

SIGMA

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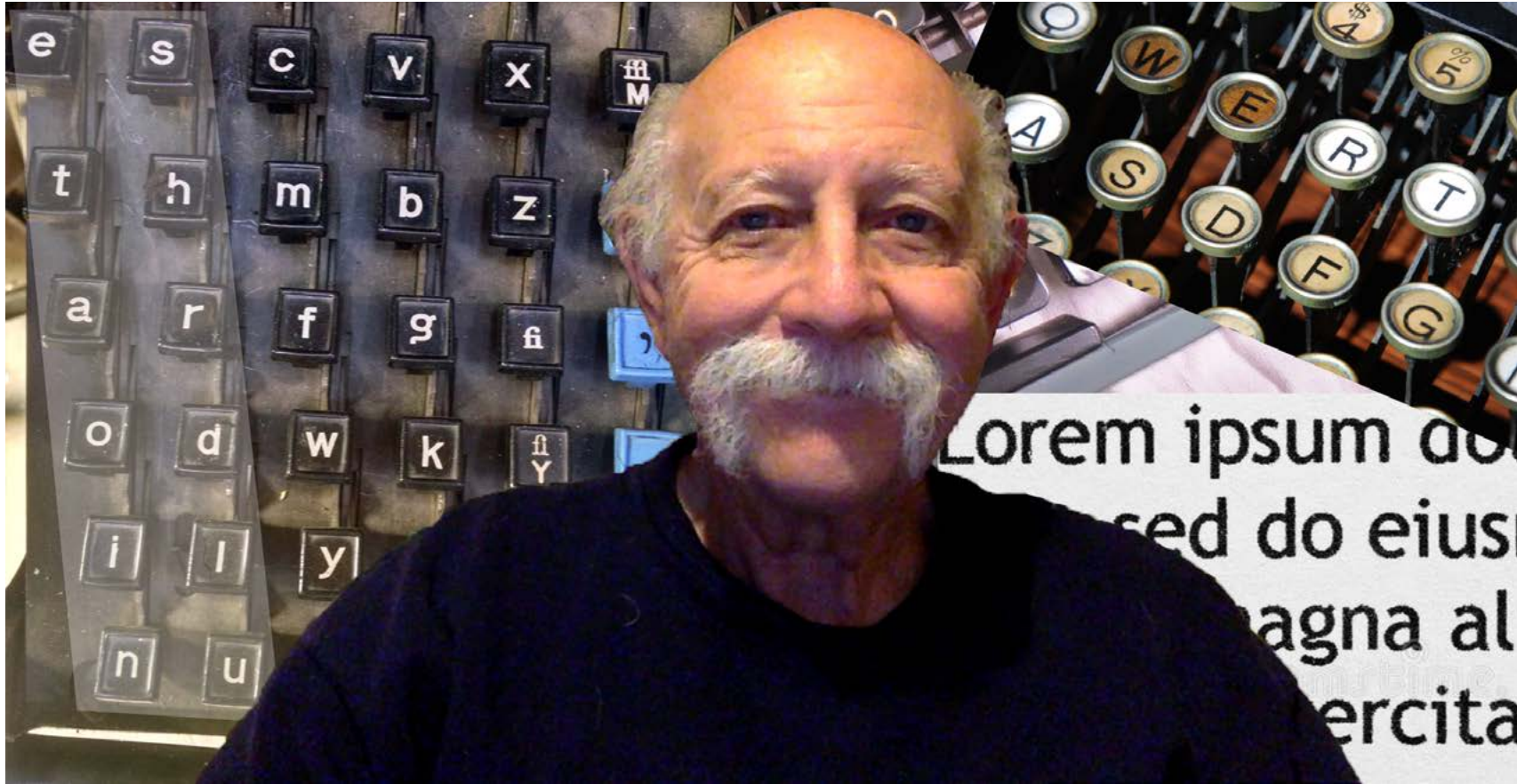
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President's Column



I've been absent from the last two Parsec meetings for medical reasons. I won't tell you mine if you don't tell me yours. I will report, I'm okay and will miss the August meeting and picnic, as well, but will be back for the September meeting.

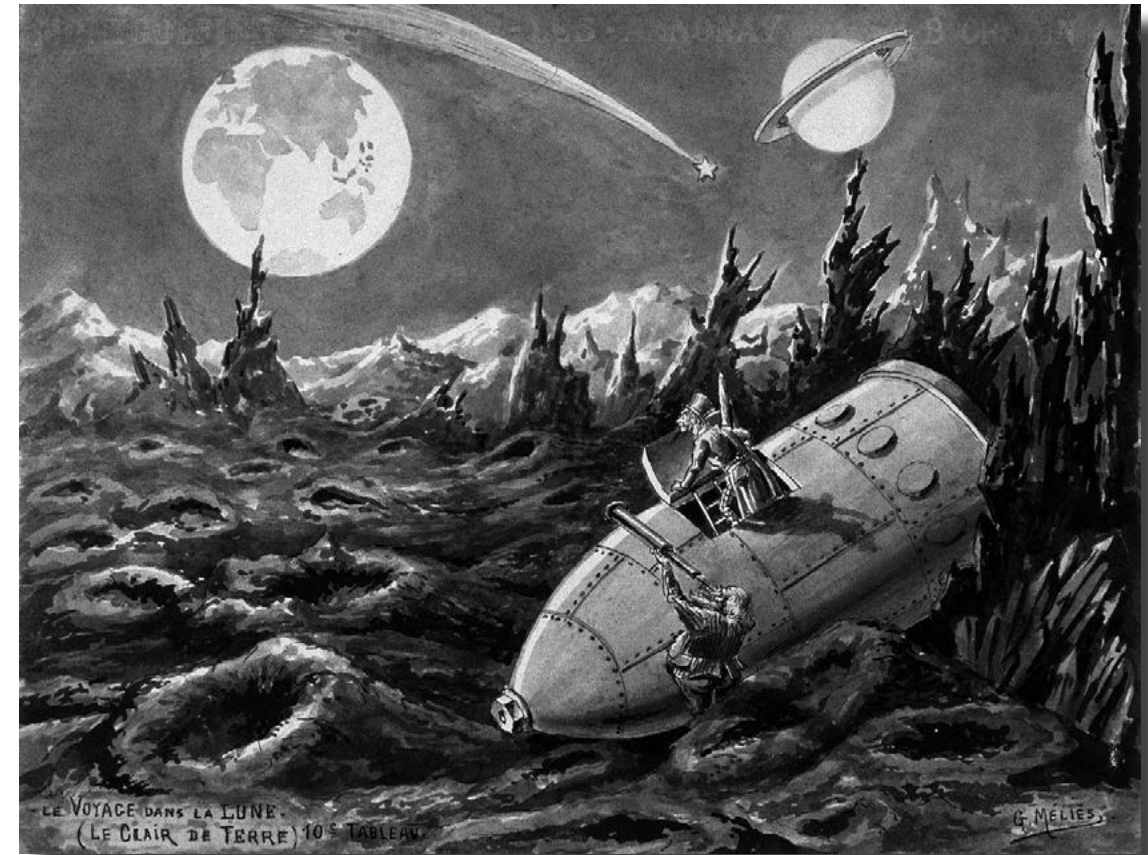
Illness left me relatively immobile and allowed me to watch a couple thousand movies I've been meaning to view or review. And to READ! A pleasure which I have let lapse for an irrational and unknown reason the past year. "When do you find time to read all those books," folks who I can only believe are horrified by the thought of a parade of words on page, ask me, when then spot my overflowing library.

"When," I always reply with my own wondering question, "do you not have the time to read? Waiting in the queue?" My personal version of hell. I have been even known to pick up a copy of the dripping dreck on the magazine racks while waiting in a line for the cornucopia of supermarket baskets to advance for processing. "What about," I say, "in Martin Luther's favorite library nook, the bathroom? Before the movie starts? Before dinner? During Dinner? After Dinner? In the backyard? In the bed? During the absolute boredom of a regimen of exercise?"

I have managed to advance beyond the current depression that serves as the News to the marvel of SF reading. I've managed to take on the whole history of the field and am presently swimming in the pre-genre turn of the 19th-century realm of the scientific romance. Some of it authentic steampunk. Some of it remarkably compelling. All of it a bath of wonder.

I admit that a great deal of the SF of fin-du-siecle the period seems like a precursor for the SF that is to come. That is an illusion that we should overcome. I feel like it is important to take and study the works as they are presented. It provides a kind of time travel. We can always shoehorn in the crud that has come into being in the intervening years. It is pleasant to spend time in conversation with H.G. or even Jules, though my French is utterly lacking. But dig a little deeper to find the whole vein of scientific romance. George Allan England. M.P. Shiel, William Hope Hodgson, A Conan Doyle, Olaf Stapledon, George Griffith, Frank R. Stockton. The search is on for female writers of the era who, as always were there but are forgotten, Gertrude Barrows Bennett, Margaret Cavendish, Mary Shelley, Virginia Woolf(Orlando), Jane Webb Loudon.

See you all in September!





Thanks are always in order, but seldom given.

This month we make up for the oversight.

Thanks to Alan Irvine for his wonderful excursions into popular culture and gaming. His article on the TV show “Community” this month is no exception.

Thanks to Eric Leif Davin for his permission to print his extensive research into the women, often forgotten, who have been writing and participating in the genre of science fiction since the beginning. In January we began reprinting Eric’s seven-year cycle of the bios

of women in SF presented in alphabetical order.

Also thanks to Eric for the reprint in this month’s edition of the chapter on science fiction writer and film director Curt Siodmak from Eric’s work “Pioneers in Wonder.” A book that is a must-read for anyone interested in the genre of science fiction.

Thanks to Bill Hall, Parsec Secretary, who never misses a meeting and always provides us with a grand synopsis of what occurred during our monthly meetings.

Thanks to the Conference Committee that tirelessly works to provide an enriching experience at each year’s Confluence.

Thanks to the Workshop Committee for holding the yearly Alpha, science fiction, fantasy and horror workshop for young writers and, the periodic Young Adult Lecture Series.

Thanks to the Publishing Committee whose hard work brings about an edition of the themed Triangulation anthology of short stories each year.

