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**“Happy Halloween,” by Steve Stiles**

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All great literature is about what a bummer it is to be a human being.  
--Kurt Vonnegut

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**THIS ISSUE OF *eI*** is in memory of the 1950-60 members of the incredibly wonderful University of Chicago Science Fiction Club. The best of the best....

In the strictly science fiction world, it is also in memory of Wrai Ballard, Donald M. Grant and Ben Indick.  
#

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](mailto: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, Ann Bannon, Laura Baumbach, Robert Bonfils, Bruce Brenner, Jay A. Gertzman, Drewey Wayne Gunn, Jacques Hamon, Earl Terry Kemp, Rob Latham, Richard Lupoff, William Maltese, James O’Meara, Luis Ortiz, Robert Speray,

**ARTWORK:** This issue of *eI* features original artwork by Steve Stiles, Ditmar, Harry Bell, and Brad Foster, and recycled artwork by William Rotsler.

**OF HIS back cover** in this issue, Ditmar says: Murray Leinster's story "First Contact" is one of my favorite SF yarns, but, according to Eric Flint writing in the anthology "The World Turned Upside Down", he wrote 'at least one other which is just as good' - "The Aliens". It is included in the anthology, edited by Flint, David Drake and Jim Baen. Humans and Plumies have different metabolisms and, at first contact, realise that they, in effect, need each other because they inhabit completely different environments, which require different technologies. The graphic has the Plumie in an enclosed suit, while the human is exposed to the planetary atmosphere.

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Things are going to get unimaginably worse, and they will never get better again.  
-- Kurt Vonnegut

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## ...Return to sender, address unknown.... 36

### The Official *eI* 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](mailto:earlkemp@citlink.net) or by snail mail to P.O. Box 6642, Kingman, AZ 86402-6642 and thank you.

#### **Tuesday August 3, 2009:**

**Chris Garcia:** Man oh man, I hate you. You have the greatest single piece of fan art I've seen all year! That Steve Stiles piece on *eI45* is just amazing and I cannot express my jealousy nearly enough! It's simply amazing.

#### **Wednesday August 12, 2009:**

**Robert Silverberg:** Took a very quick preliminary look at the new issue. Your usual superb product. The *Unknown* index made me weep -- they just don't make mags like that any more.

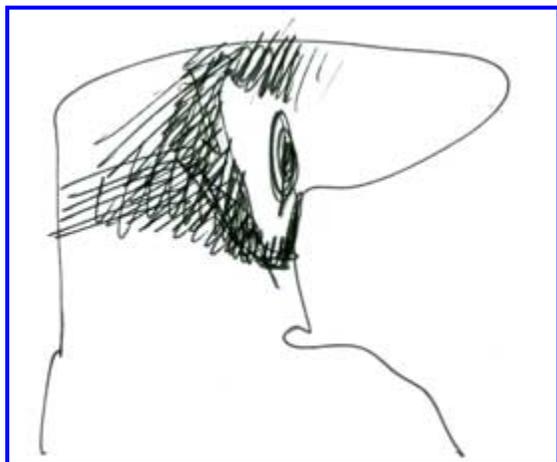
I'm just back from the Montreal worldcon. The old gang is just about extinct and I felt like Rip van Winkle there. But Dave Kyle, at least, showed up -- 90 years old and looks every day of it, but just as quick and alert as ever. I came up to him in astonishment to say hello and before I quite reached him he called out, "You can't sit there!" Nobody else in the whole place would have understood.

#

**Lawrence Stanley:** I'm writing a book on some of the latest censorship cases focusing in particular on US v. Fletcher and US v. McCoy (prosecutions for text only erotica), US v. Handley and US v. Whorley (about which I wrote at <http://comipress.com/special/miscellaneous/down-the-slippery-slope-the-crime-of-viewing-manga>) and various other cases. In order to discuss the Fletcher and McCoy prosecutions, I found myself having to examine not only the history of obscenity but the history of literary erotica/pornography in the United States during the 1960s and 70s, which led me to your invaluable ezines. They contain information that one simply doesn't find anywhere (and especially not in the case law). Do you know anyone, however, who maintains comprehensive bibliographies of the erotica that was published? The site [vintagesleaze.com](http://vintagesleaze.com) lists (and sells) some books, but just a smattering of what was published. I'm more interested in the post-Memoirs and Redrup period, when the market shifted from (mostly) sexually suggestive to the more sexually explicit. It's a shame that there is nothing online documenting the business in the 70s as you have done with the 60s, but there is no question that you have far better stories to tell.

In any case, this is more of a fan letter than anything (!) Any suggestions you might have will of course be appreciated. It was nice, btw, to read more about Stanley Fleishman. I conversed with him a few times in the late

1980s when I began working as a criminal defense lawyer. The man always had time for me. He was a total mensch.



BTW, this is the quotation that has inspired my book and leads me to think (along with other lawyers like Jeffrey Douglas and Larry Walters) that the US Supreme Court has completely knocked the foundation out from under the obscenity laws:

“The government ‘cannot constitutionally premise legislation on the desirability of controlling a person’s private thoughts.’ Stanley v. Georgia, 394 U. S. 557, 566 (1969). First Amendment freedoms are most in danger when the government seeks to control thought or to justify its laws for that impermissible end. The right to think is the beginning of freedom, and speech must be protected from the government because speech is the beginning of thought.”

