publications of Milwaukee. It was “impossible” to make a living writing science fiction, he said.

**More than Amazing**

Curiously, Rap said his hard work and organizing skills had nothing to do with his hire at Amazing Stories. The real story, the truth, he said, went something like this. One day, he simply quit his job at the P.J. Lavies Company and went home. At the time of the life-altering job offer, Rap was sitting in his tiny room, “having meals delivered and wishing himself a pulp sale.” 11

Said Rap, “… I gave up my job, went to my rented room, and simply waited...I was waiting to be called to the editorship of Amazing Stories magazine, which was published in New York and had an editor who had no intention of relinquishing his job. In short, I pre-destined it!” 12 Meaning, none of the circumstances leading up to his job at Amazing were chance, fate, or the fact that he had been writing science fiction since age 16 and was on a first name basis with scores of pulp fiction writers like Ralph Milne Farley, who recommended him for the job. No, it was “…by pure force of will I had created the conditions I wanted,” he said.

As another version of the story goes, his eventual career as an sf writer and editor may have been due in part, at least, to his grandmother. In 1929 she informed him he would never achieve his dream of becoming a writer. As this version goes, Rap immediately sat down and cranked out his first sf yarn, “The Time Ray of Chandra.” It appeared some years later in Gernsback’s June 1930 issue of Wonder Stories. The rest, as they say, is history.

Even if this version (or the previous one for that matter) is a total myth, it’s real enough to fit a pattern. It was a pattern Rap repeated throughout his life, and it went something like this:

Tell Rap that something, anything, is ridiculous, far-fetched, or impossible to accomplish.

Rap then proves you wrong, and has fun doing so.

This was as much a form of entertainment as a symptom of his self-declared war on establishment thinking. And Rap abhorred mainstream thinking...the kind of thinking that has no place in science fiction literature.

As a self-taught writer, it is no surprise that Rap viewed himself as the common man; no ivy league, tweed-coat-wearing, pipe-smoking, latte-swilling elitist, he. It was this identification with the “average” man, he said, that taught him everything he knew.

“Thus it was that I learned that the pathway toward reality did not lie in the libraries and the universities, but out among the people, the simple person who sought no acclaim, no high position in life, no mastery over anyone, no
Science fiction offered the world he craved, of infinite possibilities, of challenges to accepted thought. And sparking the imaginations of thousands of young sf readers at the time was what was commonly known as space ships. Rap had been reading about them since he was a kid.

Which brings us back to his alleged invention of flying saucers. Did Rap really invent them or was he merely following the footsteps of others who came before?

In 1928, two years after Rap sold “Time Ray of Chandra” to Gernsback, a 40-year-old newspaperman named Philip Francis Nowlan sold his first sf yarn to Amazing Stories—called “Armageddon 2419 A.D.” It was about a rebel spaceship pilot named Anthony “Buck” Rogers. Buck became the hero of a long-lived comic strip read by generations of youngsters. Rap, too, read the popular strip, that bristled with anti-gravity flying belts and rocket guns.

There were evil aliens, too, Martians, of course, who sent their saucer-like craft to Earth to kidnap human specimens (that is SO 1930s—today we say “abduct” human specimens). To combat this evil Martian threat, Buck built the world’s first interplanetary space ship, and declared, “Roaring rockets! We’ll show these Martians who’s who in the solar system!”

The Ziff-Davis Years

“I don’t believe the literal ‘truth’ can ever be known—we can only appropriate truth in the framework of our capability of understanding.”—Rap

With the reigns at Amazing Stories firmly in hand, Rap galloped off at breakneck speed publishing tales of space ships, BEMs, beautiful babes in stylish space suits, ray mech, and aliens. Newsstand sales soared. To hear Rap tell it, sales went from his first issue of 75,000 copies to 93,000 by the second, and within a year Amazing was selling 185,000 copies per month (or 250,000 depending on who’s telling the story). Though he enjoyed telling and re-telling the story of these legendary circulation figures, its numbers varied widely; depending on which publication and year he told the story.

The same year Rap was assuming editorial control at Amazing, Orson Welles’ Mercury Theater panicked thousands of radio listeners on Halloween night after convincing them Martians had landed in New Jersey and were coming to get them. Just months before Welles’ legendary broadcast, Rap’s editorial in Amazing Stories went like this:
“We wonder if after all, if earth hasn’t been visited by beings from other planets? What were the ships, with tails of fire, Elisha saw in his visions? Are they future prophecy, or are they the more likely legendary memory of actual and long-gone fact?” 15

Then, in 1939, he witnessed something that brought new conviction to his editorials.