Thanks to you dear reader and members of the Program Committee for being fans of the genre of science fiction and comrades who delight in meeting and discussing our passion.

Thanks to all of those who have come to present and discuss their ideas and work at our meeting.

-Eds

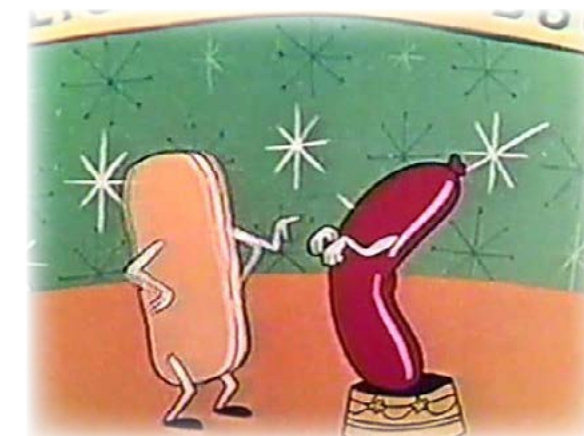
Parsec Picnic



Funny and fannish musician Steve Goodie, who performed (quite successfully!) as the Special Music Guest at Confluence in 2016, will be performing at the

Parsec Picnic on August 26, 2018, at the Dormont Park large pavilion.

Come enjoy the music.
Come enjoy the hot dogs and cool cats.
Come enjoy the conversation.
Come enjoy the games.
Oh, what the heck, just come.



July 2018 Parsec Meeting Minutes



My pre-meeting experience begins with Chris Ferrier handing me a copy of Richard Wilbur’s poem “Epistemology,” I suppose as a response to my sort-of review of Tom Sweterlitsch’s “The Gone World” in the previous minutes. Somehow we get to mentioning China Mieville, who sounds like a writer I seriously need to look up. Eric Davin hands out cards advertising Pulpfest, which will run parallel to Confluence in the hotel we used to have out Mars way, and our meeting gets hold of a new vict, er, visitor named Tim. Hey, Tim.

Eric pitches his Pittsburgh historical novel “The Great Strike of 1877,” now available not only from Lulu but Barnes and Noble, a dramatic yet overlooked chapter of American history which, we are assured, “would make a great movie.” (Twenty years before the famous 1897 Homestead strike over steel, there was one here over rail.) Mary Soon Lee announces new work appearing in

Analog and MSFSF, as well as her Rhysling Award win, and she reads us two poems. Eric passes around a book showcasing the great F&SF artist Michael Whalen.

Local author and Parseckian Josh Bellin comes back to talk about the experience of self-publishing his new book “Ecosystem.” When last we left Josh and his “Survival Colony 9,” he was working with a division of Simon and Schuster, but while he appreciated key individuals over at S&S, he got underwhelmed by the whole dynamic of “mid-list” books such as his own serving as minions keeping the house aloft while they concentrate on the glory of the bestsellers. He was able to design his own cover for \$100, and generally one can self-publish for under a grand. In addition to “Ecosystem” he has also put out the anthology “Ten Tales of Terror and Terra.” Josh was able to bang out “Ecosystem” at 5000 words a day, with the caveat that as a teach he was really only able to do that over the summer. (“Ecosystem” evidently comes to around 75,000 words or 340 pages.)

“Ecosystem” is the story of a future planetary unifying sentience which does not like humans very much, somewhat reminiscent of the movie After Earth. It features a young protagonist with adult sensibilities, a kind I still tend to think of as “Paul Atreides,” but that’s me, so perhaps I should branch out to consider Heinlein works of the Fifties.

That’s about it, as we are mentally gearing up for Confluence in two weeks.

Our headcount reaches twelve.

Secretary Bill Hall

Young Adult Lecture Series - September 8, 2018

The Partners in Speculative Fiction student club and Parsec will sponsor NY fantasy author Lara Elena Donnelly



McConomy Auditorium, University Center, Carnegie Mellon University
5000 Forbes Ave, Pittsburgh, PA 15213

Campus map: <https://www.cmu.edu/visit/maps-parking-transportation.html>
Free parking in the East Campus Garage next to the University Center.

1 - 3 pm, a two-hour, genre writing workshop for the public

3 - 4 pm, a book signing

5 - 6 pm. Author Lara Elena Donnelly talks about her novels “Amberlough,” a 1920’s European burlesque spy novel, a politically charged thriller, and a love story between two very different kinds of men and it’s sequel, “Armistice.”

wMs. Donnelly is a graduate of Clarion and Alpha, the SF/F/H Workshop for Young Writers and currently resides in Harlem, in a tower named after Ella Fitzgerald.

Parsec Officers

- Joe Coluccio (President)
- Bonnie Funk (Vice President)
- William Hall (Secretary)
- Greg Armstrong (Treasurer)
- Michelle Gonzalez (Commentator)
- Joe Coluccio & Larry Ivkovich (SIGMA Editors)



Community - TV/DVD review

Reviewed by Alan Irvine

Community was a quirky, off-beat sit-com that ran for 5 seasons on NBC and one season more on Yahoo, one of those shows that acquires critical acclaim but only a small, but extremely loyal, audience. The show centers on study group of odd-ball characters at Greendale Community College: Jeff, the manipulative ex-lawyer; Abed, pop-culture buff and uber-nerd; Troy, innocent man-child; Britta, radical but incompetent activist; Annie, compulsive over-achiever; Shirley, judgmental mother-figure, and Pierce, obnoxious, lonely old guy.

While not specifically a genre show, *Community* has plenty in it to delight the hearts of nerds, geeks, and genre fans of all stripes. To start with, the show is filled with pop-culture and SF references. For example, Uber-nerd Abed's favorite TV show is Inspector Spacetime. Abed and his room-mate/best friend Troy convert one room of their apartment to a holo-deck. In one episode ("Remedial chaos Theory," regarded as one of the best episodes of the series,) Abed warns the group against using a die roll to determine who goes to pick up a pizza, since the random roll will create divergent time lines. The episode then follows a myriad of different stories based on which character has to go get the pizza. The results range from a happy ending to a dark time line where some characters are killed or maimed and Abed ends up an evil Machiavellian sporting a Mirror-universe Spock goatee. (Mirror universe Abed reappeared in later episodes as well, conspiring to break through into "our" time line.) Two episodes plunged the group into D & D adventures. At one point, the school hires Abed to film a SF epic adventure movie, but with virtually no budget, props, costumes, or time.

But the show does not just play in the SF/F playground. In "A Fistful of Paintballs," a campus wide paintball game turns into a parody of Clint Eastwood westerns that was so hilarious that the next season ended with "A Few Paintballs More." And that was followed by a two part blanket fort vs. pillow fort war that is a dead on spoof of Ken Burns' Civil War. And that led to a "the floor is lava" game right out of Mad Max. One episode turns everyone into characters in an animated Christmas special, another put them into a 1980s style video game. The entire third season features Troy, revealed to be the chosen one of plumbers, being lured to the Dark Side of the HVAC school. (I kept waiting for John Goodman, playing the Dean of the HVAC school, to say "Troy, I am your father." Alas, it never happened. But if it had, it would have fit right in.)

Throughout the six seasons, the writing is top-notch and the acting excellent. The stories often go off in completely unexpected, though always hilarious, directions.

The entire series is available on DVD and through different streaming services, but if you watch it, skip most of the first season. The show started out as a funny, but rather conventional sit-com about a skuzzy, disbarred lawyer, Jeff Winger, forced to attend community college. Each episode features Jeff learning a lesson about being a better human being. But 2/3s of the way through the first season, the show finally hits its stride with a send-up of Mafia movies (Abed takes over the fried chicken wing concession and soon controls the school.) and it keeps getting better. By the time you hit the season finale ("A Fist Full of Paintballs"), you will be hooked.

(And make sure to watch the post-credits scene at the end of each episode. Always a little more silliness to wrap up with, especially the "Troy and Abed in the Morning" morning show.)

Alan Irvine is a storyteller, playwright, director, writer, teacher who tries to find time for games whenever he can.



Fantastic Artist Of The Month

Wallace Wood (1927 - 1981)

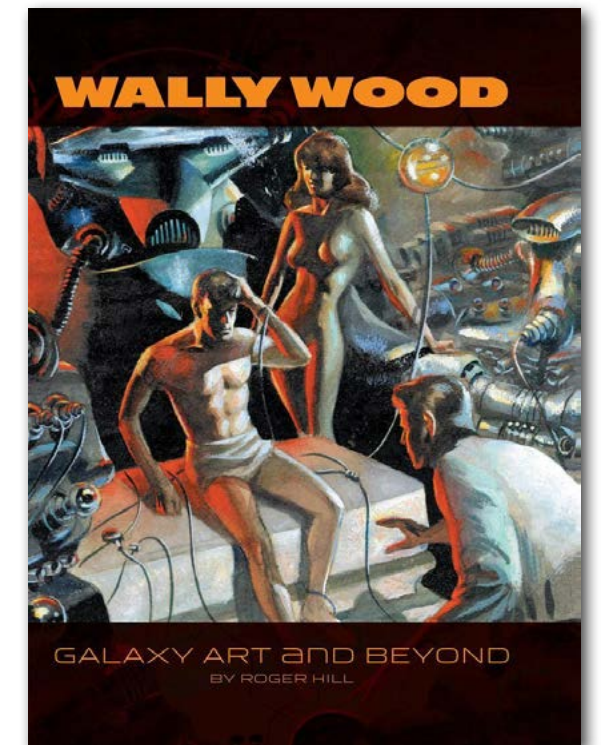
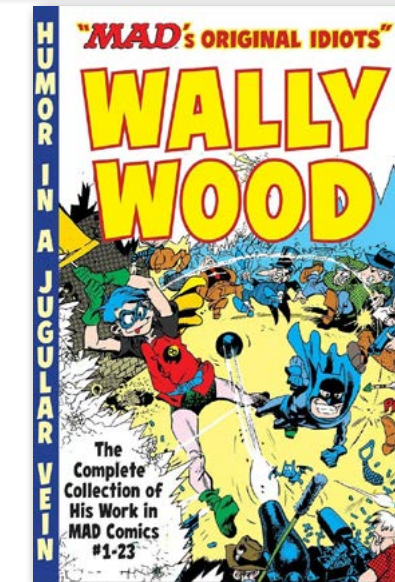
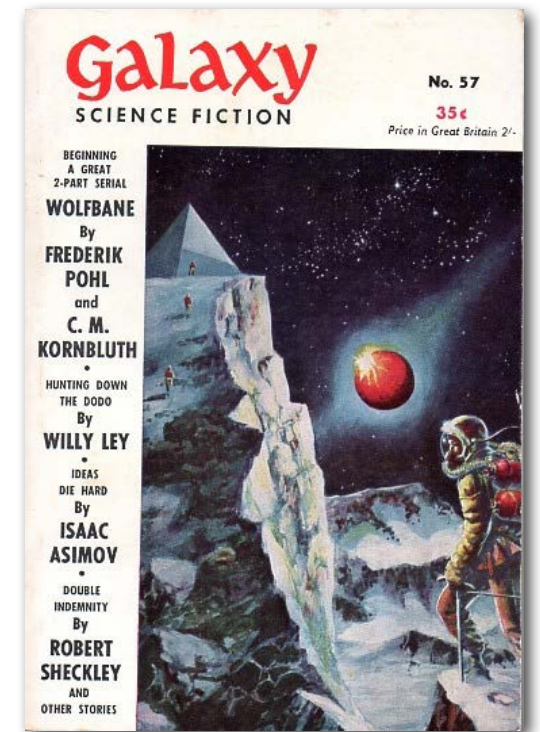
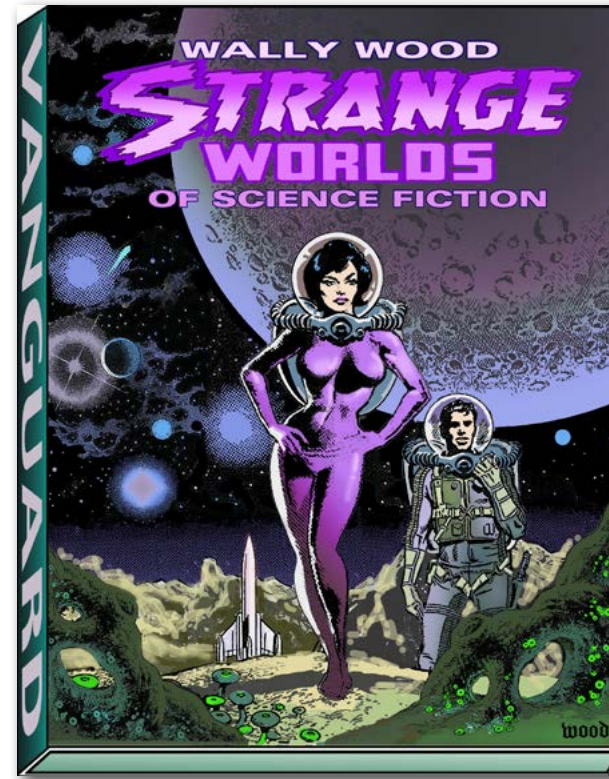


Wallace Wood, who is famously known as a comic book artist, penned many of the very best of the science fiction comics produced by EC comics in the 1950s, *Weird Science* and *Weird Fantasy*. After the disaster of the “Tail Gunner Joe” like movement lead by Frederick Wertham in his book “The Seduction of the Innocent” and the subsequent formation of the Comics Code, Wood worked on artificially tamed SF comic Books. EC Comics with Bill Gaines as publisher produced in cunning revenge the far more subversive, *Mad Magazine*. Wally Wood became a part of “the usual gang of idiots.”

Wood’s style was strongly influenced by the fine detailed comic strips of Alex Raymond’s *Flash Gordon*, Will Eisner’s *The Spirit*, Milton Caniff’s *Terry and the Pirates*, and Hal Foster’s *Prince Valiant*. His work shows up on the covers and interiors of quite a few science fiction pulp magazines.

Wood’s later life was troubled with chronic headaches, bouts with alcohol, a stroke and kidney failure. On November 2, 1981 Wood committed suicide. EC Editor Harvey Kurtzman said, “Wally had a tension in him, an intensity that he locked away in an internal steam boiler. I think it ate away his insides, and the work really used him up. I think he delivered some of the finest work that was ever drawn, and I think it’s to his credit that he put so much intensity into his work at great sacrifice to himself.” (from *EC Lives! The 1972 EC Fan-Addict Convention Book*)

For anyone interested in Wood’s *Amazing*, *Fantastic*, *Startling*, *Weird*, *Future*, *Wonder*, *Dynamic*, *Uncanny Science Fiction* work “*Strange Worlds of Science Fiction*” and “*Wallace Wood: Galaxy Art and Beyond*” are available for sale or at a library near you.



It's A Mad Universe After All or How I learned to Stop Worrying and Love That Brown by Joe Coluccio



I admire the words and philosophy of Fredric Brown so much that I named my son, Etaoin and one of my daughters, Shrdlu. Not in this universe, silly, but in some other Mad Universe I was assured, by Brown and some other proponents of modern cosmology, exists. I also believe a linotype machine exists.

In two other of those bubble universes, I have kids named “Lorem and Ipsum” and “Qwertyuiop and Asdfghjkl.”

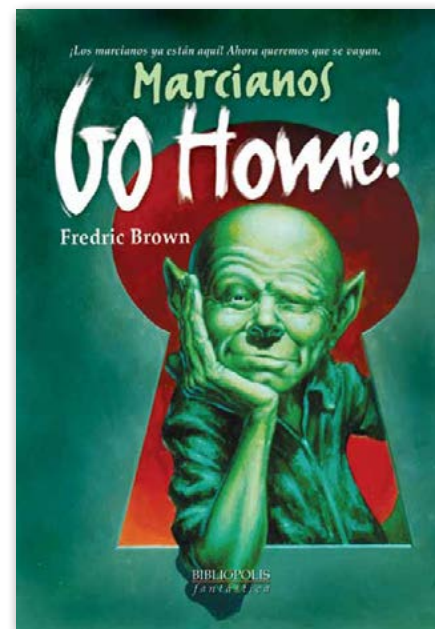
I have been a fan of the work of Fredric Brown since Mark Scholander shared his copy of “Angels and Spaceships” with me one autumn morning during my ninth grade Home Room period at Seneca Junior High School. I realize as a sit down to write that I have not devoted any sustained reading of Brown’s myriad tales. Just a dab here and a dollop there. A jumble of SF memory and a more recent scan of “The Fabulous Clipjoint,” an Ed and Am Hunter mystery, are what fills the organ that I rely on for memory.

I can tell you endlessly that the short story (an example of Flash Fiction before the idea was conceived.) “Too Far” about bon vivant R. Austin Wilkerson, man about town and outrageous punster, has been in my mind since that fateful school morning. I cannot tell you the number of times I have repeated those puns to an unsuspecting audience even though they are not always apt in the conversation. I spout pun-etic whether they apply or not.

Further confession. I have read, until this very weekend, zero, null, none of the SF novels of Fredric Brown. I was too enthralled by the scope of his SF short stories and mystery opera.

There are five novels. “The Mind Thing,” “What Mad Universe,” “Martians, Go Home,” “Rogue In Space,” and “The Lights in the Skies are Stars.” All happily collected the NESFA Press in a volume called “Martians and Madness.” All happily checked as read this weekend.

I am not going to layout particulars of plot or character, but I will say I was frequently amazed in the way the story was unfolding as I read. That was the first surprise. I knew from the short stories Fredric Brown was a master of the twist at the end of the tale. I discovered I write the story as I read it. As I was winding down the path marked by Brown, my storyline invariably would take a wrong turn at some paragraph. Brown’s plot went spinning into a whole new dimension. I can’t tell you how exhilarating that time slip is in this era of “plot by the numbers.” Surprise number two was the characters insisted on developing in a way that skirted all my expectations. There was growth and a depth of personality.



I make no secret of the fact that I am a fan of those writers who bring a sense of humor, wit, and irony to SF. I can name the few that I have explored. Robert Sheckley, William Tenn, Henry Kuttner and Fredric Brown. In a recent reading of Robert Bloch’s authorized biography by Robert Bloch entitled “Once around the Bloch.” Bloch’s wit and humor are immediately available from the first page forward. I guess I knew, but am still shocked that the author who thought to bring us the fictional analog of Ed Gein, could have such a rich vein of humor manifest in his writing. I am not a great fan of horror fiction, but I am a fan of great horror fiction. Makes me want to reevaluate those dark and stormy works Bloch created.