“Your editors were reminded of Charles Fort and his LO! The other day, seen from our 22nd story window, in the west was a strong light, high in the air, which remained for perhaps ten minutes, then faded...your editor got a great kick out of announcing the arrival of the Martians to his fellow editors of...Radio News, Popular Photography, and Popular Aviation.” 16

Rap’s interest in the as yet unnamed flying saucers had percolated for years thanks to science fiction. But future events were about to alter his career in the science fiction field he loved so dearly.

**The Shaver Mystery**

Rap knew exactly why the circulation figures were climbing at *Amazing*, and said so in his *Other Worlds* magazine years later...

“...it was ideas that did it. NEW ideas. STARTLING ideas. It was building a fire under readers by giving them something so hot they couldn’t put them down, and making them pant for the next issue. Nobody pants for the next issue these days.” 17

After successfully piloting the good ship *Amazing* for nearly six years, Rap encountered yet another truck barreling down on him, and this one would hit him harder than the first. The truck is only a metaphor, but it, too, was something of an accident and it changed Rap’s life forever. This time he gave the truck a name; he called it “The Shaver Mystery.” It was hot, and it was NEW. Rap said it was the next big wave in sf, though he also said that of flying saucers.

The mystery emerged from Rap’s discovery of a Ford assembly line worker named Richard S. Shaver, who in 1943 sent a letter to *Amazing Stories* offering Rap first crack at an ancient alphabet – Mantong, he called it. The alphabet, which Shaver deciphered himself, was said to be the original tongue of Earth’s first civilization. It piqued Rap’s interest mightily and, ignoring the admonitions of his assistant editor Howard Browne, he published Shaver’s letter in *Amazing’s* January 1944 issue.

Behind the scenes, a feverish correspondence ensued, wherein Palmer learned that Shaver had an even more bizarre
tale to tell. As the story went, Shaver had lived among the denizens of an underground civilization that exists within the Earth’s mantel. These underworld people (essentially two groups, “dero” and “tero,”—the first being evil, the latter good) have the ability to control earthly affairs via thought control using wondrous machinery left by that fantastic elder race whose language was the aforementioned Mantong.

“They have death rays, space ships, giant rockets that traverse the upper air (the flying saucers were described in detail by Mr. Shaver before they actually appeared to Mr. Kenneth Arnold and to thousands since)...and many more marvelous things which Mr. Shaver claimed would revolutionize our surface science if we could but obtain them.” 18

There are hundreds of details to the Shaver Mystery, but, in the interest of hitting the sack before 3 AM, this synopsis will have to do. Shaver typed a 10,000-word story on a semi-functional typer at his Pennsylvania home and mailed it to Palmer. It was titled ominously, “A Warning to Future Man.”

Rap read it and saw its potential as a new direction for *Amazing* and, as legend has it, expanded it to a 31,000-word manuscript titled “I Remember Lemuria!” Rap changed one key element, however. Shaver claimed he got the basis for his story from first-hand experience; but fearing his readers would find that too outlandish, Rap changed the source to “racial memory,” much to Shaver’s chagrin.

In any case, it was a hit. It was beyond a hit, it became a phenomenon. Letters of support and congratulation poured in. Rap’s hunch that his Shaver Mystery would punch up sales did that and more. It was creating a new fan base for *Amazing*. Sales climbed to incredible heights during the Shaver Mystery’s heyday, “a record that has never been broken in pulp publishing,” Rap said.

As occasionally happens when something seems to be going so well, a problem arose when Palmer informed his readers that the Shaver yarns, now being cranked out at white hot speed each month, were based on factual events, just as Shaver said. Rap began arguing, debating, and generally lobbying readers to seriously consider Shaver’s claims. He commissioned artists to feature back covers of *Fantastic Adventures* as well as *Amazing Stories* depicting Shaver Mystery scenes. On the one hand, this lured Forteans, occultists, and mystics into the *Amazing* fold. The way they saw it, there was truth to be mined in the pages of *Amazing*; some readers even became amateur explorers and spelunkers in the hope of finding cavern portals to Shaver’s fabled Underworld.

What is often ignored in the Shaver Mystery mêlée is Ray Palmer himself. Fellow sf writers and fen could not
understand why he strayed so far from the mainstream of science fiction. According to his son, it is exactly what Ray Palmer was all about.