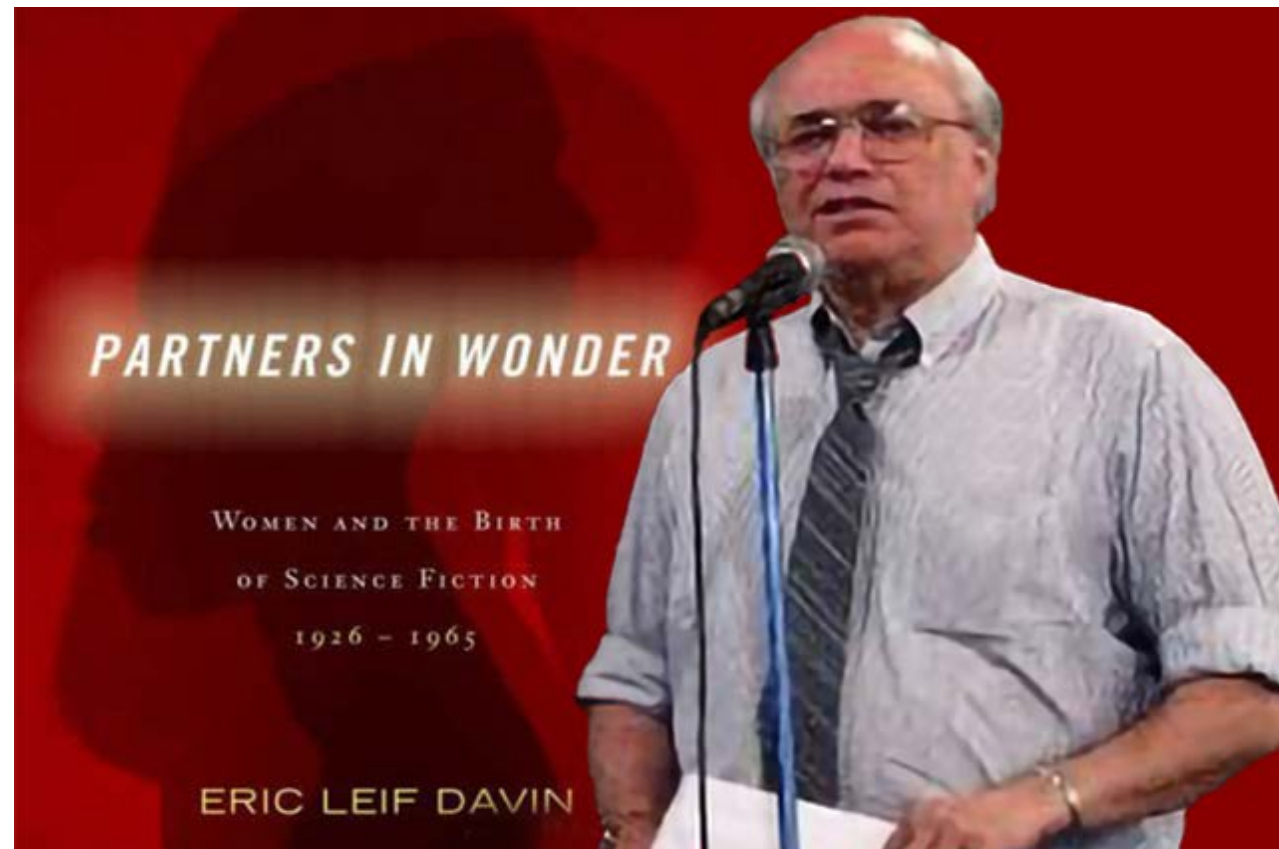
Fredric Brown et al, have that same playfulness and humor. It is interesting that Bloch who was a friend of Brown’s wrote the introduction to “The Best of Fredric Brown.” Henry Kuttner, also known for his humorous works of SF was a disciple of H.P. Lovecraft and wrote many a gruesome story for Weird Tales. There is a rebellious and seditious strain in all humor. Watch out for the funny writer and the clown.

Frederic Brown was as well known as a mystery writer as he was as a SF writer. Frederic Brown and Anthony Boucher are the only two so revered and honored in both fields. (Asimov was a mere moodler.) If you haven’t been paying attention to Brown, who is slowly disappearing from our SF landscape I recommend both “Martians and Madness” and “From These Ashes” published by the NESFA Press.

Later.

I’m going back in to satisfy my Jones.





Rhoda Broughton, (1840-1920)



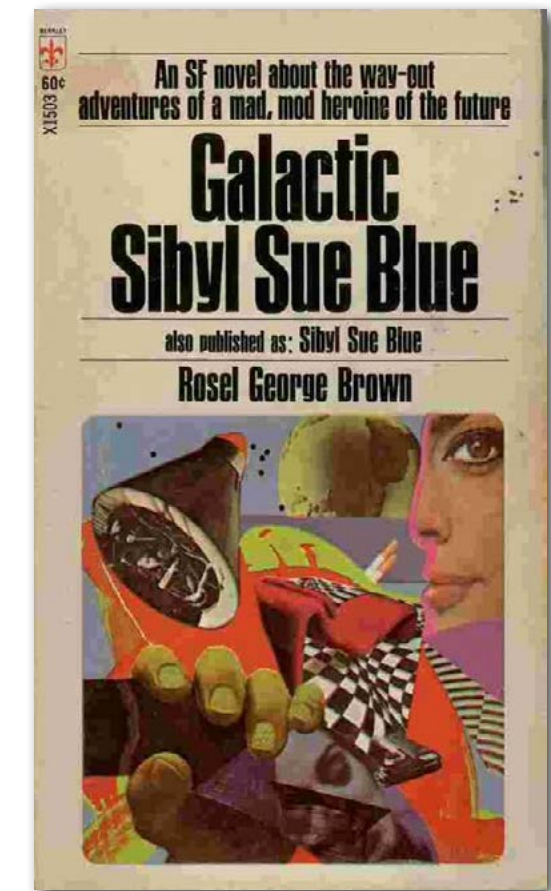
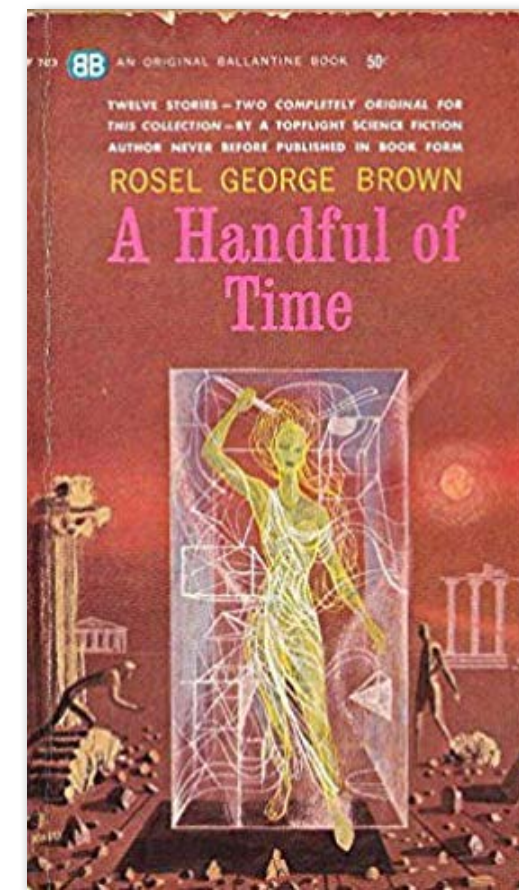
British author Broughton was the niece by marriage of famous English ghost story writer J. Sheridan Le Fanu. She lived for many years with her widowed sister in Oxford. She published her first novel in 1867. By the 1870s she had become well known as the author of many light and witty three-volume novels of Victorian country life featuring outspoken and articulate heroines. Among the most noteworthy are *Belinda* (1884) and *Not Wisely But Too Well* (1904). In her later career she focused on short stories. Some of these were ghost stories, such as "It Was a Dream" (1873), collected in *Tales for Christmas Eve* (1873), enlarged and reprinted as *Twilight Stories* (1879, 1947).



Rosel George Brown, (1926-1967)



Brown was born and died in New Orleans, where she was a welfare worker and teacher. She married W. Burlie Brown, a professor at Tulane University. She was the mother of two children and the holder of B.A. from Tulane (1946) and an M.A. in ancient Greek history from the University of Minnesota (1950). She is most well known for her mid-1960s "Sibyl Sue Blue" series of stories. These featured the interstellar adventures of a tough female cop and her teenage daughter. Her early work is collected in *A Handful of Time* (1963). She collaborated with Keith Laumer on the space opera, *Earthblood* (1966), and was just becoming popular when she died at age 41.





ONE PANELIST'S EXPERIENCE
by Larry Ivkovich

Coincidentally, or maybe not, after I gave my presentation at Confluence on *SF and Rock and Roll*, I was on a panel titled, *It's a Monster Mash: Rock and Roll and SF*. It was moderated by the con's musical guest S.J. Tucker with Pittsburgh author Lawrence M. Connolly, literary guest Catherynne M. Valente, and musician Marilyn Brahen rounding out the very talented panel of artists. I felt very honored to be a part of it.

It was a fun and very interesting discussion. Valente talked a little about her new novel, *Space Opera*, and the part Eurovision and its music plays in it. Personally, I'd heard of Eurovision but didn't know that much about it. It's basically a televised songwriting contest broadcast in Europe since 1956. There's a lot more involved with it but it is evidently very popular.

Tucker brought up the subject of how SF novels and short stories inspired by rock and roll and vice versa really increased during the 1980s and wondered why. I suggested the emergence of MTV could have been a factor in that. Everyone else agreed the explosion of expensive and slickly produced music videos in that decade opened

the door to more of a merging of the two art forms.

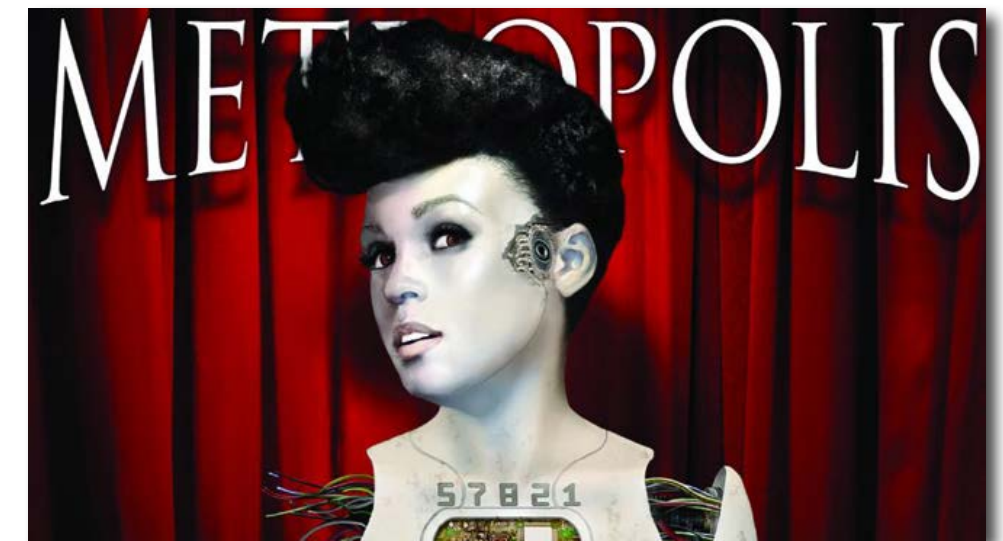
Connolly talked about today's music not really being as message-oriented or topical as music of decades past. He told of a fellow musician saying that kind of activism in music was still alive and well in some of the Eastern European countries. That sparked a discussion with Valente using Eurovision again as an example of that. I think probably some hip-hop and rap might also fall into the topical category in the recent and current music scenes as well.