“If this was all to get people to think for themselves and see that there are other possibilities,” Palmer the younger explained. “He would write an article one month saying this [or that] is true, and in the next issue under a pen name would blast that crazy Ray Palmer with a new viewpoint. And that is what people do not seem to understand. Ray Palmer wanted to learn. Being unable to travel the world, he found a way for the world to come to him with their ideas. With Shaver, he would listen to what he had to say and did not ridicule him...he would ask questions to bring out new possibilities and then see if he could find out how they could be true.”

Fantasy Adventures showing the back cover Shaver scene.

Throughout the Shaver Mystery hoopla, Rap promised to reveal his proofs of said mystery. One key element, as he often pointed out, was the fact that Shaver talked in great detail of sinister saucer-like craft invading our airspace for reasons that did not benefit humankind. Shaver called these saucers “Vermin From Space.” The Shaver Mystery was replete with what would later be considered conspiracy literature.

To be fair, John W. Campbell, Rap’s competition over at the “scientifically-based” Astounding Science Fiction magazine, later began publishing sf tales by L. Ron Hubbard, claiming these stories too, were based on solid fact (Hubbard’s Dianetics). At one point, Campbell even became editorially obsessed with psionics. Nonetheless, everyone agreed Rap set a precedent.

As Keel saw it, Rap used the Shaver Mystery to brainwash a legion of Manchurian candidates, implanting the shape, behavior, and even the source of flying saucers into the minds of millions. There were many sf fen at the time that would have agreed with Keel, because for every fan who loved the Shaver Mystery there was another who hated it. To them it became “The Palmer Hoax.” An article by Thomas S. Gardner, published in the Fantasy Commentator, expressed the indignation of the time:

“The crackpots, as they are usually called, number at least a million in the United States. They are, in the main, adults, and have educational levels ranging from near zero to those of Ph.D.s. A great many harbor seriously (sic) delusions of ancient civilizations superior to ours, believe in pyramidology and the like. To capture these readers it is only necessary to publish issues of Amazing Stories containing stories which propitiate these crackpots’ views in fictional guise. And with Richard S. Shaver’s ‘I remember Lemuria’ Palmer has instituted this very trend.”

And so it came to pass that a vast chasm loomed among fandom thanks to the Shaver Mystery. Those who read Amazing and followed the Shaver series with interest were called Shaverites. Those who read Astounding Science Fiction (and shunned Amazing) were “rational, science-based fen.” Fan luminaries like Forrest J Ackerman sustained this on-going fan fued, and it continued unabated for nearly four years.

The protracted squabble had no effect on the diminutive editor of Amazing Stories, however. Even Rap must have
known something would have to tip the balance, and that’s just what happened on June 24, 1947 when pilot Kenneth Arnold spotted a formation of nine silvery flying objects near Mt. Rainier, Washington.

The objects’ strange, skipping motion inspired a newspaper reporter to tag them as “flying saucers,” and the name stuck like glue. The flying saucer age was on with a vengeance. Newspapers were blazing with the story of the mystery discs.

Back in Chicago, Rap followed the newspaper stories with keen interest. He assured his Amazing Stories readers that here at last was proof of the veracity of the Shaver Mystery. But the handwriting was on the wall for the Shaver series. With growing concerns from his publisher over the fact that elements of the mystery conflicted with Einstein’s Theory of Relativity, and continuing complaints from a newly organizing fandom, Rap’s budding interest in flying saucers gradually drew him away from the Shaver Mystery.

Fred Lee Crisman

One could say that if all it takes is for someone to write about something to make it happen, Buck Rogers can be blamed for flying saucers. He predated The Shaver Mystery. What really turned Rap into the world’s first flying saucer investigator was one Fred L. Crisman of Tacoma, Washington, not Richard S. Shaver.

Nowadays, Crisman is generally deemed a trickster by trade, and a truly shady character. The two things we positively know about him is that he was born in 1919 and died in 1975. Conspiracy buffs and ufologists alike have been trying to unravel his secrets for years. Just Google Crisman’s name and it will spew a bizarre thread that begins with Ray Palmer and the Shaver Mystery.

Crisman is believed by some to have been an OSS and CIA agent, an industrial spy, closely aligned with right-wing extremists, underworld figures, and anti-Castro Cubans who were allegedly involved in the JFK assassination. In 1968 Crisman worked as a right wing “shock jock” hosting a radio talk show in Tacoma. He was subpoenaed by New Orleans District Attorney Jim Garrison during a 1968 investigation into the Kennedy assassination. It has been rumored (even Keel mentioned this) that Crisman was one of the three “tramps” arrested in Dealey Plaza after the murder.

It is also written that during WW II, Crisman came up with a plan to forestall the Nazis’ completion of their atom bomb. He came up with a non-functional “widget,” that was dropped by Allied bombers across Germany as the war ground to its grisly finale. While German scientists wasted valuable time trying to figure out what the widgets were about, we whomped their asses and dropped the A-Bomb on Japan. So the story goes.

Crismanologists all agree that Crisman’s post-war existence was first noted in a published letter in the June 1946 issue of Amazing Stories. At first glance it appeared to be a fantastic corroboration of The Shaver Mystery, detailing the gory details of a dero attack on then Army pilot Crisman and an unnamed captain near Tibet. Wrote Crisman...

“For heaven’s sake, drop the whole thing! [The Shaver Mystery]. My companion and I fought our way out of a cave with sub-machine guns. I have two nine-inch scars on my left arm that came from wounds given me in the cave when I was 50 feet from a moving object of any kind....

“You can imagine my fright when I picked up my first copy of Amazing Stories and see you splashing words about on the subject.”
Anti-Shaverites zeroed in on the letter. Though it appeared to be a validation of Shaver’s claims, critics saw it as one more proof that Rap and his wild-eyed readers were a bunch of nut balls. Years later, Rap said he was actually skeptical of the letter.

“...According to Life magazine, this publisher wanted everybody to believe that the Shaver Mystery was true, and here was some provident proof. But he did nothing, because he didn’t believe a word of Crisman’s letter,” said Rap. 19

There was a follow-up letter from Crisman, too, appearing in the May 1947 issue. Soon after the appearance of the first letter, Harpers magazine published a denunciation of Rap and the Shaver Mystery. The author, S. Baring-Gould, touted Crisman’s letter as an example of the crackpots Rap catered to. Then Crisman himself chimed in!

“I bitterly resent this,” snorted Crisman about the article. “I felt that you too, Mr. Palmer, had more or less given me up for a jerk who was only trying to pull your leg...that maybe all this was only a promotion stunt....”

Whatever Crisman’s motives, one thing is clear; Crisman had already targeted Ray Palmer as part of a grand scheme. What the purpose of this scheme was, not even conspiriologists admit to knowing for sure, though they have their theories. One thing we know for certain is that one month after the appearance of Crisman’s second letter, Ray Palmer got sucked into a black hole that pulled him into an even stranger universe than the Shaver Mystery. This is where his reputation as the world’s first flying saucer investigator really begins.

The Tacoma Incident

We wonder how many of you readers know that at one time Project Blue Book...named your editor as the ‘hoaxer’ who started this whole flying saucer thing? —Rap

Martin Gardner in his book Fads and Fallacies in the Name of Science brushes off the Tacoma Incident, aka the Maury Island Mystery, like it was lint on his collar:

“The entire Maury Island episode later proved to be a hoax elaborately planned by two Tacoma men who hoped to sell the phony yarn to an adventure magazine. Both men eventually made a full confession.” End of story. 20

The key word here is “elaborately,” because Crisman was definitely a pro. Elaborately means he reserved a hotel room for his victim before the victim arrived. Crisman also secured an empty house to set up a phony “secretary” who lived there and “worked on the books” for his phony log-salvaging company. This was a lot of work just to sell a penny-a-word pulp yarn to some adventure magazine; but hey, strange things happen. In any case, let the tale begin.

On June 21, 1947, three days before airplane pilot Kenneth Arnold spied a formation of nine bright objects “skipping like rocks” across water, a very strange event was unfolding near Tacoma, Washington. Featuring all the key elements of future flying saucer lore, it had intrigue, a bugged hotel room, inquisitive newspaper reporters, tragic deaths, Military Intelligence officers, potential Cold War spies, weird saucer debris that was somehow “switched” with phony metal slag, unannounced visits by government secret service agents, and an after-hours burglary of saucer evidence, sinister warnings over the phone, and finally the disappearance of the two men who started the whole thing. Again, in the hope of getting to bed before 3 AM, this has to be a Readers Digest version.