I mentioned some of the musical artists who've written SF. Janis Ian has written several SF short stories, many collected in her collection *Stars*. Greg Kihn of the Greg Kihn Band ("Breakup Song," "Jeopardy") has written 4 horror novels, *Horror Show* having been nominated for a Stoker Award in 199X. He also edited an anthology titled *Carved in Rock: Short Stories by Musicians* containing stories written by rock stars including Pete Townsend, Joan Jett, and Richard Hell.

Valente mentioned, and some agreed, Janelle Monae, who recorded two albums based on the great silent SF movie *Metropolis*, is the future of rock and roll. I'm familiar with Monae's album *Archandroid*, which is very good, and her film roles in *Hidden Figures* and *Moonlight*, but don't really know enough about her music to comment on that statement. Unfortunately, I couldn't find the time to follow up with the other panel members on that. I also talked about the recent SF anthology *Rock On: The Greatest Hits of Science Fiction and Fantasy*, edited by Paula Guran. This features stories about SF and Rock, including Connolly's great short piece, "Mercenary." Guran's introduction is a treasure trove of facts regarding works combining SF and rock music.

There were a lot of great questions and comments from the audience. A terrific panel experience!

Thanks To Karen Yun-Lutz For The Confluence Photo!



Review of The Gone World

written by Thomas Sweterlitsch



Last month, Bill Hall skillfully described and superbly reviewed *The Gone World* in his minutes column, relating to Tom Sweterlitsch's Parsec meeting presentation. But I wanted to add some comments of my own about Tom's new book, since I think it's worth mentioning again.

Thomas Sweterlitsch's second novel, *The Gone World*, is a brilliantly realized tale of time travel, first contact, alien invasion, police procedural, self-sacrifice, love, friendship, and family. Sweterlitsch pulls off this seemingly disparate group of elements expertly, fashioning a story equal parts horrific, suspenseful, heartbreaking, and mind-boggling.

It's a great one!

NCIS agent Shannon Moss is assigned to investigate the murder of another NCIS agent's family and the disappearance of the agent himself. Shannon is part of a secret government program involving what is referred to as Deep Space and Deep Time. With the ability to travel into the future, Shannon can investigate the murder long after it's taken place in the hope those involved in the crime, either directly or peripherally, can now reveal information they couldn't or wouldn't before. As more murders occur, the clues point to the Libra, a long-missing space/time ship and its crew.

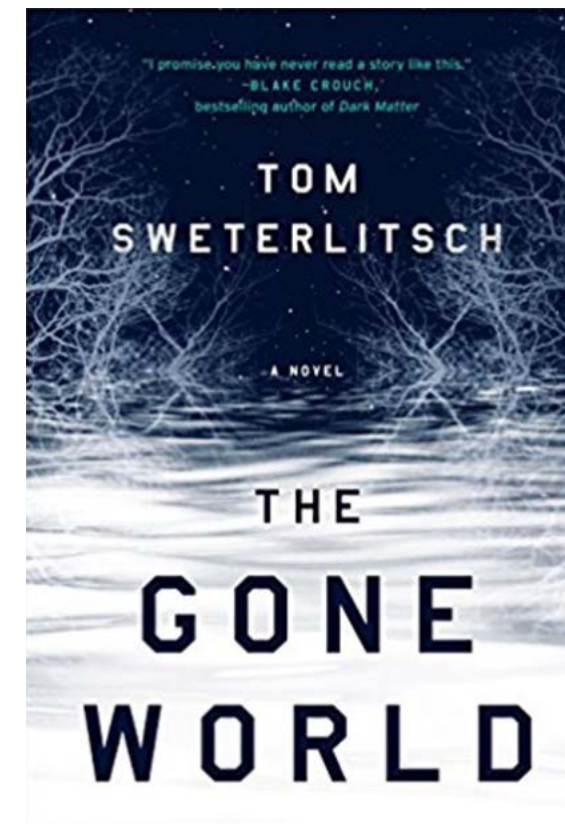
And to the alien Terminus – the approaching end of all terrestrial life – the only constant in most of the future time periods. What started as a murder investigation takes Shannon into the heart of the Terminus itself and to the realization Shannon may not be who, or what, she thinks she is.

Taking place in several time periods – 2199, 1997, 2016, and 1986 – the story involves Shannon not only living

different lives in different times but in various futures-that-might-be or IFTS – Inadmissible Future Trajectories. What Shannon experiences in these IFTS would never exist without her and will certainly not exist once she leaves those periods and returns to her own time. Everything and everyone she knew and loved in those futures will be gone. Utterly and forever.

Influenced in part by Dante's *Inferno* and other literary sources, this is a novel that will linger in your mind long after you've finished it. Award nomination-worthy at the very least. Highly recommended.

– Larry Ivkovich





Parsec Meeting Schedule
August 19, 2018

Join us on the third Sunday of August to discuss Science Fiction, Fantasy, Horror, Magic Realism, Steampunk, Cyber-and-all-the-rest-of-the-Punks, Post-Future, Slipstream, Space Opera, Wierd West, Space West, New Wave, Military, BUT mostly,
feel free to make up your own subgenre, everyone else does!

Squirrel Hill Branch of the Carnegie Library
Room B - Next to the Rear Entrance
1:30 - 4:30 PM
Come in and introduce yourself
The room is open at noon.

An Un-aired Un-produced Lackzoom Acidophilus/Parsec Radio Ad

NIMBOD SCORPO VISITS PITTSBURGH

F/X

Ethereal Music

ANNOUNCER

Hello, my name is Jinx Jenkins and I’m just wandering around the streets of your neighborhood talking to people who are meandering with me in this hot summer sun.

SOUND OF SOMEONE CLANKING AS HE WALKS

ANNOUNCER

Whoa, sir, you are a strange looking fellow.

F/X

Beeping and whistles

NIMBOD

Who me?

ANNOUNCER

Why, yes, indeedy, you, my friend. Your outfit looks as if it might be made of Stainless Steel.

NIMBOD

It’s made of Krell Metal. You want to falloop it?

ANNOUNCER

Falloop?

NIMBOD

It’s kinda like your Earth people’s touch. But you use your Fallooper instead

ANNOUNCER

Fallooper?

NIMBOD

Oh, excuse me, your tongue.

ANNOUNCER

You want me to lick your outfit?

NIMBOD	How else will we kravitz?		the pubic, it only costs 15 Zotans for a year of membership to support Parsec a non-profit organization that has been promoting all forms of science fiction and fantasy in the Pittsburgh Area for the last 30 years.
ANNOUNCER	Say, are you putting me on?		
NIMBOD	Oh, no, this Krell Metal is quite comfortable and you really wouldn't fit me.	ANNOUNCER	Zotans?
ANNOUNCER	I get it. You're some sort of Man from Mars	NIMBOD	Dollars, in this portion of the galaxy. So please show me the way to the Parsec Meeting room of the Squirrel Hill Branch of the Carnegie Library.
NIMBOD	My name is Nimbod Scorpo and there are no men on Mars, just a few scooters with big tires.	ANNOUNCER	But this is only Tuesday. You'll be very early.
ANNOUNCER	Well, Nimbod, is it? Where do you hail from?	NIMBOD	I'll just set my chronachime to half flocculate.
NIMBOD	I just flew in from Cleveland and, boy, are my arms ever tired.	FX	SF sounds
ANNOUNCER	Cleveland that's unexpected. So my peculiar friend what are you doing in the Pittsburgh Area.	NIMBOD	Now check your watch.
NIMBOD	I'm going to a meeting of science fiction people.	ANNOUNCER	Hey, it's 12:30, just an hour before the meeting on the third Sunday of the month. Nimbod, take me to your leader.
ANNOUNCER	Understandable.	NIMBOD	You'll need 15 Zotans.
NIMBOD	And I understand they meet the third Sunday of the month at the Squirrel Hill Branch of the Carnegie Library at 1:30PM.	PARSEC TAG LINE	
ANNOUNCER	The science fiction people?		
NIMBOD	Yes, and they have guest speakers that may have tentacles.		
ANNOUNCER	My! Tentacles, not falloopers.		
NIMBOD	Yes although the meetings are free and open to		

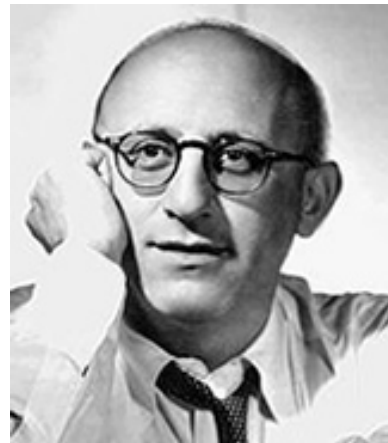
From Print to the Screen: A Conversation with Curt Siodmak by Eric Leif Davin

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Even a man who is pure in heart
And says his prayers at night,
May become a wolf when the wolfbane blooms
And the autumn moon shines bright.



Curt Siodmak may have the longest professional career of any writer in the science fiction field. Not counting a fairy tale he published at the age of eight in a children’s magazine, he has been writing and publishing for over three-quarters of a century, with his first “professional” sale in 1919. And he is still writing and publishing.