One very special day on Puget Sound harbor near a place...
called Maury Island, a logger, Harold Dahl by name, his teenage son, the family dog, and two crew members were patrolling for salvage logs in a war surplus mine sweeper, when they witnessed six huge doughnut-shaped craft in the sky.

They estimated the objects, which had a bright metallic sheen, to be about 100 feet in diameter. Five of the things circled a sixth one, which acted differently than the rest, as if it was having some kind of mechanical malfunction.

The crew was then spooked by a loud concussion from the distressed ship, which suddenly discharged vast quantities of metallic “stuff” resembling shreds of aluminum foil and newspaper interspersed with heavier “stuff” like lava rock. All this came raining down on the crew, much to their dismay. The dog was killed by a large piece of the falling debris, and Dahl’s son suffered a severe burn to his arm. The boat’s cabin was significantly damaged.

In the midst of all this chaos, one of the hovering doughnuts approached the sickly, spewing doughnut and somehow “rejuvenated” it, at which point all disks quickly rose into the sky and vanished.

Dahl, on returning home, gave a report to his “boss” Fred L. Crisman. Yes, the very same Fred L. Crisman who sent the letters to Rap a year earlier. He was now in charge of a log salvaging operation in Tacoma Washington! Small world. Or was it a large conspiracy?

Back in Chicago, Rap sat at his desk pondering newspaper reports of Kenneth Arnold’s “flying saucer” sighting near Mt. Rainier. It was June 1947, the same month Rap published Amazing’s highly anticipated all-Shaver Mystery issue.

Then, as was the pattern in Rap’s charmed life, “it” happened. He got a phone call from Tacoma, Washington. Fred L. Crisman was calling. He told Rap that he was ready to hand over the greatest story since, well, never.

At this point we can only ponder why Rap would even consider Crisman’s story if he suspected those previous letters were a hoax, though Rap’s son explains it thusly:

“Ray Palmer [was] a skeptic, but he was not the type of skeptic that would laugh at you and then change your story to make you look foolish,” he said. “He would listen and get as much information as he could and then try to find out how your story is true. Sometimes you find out and sometimes you don’t, but either way you learn more.”

We only ask that you suspend disbelief awhile longer, as Rap did; otherwise the rest of this tale would not have happened.

Rap went right to his typewriter and hammered out a letter to Kenneth Arnold, pleading with him to get in his plane and head to Tacoma to investigate Crisman’s story. He offered him $200, but it took a second letter with even more pleas from Rap, before the world’s most celebrated pilot since Charles Lindberg conceded.
Ken Arnold’s first clue that he was not in control of his situation came when he discovered he had a room already reserved at the Winthrop Hotel in Tacoma. Neither he nor Rap made the arrangements. “Ah, yes,” the desk clerk said to Arnold over the phone, “We have Room 502 reserved in your name!” Maybe it was a different Kenneth Arnold, he thought, since no one other than Rap and Arnold’s family knew he was flying to Tacoma. Oh well, whatever. He took the room.

In due time, Arnold contacted Harold Dahl, who arrived at Room 502 to tell the strange tale of saucer debris, a dead dog, danger, and incredulity. Dahl was full of angst, and seemed reticent to tell the story, warning Arnold that he should just forget the whole thing and fly home.

Next day at 9:30 AM, Fred L. Crisman was banging on the door of Room 502. Arnold described him as a “short, stocky fellow, dark complexioned, a happy-go-lucky appearing person...and extremely alert.” 21 After Crisman’s grand entrance, Dahl faded into the woodwork, spending much of the rest of this story at a local movie theater watching episodes of The Crimson Ghost.

Crisman confirmed Dahl’s story to Arnold and added even more. He said he went to retrieve some of the saucer debris at Maury Island. While there, he too saw one of the doughnut-shaped craft circling the area, and there was no doubt about it, he knew what he saw.

“I hold a commercial pilot’s license,” Crisman informed Arnold. “I flew over a hundred missions in fighter aircraft over Burma in the last war and I feel qualified to describe it accurately.” 22

Arnold, feeling overwhelmed by all the details Crisman was firing at him, called an old friend and commercial pilot, Captain E.J. Smith, for backup. Smith arrived the next day, and heard more of the same from the two “loggers.” Nonetheless, Arnold began to feel uneasy about the two men.

“We both had a peculiar feeling that we were being watched or that there was something dangerous about getting involved with Crisman and Dahl,” he later wrote in The Coming of the Saucers. 23

Smith and Arnold suspected a hoax, or even that Russian espionage was at play. Cold War jitters being what they were, everyone believed it was a good bet the saucers were Soviet secret weapons taken from the Nazis.