Like that of his older brother, Robert, his career began in Berlin in the days of the Weimar Republic. He has written short stories, novels, and plays, but it is as a Hollywood screenwriter that he made his mark. For twenty years, from 1938 to 1957, he regularly churned out original and adapted screenplays, sometimes two or three per year. In all, including collaborations, he crafted approximately forty-eight screenplays for films in Germany, Great Britain, America, Sweden, France, and Switzerland. Meanwhile, he produced approximately fifteen novels in Germany, America, and France, and his total number of short stories is unknown even to himself. Later in his career, Siodmak also directed a handful of Hollywood films, although it was his brother, Robert, who went on to become celebrated for directing such classics as *The Spiral Staircase* and *The Crimson Pirate*.¹

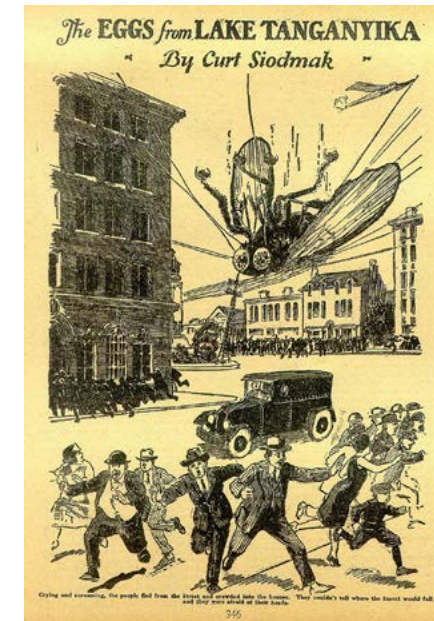
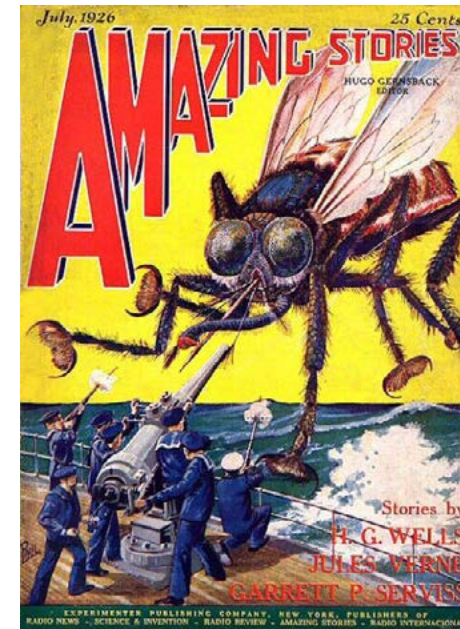
Robert and Curt were the sons of a well-to-do Jewish banker in Leipzig, Germany (although Robert was actually born in 1900 in Memphis, Tenn., during a business trip by his father and Curt was born in Dresden two years

¹ Robert Siodmak died in Switzerland on May 10, 1973.

later).

Robert graduated from the University of Marburg and began acting in repertory theater, but the hyperinflation of the Weimar years forced him to give that up and become, first, a bank clerk, and then a failed businessman in a series of unsuccessful ventures. In 1925 he managed to find a job in Berlin as a title writer for imported American films. In 1926 Robert became a film editor. In 1929 Robert and his brother, Curt, collaborated with Billy Wilder and Fred Zinnemann—both of whom later became prominent Hollywood directors—in creating the noted feature documentary *People on Sunday*, marking Robert’s directorial and Curt’s screenwriting debuts.

Curt had hoped to graduate from a German university, but the inflation of the years immediately after World War I again interfered. When his father was unable to finance his continued education in Germany, Curt went to Zürich, Switzerland, where he obtained his B.A. in engineering in 1924. He was already writing short stories, which appeared in top German magazines. One such story, “The Eggs From Lake Tanganyika,” was seen by Hugo Gernsback and re-printed in the fourth issue of his new science fiction magazine, *Amazing Stories* (July 1926).² Thus, though he’d never heard of either Gernsback or his magazine, Siodmak became a “Gernsback author,” a reputation he has retained ever since.



Upon graduation from the University of Zürich, Curt joined his brother in Berlin. There, the vagaries of the financial situation made it impossible to pursue his engineering career. Instead, he drifted into his brother’s film circle and wrote scripts for several of Robert’s films. Both brothers fled the Nazis in the early thirties and eventually ended up in Hollywood. Curt was quickly given a job writing a sarong picture for Dorothy Lamour and a succession of such assignments followed for the next two decades. A number of his assignments for Universal Pictures— *The Wolf Man*, *House of Frankenstein*, *Frankenstein Meets the Wolf Man*, *Son of Dracula*, and others—have since become horror classics. This, as he makes clear in the following conversation, was

² This was the story—with a Frank R. Paul illustration for the magazine’s cover showing a giant fly attacking a warship—which captured the young Raymond Z. Gallun’s eye and moved him to purchase his very first science fiction magazine. He was an instant convert to the genre. It has been reprinted in Forrest J. Ackerman, ed., *The Gernsback Awards I, 1926* (London: Turret, 1982).

entirely accidental. He had no particular affection for or interest in either horror or science fiction—indeed, he never read the stuff. It was merely a job.



This unfamiliarity with the field may explain why Siodmak’s output—though prodigious—is also so derivative. Siodmak never displayed much feeling for or understanding of the field. Even his most noted novel and film, Donovan’s Brain, a 1943 story about a disembodied brain kept alive in a vat, was a crude science fiction cliché at the time. The August 1926 issue of Amazing Stores, for instance, the very next issue after the one that introduced Siodmak to America, featured a cover of two scientists recoiling in horror from a still-living head in a lab vat.³

Nor, though Siodmak claims credit for creating the Wolf Man character in 1941, was his werewolf creation without precedent. The Wolf Man was Lon Chaney Jr.’s second horror film and the role for which he is most remembered. Indeed, he was honored with his in-character Wolf Man portrait on a U.S. postage stamp. Werewolves, however, were not new to cinema. As early as 1913 Bison Films had made a silent film, The Werewolf. In 1933 Guy Endore’s classic novel, The Werewolf of Paris, burst upon the world and Endore was quickly snapped up by MGM as a screenwriter to turn his novel into a screenplay. Universal Studios rushed to beat MGM to the screen with their own werewolf story. In 1935 they turned out The Werewolf of London with, not one, but two werewolves, One of them an Oriental werewolf played by Warner Oland, of later Charlie Chan fame. Thus, when Universal Studios returned to the werewolf theme in 1941 with an assignment to Siodmak to write a screenplay, the ground was well-trodden—although now-integral parts of the werewolf legend, such as Gypsy curses and silver bullets, made their first appearance in this film and might have been Siodmak’s ideas. In addition, the script was unusually literate for both a B film—and for Siodmak.

In 1943 Siodmak co-scripted I Walked with a Zombie, a true horror classic from the team of producer Val Lewton and director Jacques Tourneur, who also brought us 1942’s Cat People. This was perhaps Tourneur’s best work, almost poetic, complemented by the haunting camera work of J. Roy Hunt and the dialogue of Ardel Wray, based upon an original story by Inez Wallace. Here, also, however, the film, though nightmarishly beautiful, was basically the well-known story of Jane Eyre transposed to the West Indies and it is unclear what, or how much, Siodmak contributed to the film.

Even at the time, Siodmak’s films were recognized as plodding and predictable, if not outright ridiculous, confirming that his talents were of the stolid work-manlike variety which welded worn-out SF conventions onto mundane formulas. For example, of Curucu, Beast of the Amazon, shot on location in Brazil, Variety said, “Curt Siodmak’s screenplay and direction make formula thriller use of the settings.”⁴ Of Siodmak’s Love Slaves of the Amazon, based upon an unpublished short story of his, Variety said it was:

“a simple-minded, poorly-made adventure film of which everyone says, “there must be a market

³ Siodmak turned his novel into the original screenplay for the 1953 film of the same name. The film starred Nancy Davis First Lady, Nancy Reagan) and Lew Ayres, World War II pacifist who briefly served time with pacifist SF editor Charles D. Hornig.

⁴ Variety, Nov. 7, 1956.

for them somewhere.” It’s being coupled by Universal with Monolith Monsters, and, as part of such a package, probably will sneak by. If there’s anything good to be said about it it’s that the Eastman color is vivid and impressive, picking up some interesting landscapes in Brazil, where this was produced by Curt Siodmak. Siodmak’s script is so clumsy, the temptation is great to consider the whole thing a takeoff on jungle pix that have gone before. His direction isn’t any much better, judging by the performances. Siodmak should have to answer to someone why nothing better came out.”⁵

Meanwhile, Damon Knight has pointed to Siodmak’s screenplay for 1954’s Riders to the Stars as, “a splendid example of all that is silliest and most unscientific in SF cinema.”⁶

Nevertheless, Siodmak has had the last laugh—all the way to the bank. His novels are still in print, at least in Europe, he is financially comfortable, and he now “lives like a king” on a sixty-acre ranch in the wilds of the California out-back. If nothing else, the long-distance career of Curt Siodmak proves that there is always a lucrative market for formula.

The great virtue of oral history, such as in the following conversation, is that it gives a first-person “eyewitness” account of events by someone who was there. The great flaw of oral history, however, is that memory is exceedingly fallible, especially about events which happened decades past. Oral testimony, therefore, always has to be verified, as much as possible, by comparison with the record. This is true of the following conversation, where both the great virtue and great flaw of oral history are both on display. This conversation with Curt Siodmak took place on June 11, 1991. Siodmak was eighty-eight years old at the time.

You were born August 10, 1902, correct?

Curt Siodmak: Ja, I didn’t choose it. I didn’t choose my family and I didn’t choose Dresden, where I was born. If I’d had a choice, I’d have been born two thousand years ago in Greece during the time of Aristotle, not during

⁵ Variety, Dec. 4, 1957.

⁶ Quoted in Peter Nicholls, ed., The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction (New York: Doubleday & Co., 1979), p. 548.

A small selection of other films for which Siodmak wrote the original screenplays include: House of Frankenstein (1944), in which all the Universal monsters were thrown together to revive the flagging series; Bride of the Gorilla (1951), also directed by Siodmak, in which Raymond Burr is a were-gorilla killed by cops Lon Chaney Jr. and black actor Woody Strode in his debut; and The Magnetic Monster (1953), co-written with Ivan Tors and directed by Siodmak. The latter film starred Richard Carlson, omnipresent actor in 1950s’ Grade B science fiction films. Siodmak and Tors wrote the screenplay in hopes of creating a TV series based on Carlson’s character, who was an agent of the Office of Scientific Investigations. Sounds like X-Files.

Some of Siodmak’s adapted screenplays include: Black Friday (1940), co-written with Eric Taylor, in which Boris Karloff performs a brain transplant; The Invisible Man Returns (1940), co-written with Lester Cole and Joe May, who directed it. This was Vincent Price’s first starring vehicle; Tarzan’s Magic Fountain (1949), co-written with Harry Chandler. Basically Lost Horizon in the jungle, this was the first Tarzan movie to star Lex Barker, who made several sequels; and Earth vs. the Flying Saucers (1956), co-written with George Worthing Yates and Raymond T. Marcus [Bernard Gordon], with special effects by Ray Harryhausen. Based on Maj. Donald E. Keyhoe’s 1953 book, Flying Saucers From Outer Space, although greatly influenced by George Pal’s 1953 film, War of the Worlds. Indeed, except for War of the Worlds, Earth vs the Flying Saucers is the only 1950s’ SF film to feature a mass invasion of aliens. It contains the famous Harryhausen-engineered scene of a flying saucer crashing into the dome of the U.S. Capitol Building, a scene later spoofed in the TV cartoon series The Simpsons.

the time of Hitler.

Are you Jewish?

My father says so and I am his child.

In Slaughterhouse Five Kurt Vonnegut described Dresden before the firebombing. Was that an accurate description ?

I don’t remember. That was over fifty years ago. In your memory things are so different. I had a lovely big palazzo in Italy with a big staircase. I saw it thirty years later and it was a small house with a small staircase. We’re used to big spaces in America. Now I live in California on a ranch. Sometimes we see a jeep on the fire roads and my wife says, “Let’s move out, it’s getting crowded.”

I’ve been back to Europe a few times. I was invited recently by the head of the film museum in Berlin, who was a house guest here on my ranch a few weeks ago. I’m also a new writer they’ve just discovered over there. All my books are being republished and I had a new book out two weeks ago entitled The Riches of Paris. Only published in France. A historical novel about Louis XIV.

All my books have been continually in print. My book Donovan’s Brain has been published five or six times in Germany. I was published by Bertelsmann, one of the largest European publishers. I was in Munich about two years ago with a book manuscript. They took it away and gave me cash!

I think the 1953 film version of Donovan’s Brain was the first film I saw based on your work.

They didn’t want me to direct that. I had a contract to direct it, but it didn’t happen.

Were you satisfied with what they did?

I don’t look at those pictures. They changed too much, especially adding references to God, so I didn’t look at it. Another version was called The Brain, made by an English company in 1962. They had a cancer cure in it. What is a cancer cure doing in that picture?⁷ But, the book is still in print; sold about five million copies. I just had three of my books come out in one volume. It’s written from the shifting viewpoint of a young man in the first story, middle aged in the second, and an old man in the third.

So, you’re still active?

What do you mean still active? Of course! They just had a big parade for me in Austria. I’m also a lyricist and song writer. I just wrote a play, The Song of Frankenstein. It’s a comedy. It’s huge over there. It’s in Vienna, then it goes to Berlin, then it goes to London.

I have also written about five hundred pages of my autobiography, which I’ve been working on for some time. I threw the first draft away and started from scratch. There was a lady photographer visiting me from

⁷ A British-West German production, it is also known as Vengeance and Ein Toter Sucht Seinen Moerder.

Zürich about three years ago. She was interviewing all the people of my circle from the thirties who are still alive. That started me thinking that I should write about my life and about those people, too.⁸

Can we talk about those early days? I think you must have the longest professional career—wasn’t your first professional sale in 1909? When you were eight years old you published a fairy tale in a magazine called Kinderwelt, “Children’s World.”

Well, I wrote that fairy tale as a child and I wrote lots of science fiction. I remember one story, it was a long time ago, 1922. I described a telephone booth which would disassemble people into atoms and transmit them to another booth which would reassemble them into people—a matter transmitter.

What would you say your earliest influences were?

I studied engineering in Zürich, Switzerland, and in Stuttgart Hochschule, which was similar to a community college. I developed a car engine in ’22, similar to the Wankel engine. I studied lasers in the thirties. My father refused to pay for my education because of the tremendous inflation at that time, so I lost my education. But, I had two friends who invited me to Switzerland, where I met my wife, Henrietta.⁹ She was an architect in Zürich. I met her at a fancy dress ball. I was then a student at the University of Zürich, from which I graduated.

Do you credit that engineering education with your ability to think up science fiction ideas?

Not at all. It’s like a shoeshine boy asking you if you want a shine. How does he know? He looked at your shoes! I go through life and I see things others don’t see because it’s my profession. If you have the talent and you do it often enough, it becomes second nature. You don’t need an engineering background to do that. And you don’t need to read science fiction! I never did read science fiction. I think it’s gibberish. I don’t understand all the technical words they use.

But, you’ve written technical stories about outer space like City in the Sky!

City in the Sky is possible! But Star Wars is not possible.

I see. Did you always think science fiction was gibberish?

Of course, it was always gibberish.

You know, the human mind is so limited. We write about societies on other worlds, and they resemble us so much. You look at the paintings of Brueghel or Bosch¹⁰ and all those demons look like men with two eyes and

⁸ Unable to find a publisher, Siodmak self-published his completed autobiography on August 10, 1997, in a signed and boxed edition. Its title, Even A Man Who Is Pure in Heart. . . , comes from the opening lines of The Wolf Man. The publication date coincided with the U.S. Post Office release of the commemorative Lon Chaney “Wolf Man” stamp.

⁹ Henrietta De Perrot, whom he married in 1931. They had one child, a son, Peter, born in Great Britain and now a well-to-do American businessman.

¹⁰ Pieter Brueghel (15647-71638), Flemish painter known for his paintings of demons and infernal regions. Hieronymus Bosch

two arms—hard to think of a new shape. The same with societies. You go into outer space and you find fascism or communism or the Roman Empire or feudal Europe. We don't have much in our brains.

I wrote a few books about space, Skyport and City in the Sky.¹¹ A friend took me to visit engineers at Lockheed because he thought talking with them would help give me ideas. They got their ideas from reading my books!

For instance, instead of launching rockets from the ground to reach orbit, why not have a huge elevator into space, miles high? Launch things from the top and they save so much on fuel!

Didn't Arthur C. Clarke already write about that in The Fountains of Paradise?¹²

Who? I don't know. I never read that.

How did you go from being an engineer to being a reporter and a writer?

I was always a writer. When I went to Berlin in 1924, the inflation made it impossible to make a living as an engineer, so I wrote for the newspapers. My education helped me a lot in my science fiction writing. I didn't know very much, but I knew a little.

But, while my education helped with my science fiction, I also wrote love stories, all kinds of novels. My last one is a historical novel. If the idea is interesting, it doesn't matter if it's science fiction, or not. I'm a writer. I can write about anything.

Was there an active German science fiction community in the twenties?

I wrote a short story called "The Eggs from Tanganyika." It was published in a German magazine and then I got some money from Hugo Gernsback when he republished it. I found an article in The Smithsonian about four weeks ago which said he wanted stories which used a lot of scientific research.¹³ But, I didn't do any research for that story! I'd never heard of Gernsback before he published my story.

Were there any American science fiction magazines republished in Germany?

It took six weeks for the boat to come over! An exchange didn't exist. Some- times you got a hardback, but nothing from magazines. How much do you know about German publications? Why should I know what was published in America?

How did you first become interested in film in Germany?

I just got a letter from a friend of mine who's my age. He reminded me that I made my first film in 1926. Then I

(14507- 1516), Dutch painter of devils, monstrosities, and other gruesome subjects.

¹¹ Skyport (New York: Crown, 1959). Basically Ayn Rand's Fountainhead—in the sky. City in the Sky (New York: Putnam, 1974). Basically Grand Hotel—in the sky.

¹² Published in 1979, it won the Hugo in 1980 as Best Novel.

¹³ Daniel Stashower, "A Dreamer Who Made Us Fall In Love With The Future," The Smithsonian 21, no. 5 (August 1990).

wrote books. I wrote Antwortet Nicht.¹⁴ Then I wrote something called The Studio Murder Mystery. In those days, newspapers still published novels in serial form. These were reprinted in smaller and smaller papers, until you got to the village papers, each paying less money. But, you were paid for each publication. The Germans paid very well, not like in America. Here, five weeks after publication your book is forgotten.

Did you have much input into the making of F.P. 1 Does Not Answer?

No, not at all. Someone said, "The writer is the most important person in Hollywood. Don't give him any power!"

And that was true in Germany, too?

No, in Germany a writer had standing.

But, F. P. One was made in Germany!

It was made in Germany, but it was shot simultaneously in three languages. It was the studio's idea. They wanted an international market. The producer for that film had imagination. He worked with Billy Wilder. He protected writers. But I didn't go onto sets. I didn't like actors. My brother, Robert, was the one who did that. He discovered Burt Lancaster, Ava Gardner, Ernest Borgnine, Tony Curtis, he picked them out of the crowd. He was a star-maker. He did Spiral Staircase and The Crimson Pirate, which was Lancaster's first big film. He wanted me to change my name so there wouldn't be two Siodmaks.

It's strange to hear you say you don't like actors, since you went on to become a director.

I went where the money was. How much money does a writer get? I never made money from my writing. A director made lots more money. Now I live like a king and I own sixty acres in the wilds of California. Not because of my writing!

Is that why you don't like actors? Because they make more money than writers?

What is an actor? Someone found in a drugstore! And if they become successful, they become a son-of-a-bitch! Who are the great actors through the ages? You know only when you know who directed them! And how many films do you re- member? But, you know Shakespeare, don't you? Who acted in his plays? Books you remember! Books go through the ages. Plays go through the ages. But who remembers the actors of yesterday? Hitchcock was right. Actors should be treated like cattle.

I knew Hitchcock. He came to my office in London and said to me, "Siodmak, write me a story about a woman who is a deaf and dumb detective." That was a very good idea, but unfortunately, I couldn't do it for him, because I left for America.

¹⁴ F. P 1 Antwortet Nicht (Berlin: Keils, 1931). Published in America as F. P. 1 Does Not Reply (Boston: Little, Brown, 1933). Filmed in Germany in 1933, for which Siodmak wrote the screenplay. An English version was released in 1938 in Great Britain by Gaumont. It is about floating airports—"Flight Platforms"—in the middle of the ocean.

What was the first film you worked on?

I worked for a small German newspaper in '26 and was sent to do a story on Fritz Lang's Metropolis. He didn't allow reporters on his set, so I and my wife got jobs as extras in the movie. We didn't get much money for it, and we ate up whatever we got.