Arnold’s paranoia edged a notch further when he got a phone call from an United Press reporter named Ted Morello, who informed him that, “Some crackpot has been phoning us here, telling us verbatim what has been going on in your hotel room for the last day.” 23 Naturally, Crisman and Dahl were the prime suspects, but when both men were present in the hotel room when Morello called again, confirming what had just transpired in the room, Arnold and Smith were dumbfounded. Who was it? How was the information getting out, and to what end?

After a thorough search of the room, Rap’s two saucer investigators were unable to locate the bug they knew must reside in Room 502. Finally, with growing concern for his safety, Arnold called in Military Intelligence.

Within hours, Air Force First Lt. Frank M. Brown and Capt. William L. Davidson arrived from Hamilton AFB in California. After interviewing all concerned, Crisman nearly forced a cardboard box full of the so-called saucer debris on the two officers, which was then loaded onto their B-25 bomber.

Talk of sabotage hit the Washington papers next morning when news that the plane’s left engine had caught fire, and the safety extinguisher failed to operate. Brown and Davidson died when they crashed near Kelso, Washington. The saucer debris was never found in the wreckage. Mysteriously, Crisman and Dahl were never prosecuted for promoting what they later confessed (“allegedly” confessed, say conspiriologists) to FBI agents was a complete hoax that indirectly led to the loss of a newly refurbished B-25 bomber. AF officials said they had traced Crisman’s saucer debris to a Tacoma smelter.

Back in Room 502, Arnold was totally freaked and wanted out. He called Rap and briefed him on the situation. Rap told him to get on his plane and bail.
“He told me to keep the money and...not to carry any of the fragments aboard my plane. He advised me to prevent Smith from taking any fragments. He didn’t tell me why, but I felt the advice was good. Mr. Palmer told me not to become too upset and then I gave the phone to Crisman.” 25

Crisman talked briefly with Rap confirming the plane crash. Arnold claimed later that “Raymond Palmer told me that he recognized Crisman’s voice. He was positive that it was the same voice that had called him long distance on other occasions from various parts of the country. Brother, what a mess.” 26

A witness was said to have spotted Crisman boarding an Army Air Corps plane, destination—Alaska. Dahl simply vanished. Back in Chicago, Rap was left holding the bag. He was now being blamed for perpetrating the greatest hoax since the Shaver Mystery. The new round of criticism only made him dig in his heels. He was convinced something very strange was going on. If the whole thing was a hoax, he wondered why his samples of the so-called smelter slag were stolen from his Ziff-Davis office one night after a visit from an intelligence agent? The agent, he said, was asking questions about the Shaver Mystery.

It was pretty clear that Rap was going to take the hit for Maury Island, and when Edward J. Ruppelt, former head the Air Force’s Project Blue Book, published his “Report on Unidentified Flying Objects” in 1956, Rap endured further public humiliation when Ruppelt declared:

“[Crisman and Dahl] admitted that the rock fragments had nothing to do with flying saucers. They had sent in the rock fragments [to Palmer] as a joke...and said the rock came from a flying saucer because that’s what [Ray Palmer] wanted him to say.” 27

Rap was pissed. “If the Maury Island Incident was a hoax, there is basis to lay it at the door of Fred L. Crisman” he sputtered.

But it moved Rap’s name to the top of the government’s list of “people to keep an eye on,” as Palmer’s son explained to this writer.

“There was a joke at the shop that the way to identify a G-man was to look at his shoes; so whenever one would come we would all lean over and look at the shoes. They came to look at our rocket launching base and radar (which we didn’t have); they came to audit his taxes; they came as postal inspectors and spent three days here only to give him back about 38¢ that was overpaid (but they did look at every name on the mailing list). They planted a false story in the news and all the authorities came down on him only to have them mysteriously leave and never explain to the news why they left with nothing being done.”

Yet, Rap continued his investigating, as well as his crusade against injustice. He also came up with a new slant to his beloved science fiction.

**The Coming of the Saucers**

“We are adding a kind of science fiction ... that deals with the new kind of spaceship. After all, it’s just not modern to talk of spaceships these days, or of Bob Crosby; but of flying saucers and Elvis Presley!” –Rap

Rap revealed years later that prior to the Tacoma Incident, he was about to release new “evidence” concerning the saucers and much more in a special Amazing Stories flying saucers issue, but never got the chance, thanks to a visit from a Federal agent.

“The Tacoma incident intervened,” he groused. “The owner of the magazine ordered the special issue halted, killed the Shaver Mystery, and tossed aside a bit of business that had netted him a half million dollars in four years—all the day after a man with a gold badge paid him a visit.” 28
Yes, the Tacoma affair did little to endear Rap to Ziff-Davis. So, in 1949, two years after Maury Island, Kenneth Arnold and Room 502, Rap left *Amazing Stories* to strike out on his own as an independent publisher. In fact, he started his new career on the sly even before he left *Amazing*. He founded an sf pulp—*Other Worlds Science Stories*—and he gambled on *Fate* magazine, a mystical digest that Rap bet would fill a niche in the publishing field. He was right. *Fate* struck a chord with a new readership, while newsstand sales for science fiction slowly dried up. TV and the newly emerging paperback houses were blamed.

Rap tried valiantly to drum up interest in his science fiction ‘zines with a dizzying array of title and format changes. From October 1953 to April ’54, *Other Worlds* suddenly became *Science Stories*. Also in ’53, Rap founded *Universe Science Fiction*, ran it for ten issues, then changed the name to *Other Worlds Science Stories*, giving it a larger format in the hopes of making it more noticeable on newsstands; all to no avail.

Meanwhile, Rap’s obsession with flying saucers was growing. His magazine cover art blatantly mirrored this preoccupation. His saucer files were growing almost as fast as his personal file at FBI headquarters. After all, the Feds had concluded in 1947 that Palmer and Shaver were indeed behind flying saucer “hysteria.” The Tacoma Incident further expanded Palmer’s burgeoning file.

Then Rap had a brainstorm. He decided to change *Other Worlds Science Stories* into *Flying Saucers from Other Worlds*, filling it with a combination of saucer fiction yarns and factual reports. It was the beginning of his transition from science fiction to saucer and “spiritual” publications, what now is termed “New Age.” For a time, he alternated the two zines. One month it was *Flying Saucers from Other Worlds*, the next it was *Other Worlds Science Stories*. By this time Rap had accumulated several file cabinets full of saucer documentation. Why not put it to good use? As he often did when he came up with a new idea, he hinted that something extraordinary was about to happen ... in the next issue, of course.
“Today we are living the science fiction of yesterday, and now something new is being added—we are living tomorrow’s science fiction too...ahead of time! We have that unexplainable feeling we always get when something big is about to break. We were ‘in on’ the flying saucer mystery before it broke.”

What with his shabby treatment after Maury Island, this new plan gave him the perfect soapbox from which to harangue Officialdom and pound the media, and other pundits did not take the subject seriously. In the first issue of *Flying Saucers from Other Worlds*, Rap angrily struck out at so-called journalists in May of 1957.

“When flying saucers first appeared, no writer had the gumption to sit down and state it was a plain news item. No, they had to make a huge joke out of it...Your editor has a word for that kind of writer, and it’s spelled ‘tramp.’ They ride the fourth estate rails free...Laughing jackasses, the whole lot of them.”

Apparently, only Rap acknowledged his vast contribution to ufology. The ghost of Tacoma still haunted him. He was being snubbed even by Flying saucer organizations like NICAP, who refused to acknowledge his work. Rap concluded NICAP was simply a “mouthpiece for the CIA” in one of his many searing editorials:

“...In spite of the fact that this editor is not only the first flying saucer investigator, but the possessor of the largest private file of saucer information in the world, and the publisher of the only newsstand magazine on flying saucers, and has repeatedly offered to help NICAP, this help being refused.”

John A. Keel remained unrepentant of his criticism of Rap’s ufological contribution, as revealed in a 1984 letter to *Shavertron*, a fanzine dedicated to the Shaver Mystery. Keel was bemoaning an apparent lack of interest in flying saucers at that time, making it more difficult to sell saucer-related material.
“Palmer created and sustained the field of ufology, and modeled it after science fiction fandom,” chided Keel. “If Palmer had not existed, it is very likely that widespread interest in flying saucers would have faded away after 1947. After his death in 1977, ufology and the subject of UFOs has slipped into total limbo...

“Because only a few copies of Amazing Stories from the 1940s remain intact, very few advocates of the Shaver Mystery have had a chance to study them. So the Shaver Mystery itself is now founded on hearsay and myth.