I never did like that movie. The thing I remember most about it was Brigitte Helm's costume catching fire during one of the disaster scenes. Helm was very pretty and very young. But, she was more hysterical than talented.¹⁵

In 1929 we made a film, we five young men in Berlin. Robert Siodmak, myself, Billy Wilder, Fred Zinnemann, Edgar Ulmer. We wrote a film called People on Sunday. The British stole it and it was made into a film called Bank Holiday. This picture is a classic, it's in every film museum, including the county museum here in Los Angeles. It was our first picture. It was the first money I made. We just took people on the street and turned them into actors, very cheap. It was the same style as what the French later called "New Wave," pictures like The Bicycle Thief.¹⁶ We did the same kind of film twenty years earlier, but we didn't get the credit. Truffaut got the credit.

If you didn't like Metropolis, why are you writing a sequel to it?

A sequel? I'm not writing a sequel to it. Who told you anything as silly as that?

Forrest J. Ackerman said so.

Well, it might be because I have a friend who reads scripts in Hollywood and he mentioned the possibility of a sequel. I wrote him back some ideas of how a sequel might go, but that was all.

Did you know Thea von Harbou, the coauthor with Lang of Metropolis?

I never met her. I saw her once. There was a split between her and Lang. He left Germany in the thirties, while she stayed. They were going to make Lang an "Honorary Aryan" and he said he'd think it over. But, he was out of the country immediately after that.

It was a nightmare time, the thirties. I don't like to think about it. I don't think the Germans have changed in their attitudes toward Jews, even today. In 1985 I went back to Berlin to see how the people behaved, what Germany was like. I stayed in the best hotel in Berlin. I saw what kind of pictures they were showing. My name was still known. It was good for the ego. But the memories made me sick. There I was, standing on the same sidewalk in front of the same theater where I'd stood sixty years before for a screening of my science fiction film

¹⁵ Talented or not, Brigitte Helm—only a teenager when she portrayed both the heroine and the evil robot-vamp in Lang's classic silent SF film Metropolis—went on to make a string of films in which she almost always had the starring role. She easily made the transition to sound and starred as the Queen of Atlantis in G. W. Pabst's excellent 1932 film, L' Atlantide. As with the filming of Siodmak's F. P. 1, Pabst's film was shot simultaneously in German, French, and English with different casts, except for Helm, who starred in all three. According to Nicholls, Pabst's film, "is generally regarded as superior, not only because of its visual flair, but also for Brigitte Helm's striking performance as the queen" (p. 49). Brigitte Helm's last film was Ein Idealer Gatte (An Ideal Spouse), in 1935. She died in Switzerland on June 11, 1996, at the age of ninety.

¹⁶ In fact, this was a 1947 Italian film directed by Vittorio de Sica, which won a special Academy Award before foreign films had their own category.

The Invisible Agent.¹⁷ In the meantime, there'd been a world war, they'd killed my family. It made me feel sick. You Americans don't know what it was like to live through those times.

But every country's the same. Here we had the Vietnam War. But we faced it. We have the Vietnam Memorial, we write books about it, we make pictures about it. But the Germans don't face it. You can't make a picture today in Germany and show the Nazis.

I met so many people who said they were anti-Nazi. I asked, "Was that in 1945 or in 1942?" They don't say anything. But this isn't about politics here.

You left Germany in 1933, correct?

No, I didn't leave Germany. They threw me out! I got a letter from the German writers' union telling me I wasn't permitted to work in Germany anymore be- cause I'm Jewish. In 1936 I received a letter in England from my publisher in Leipzig, Bertelsmann, now framed and hanging on my wall. It says, "Dear Mr. Siodmak: This is to inform you that all your books have been confiscated by the Gestapo. So sorry. Heil Hitler!" This is the same publisher who published my latest book last week!

Why did you leave England in 1937?

My wife wanted to go to America. She couldn't explain what it was. She was afraid of the Nazis coming. We tried moving to Switzerland but came back be- cause she was pregnant and wanted to give birth to a British child. So, we moved to Los Angeles. Now we live in the country because she doesn't like the city anymore. I don't fight it; she's always right.

How did you make contacts so quickly when you moved to Hollywood in '37?

Somebody took me to Paramount. I got a job the first week. My first assignment was writing a picture for Dorothy Lamour, Jungle Princess.¹⁸ It was standard in those days for old alcoholic screenwriters to be kept on and they'd assign younger writers to work with them and do the writing. I was given such an assignment of writing Aloma of the South Seas.¹⁹ I made twenty-eight pictures for Universal. That was another time when you had to really work! My brother also had no job. So, Preston Sturges said he'd get him a job. He called the head of Paramount and said, "I have the most important director in Europe in my office." So, he was hired.²⁰

How long did it take you to write a screenplay when you were working for Universal?

¹⁷ Invisible Agent was made in Hollywood in 1942 as an espionage thriller in which the son of the original Invisible Man volunteers to spy on the Nazis and Japanese for the Allies. Highly unlikely that this war propaganda film would have been screened in Berlin anytime before 1945.

¹⁸ Actually, Her Jungle Love, 1938. Starring Lamour and Ray Milland as her lover, this South Seas sarong-film was essentially a remake of Lamour's sarong-debut, Jungle Princess, which paired her with Milland in 1936, before Siodmak left England.

¹⁹ 1941, another Dorothy Lamour sarong film.

²⁰ Robert Siodmak settled in Paris after being expelled from Germany in 1933. He left Paris for Hollywood in 1940, just ahead of the German army.

About ten weeks from scratch.

How long for The Invisible Woman, in 1941, John Barrymore’s last picture?

He was an absolute mess. Couldn’t remember one line. So, I was on the set all the time. I wrote his dialog for him as he walked up and down the staircase and he could read it as he walked up and down. You had to be careful or he’d walk out of camera range. I could tell you stories, but this is on tape.

How about The Son of Dracula?²¹

It was an interesting idea. Here was a woman in love with a man who would live forever, a vampire.

Was that your idea?

Of course, of course. The directors had no ideas. Actors have no ideas.

Did you come up with the idea for The House of Frankenstein?

Well, of course. I had a little altar in my room. I’d say to it, “My weekly check, my weekly check,” and I’d go back to my typewriter. You have to write a lot of jobs to feed a family. I didn’t want to make art! By chance the times have caught up with me and some people think the things are interesting. But, it was just a job. You didn’t get much money for writing these things, \$400 or \$500, per- haps \$1,000. That was good money in those days, but you had to keep working.

And you originated the idea for Frankenstein Meets the Wolf Man, didn’t you?

Of course! And I created the character of The Wolf Man. I wish I had the copyright on him, but Universal owns it. Originally it was just entitled The Wolf Man, and would have had Boris Karloff in it, but he had to make another picture, so we had Lon Chaney Jr. I had two hours to come up with the idea for Frankenstein Meets the Wolf Man. I was told, “Here are your actors: Claude Rains, Ralph Bellamy, Lon Chaney.”²² You’ll have a budget of \$80,000. You begin shooting in two weeks. Goodbye!” So, I quickly wrote a script and was working on it right up to the last moment. I didn’t have the money to hire another writer, so I had to write it myself. There’s a book coming out on the classic Universal monster movies and it publishes my original shooting script for Frankenstein Meets the Wolf Man.

You know, I never made the big pictures. In those days, there was something called “Block Booking.” A theater had to buy three hours of entertainment from the studio, okay? So, most of my films were made just to

²¹ Released in 1943, it was co-written with Eric Taylor and directed by Siodmak’s brother, Robert. It starred Lon Chaney Jr. as “Count Alucard” (“Dracula” spelled backward).

²² Actually, these were the actors in The Wolf Man (1941). Frankenstein Meets the Wolf Man (1943) starred Chaney, Bela Lugosi, Lionel Atwill, Ilona Massey, and Maria Ouspenskaya. Siodmak is obviously thinking about The Wolf Man (co-written with Gordon Kann, which brings into question Siodmak’s claim to have created the character) all the while he is talking about Frankenstein Meets the Wolf Man, for which he was, indeed, the sole screenwriter.

fill out the block. They’ve become “horror classics,” but that was not of my doing. I was just making a living, that’s all. I wrote sixty producible film scripts. I have two which have never been filmed.

Why were so many of your films horror stories?

They were just assignments given to me.

Did you respect the things you were writing, or did you just consider it trash?

I respected it. If you spit at your work, it will spit back at you. In your life, you are merely the echo of your own energies. I put all my energy into every job I had. I took them all seriously. I did a picture in England called Transatlantic Tunnel. It was the first time the British engaged American actors. Richard Dix, others. It opened up the whole English film industry. It was based on a famous novel by a German, Bernhard Kellerman, Der Tunnel. Napoleon came up with the idea first, though. I got the job because I could read the original. They asked, “Can you write a script for it in three days?” I said, “Oh, sure.” However, it took six months.²³

What’s your method for so much productivity?

I write twenty-four hours a day. When I’m on the phone, walking around, I’m writing in my mind. Basically, you’re like a lighthouse keeper; you’re married to the thing. Writing becomes the world, and the world becomes a dream. I’ve never had a problem with ideas, they just come. I have in my garage two hundred books with my stories, and that’s only a third of my output. A young man came to me and said, “I want to be a writer. How do I get an agent? How much money can I make?” I took him to the garage and told him, “When you have that many books, come back.”

What should I do to reach the age of ninety and still be active, like you?

Be curious. The brain is a muscle. As long as you work with it constantly, it stays young.

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²³ The Tunnel (aka Transatlantic Tunnel) was actually co-written with L. Du Garde Peach and Clemence Dane, a well-known British author. It was released in 1935 and told the story of the construction of a tunnel beneath the Atlantic linking Britain and America. There was a previous 1933 German film, Der Tunnel, based upon the same novel, which linked America with the Continent, bypassing England. The epic grandeur of the German film was lost in Siodmak’s co-written screenplay, which turned the construction of the Tunnel into a love-story triangle centered around the master engineer, his wife, and a vamp.

Napoleon’s idea for a tunnel, which Siodmak mentions, was for an undersea link between England and the rest of Europe—which now exists as the “Chunnel.” This is yet another science fiction idea which has become reality!