“Keep up the bad work,
“John A. Keel.”

And what of the man who, with one crazy episode, turned Rap into the world’s first flying saucer investigator? As conspiracy history tells us, he was arrested on the grassy knoll as one of the three tramps after JFK’s assassination; he wrote a novel titled Murder of a City about Tacoma dirty politics; he partied with rogues and burned down a building or two; got into S&M: and continued to write occasionally to Rap, no doubt to clinch his reputation as master obscurantist.

“Fred Crisman not only didn’t admit [Maury Island] was a hoax,” writes long-time Crisman researcher Ron Halbritter, “but [in a letter] in the January 1950 issue of Fate he called those accusations a ‘bald-faced lie.’” 31

Halbritter, through extensive use of the Freedom of Information Act, studied Crisman’s FBI file, military records, and even job applications. He has a decidedly different opinion about Palmer’s saucer nemesis.

“Fred Lee Crisman would have you, me, and the rest of the world believe he was a secret agent for some three letter classified group. Crisman was the classic yardbird; injured during WW II, he became addicted to painkillers and
spent the remainder of his life trying to hustle to support his habit.

“Crisman always sought to be the center of attention. When Ray Palmer described the Shaver Mystery, he claimed to have been in a dero cave in Kashmir. When Harold Dahl saw a UFO at Maury Island, the next day Crisman claimed, ‘Me, too—when nobody else was around, I did see one.’ While Jim Garrison was seeking Kennedy assassins, he suddenly got an anonymous letter implying Crisman was involved. When Roy Thinnes had a hit television show in 1967 called *The Invaders*, a letter, allegedly from Harold Dahl, was sent saying that the character David Vincent, and in fact the entire show, was based on Crisman’s life. These are examples of Crisman’s need for fame.”

The Tacoma Incident not only strengthened Rap’s distrust of government authority, it also energized his metaphysical side. He began to publish *Mystic* and then *Search* magazines, exploring the shadow world of the occult. He continued publishing Shaver’s mystery, as well as the writings of mystical saucer contactees like Orfeo Angelucci. He started a special feature in *Mystic* called “The Man From Tomorrow,” in which he predicted future events using his “random thought” technique. More than the predictions themselves, Rap liked the title. “The Man from Tomorrow” *was* Rap. He liked to think he was just one step ahead of the next big trend…the next big blockbuster.

“Without the Tacoma Incident, the Chicago publisher might finally have given up on the flying saucers, uncertain of the evidence of even his own eyes,” Rap said. “But that one fantastic experience told him that here was a tremendous true thing, of unknown, unpredictable importance on the stage of future history.”

And everyone knows future history is where the Man from Tomorrow lives.
Footnotes

3. Mystic Magazine, April 1955, p 14
4. The Secret World, p 29
5. Ibid. p 28
6. Rap, Amazing editorial, February 1941
7. Actifan: a fan who participates in sf publishing, conventions, clubs. Gafiate: “get away from it all” ...meaning to quit fandom. Fughead: a fan who exhibits behavior so far beyond the pale that even the most liberal fen might raise an eyebrow over it. Fen: plural of fan. Fanfeud: feuds that existed between fen, usually over inane subjects.
9. Warner, Harry, All Our Yesterdays, p 76
11. Pobst, Jim, The Rap Packets #1 p 3
13. Ibid. p 30
14. Ron Goulart, St. James Encyclopedia of Pop Culture
15. Rap editorial, Amazing Stories, August 1938
16. Ibid., July 1939
17. Rap editorial, Other Worlds Science Stories, November 1955
18. Rap, The Secret World, p 37
20. Gardner, Martin, Fads and Fallacies in the Name of Science, p 56
21. Arnold/Palmer, The Coming of the Saucers, p 88
22. Ibid. p 39
23. Ibid. p 44
24. Ibid. p 45
25. Ibid. p 58
26. Ibid.
28. Arnold/Palmer, The Coming of the Saucers, p 9
29. Editorial, Other Worlds Science Stories, May 1957
32. Rap on Maury Island, Flying Saucers, December 1958

---


I try to keep deep love out of my stories because, once that particular subject comes up, it is almost impossible to talk about anything else. Readers don’t want to hear about anything else. They go gaga about love. If a lover in a story wins his true love, that’s the end of the tale, even if World War III is about to begin, and the sky is black with flying saucers.

--Kurt Vonnegut, Palm Sunday
“Wide Cassini Maintenance,” by Ditmar