- Justice Kennedy, Ashcroft v. Free Speech Coalition (2002).

**Thursday August 13, 2009:**

**Mike Deckinger:** In Earl Terry’s review of the Winter 1949 *Arkham Sampler*, he refers to the announced release, by Dell of an anthology containing the radio script for Wells’ “The War of the Worlds,” as broadcast by that other Welles (Orson). The volume in question was titled *Invasion from Mars, Interplanetary Stories selected by Orson Welles* and published in 1949. It appeared in a durable paperback binding that would have sold for 25 cents, since no price was listed anywhere on the covers or spine, customary for the time. The contents included stories by: Heinlein, Asimov, Brown, Bond, Bradbury (2), Sturgeon, Leinster and Boucher. Talk about a stellar line-up. Also included was “Invasion from Mars” by Howard Koch, the complete radio broadcast that panicked America.

An introduction titled “Can A Martian Help It If He’s Colored Green?” is credited to Orson Welles. He may or may not have actually penned it; my guess is that it was ghosted. It’s even more unlikely that he had a hand in selecting any of the stories, similar to the Heinlein edited “Tomorrow, The Stars”, actually the labor of Frederik Pohl and Judith Merrill. He doesn’t say very much about his notorious radio broadcast, but does give brief and very favorable mention to the other stories. He’s especially fond of Anthony Boucher’s “Expedition”, with the explosive line: “ORSON WELLES!”

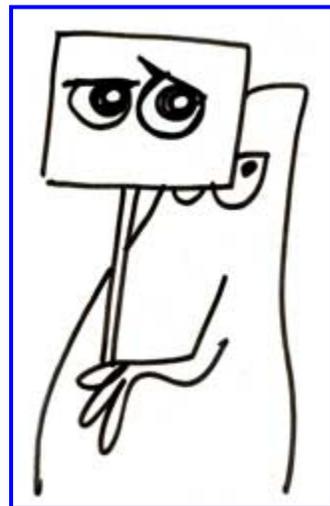
A publisher’s note reports on the tragic aftermath of a rebroadcast of “The War of The Worlds,” in Quito, Ecuador on February 12, 1949. “When the terrorized listeners realized the invasion was just a radio show, they vented their wrath and indignation by attacking the broadcast studio and setting the building afire. Tanks and tear gas had to be used to clear the way for fire-fighting apparatus. Fifteen people were killed and scores of others injured before order was at last restored.”

**Monday September 28, 2009:**

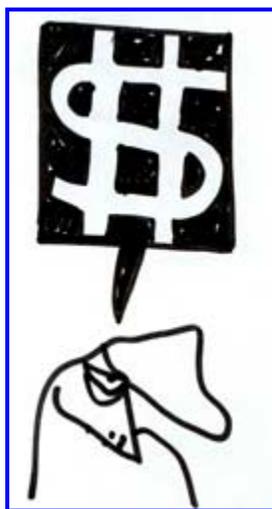
**Lloyd Penney:** That cover...that purple hippo reminds me of *Fantasia!* Don’t remember the other characters, tho...

My loc...the fanzine lounge seemed to work well. A central table, surrounding tables full of zines, a Gestetner with Twilltone and stencils, lots of fanzine fans visiting here and there, and sitting down to pound away on a manual typer...good times for all, plus some new people who came by to ask some questions; I answered them as best as I could, and I hope we will see some new names soon. Montreal was good fun, we attended the Aurora Awards banquet, and we got to give out a Hugo.

John Baxter’s College of Carnal Knowledge...the Web showcases our own attractions, fetishes and perversions on a regular basis, but we are pikers compared to the Japanese who, when they can’t find it, merely draw it. I am learning a lot of Japanese words. Sorry, I draw the line at tentacle sex, but who knows, I can always



draw more lines... This selection of sexual historical figures show that the most natural thing in the world can also be the most complex issue. If only we weren't so easily embarrassed. I saw something on television about a display in Europe celebrating Brigitte Bardot's 75th birthday.



I think a lot of us have worked or run a Worldcon at one time or another. And, most of us know better now. My Worldcon was Torcon 3, and we were treated like crap. We had a better time working with the Montreal Worldcon this year, but I don't think we'll ever work another one, not even in a junior position. Fannish politics reek at the best of times, but Worldcon politics are vile. In spite of that remark, I stand by my remarks above; our Worldcon this year was a great time. We plan to go to the Reno Worldcon in 2011, and we will attend, perhaps do a panel or two.

(Your mention of Rod Serling reminds me that on October 2, of this year, it's the 50th anniversary of the premiere of *The Twilight Zone*, on CBS, I believe. It was submitted for my approval, and it still has it, one of my most favorite shows.)

I wish Fritz Leiber had been able to write about his final years. I'd never met him so much as saw him from a distance, at the last convention he'd been able to attend, Rhinocon 2 in 1992, I believe. He was a guest of the convention, but was ill and tired, and looked like an unstrung marionette in a wheelchair when I saw him, a mere shadow of his strength as a writer and actor.

After the Mack Reynolds tribute issue, I did not know about the Maxine Reynolds gothic stories. There is always something new to learn, and fanzines always contain new revelations.

There was more and more good research into *Unknown* and *The Arkham Sampler*, plus other publications. All this research will be combined into a definitive book, I hope.

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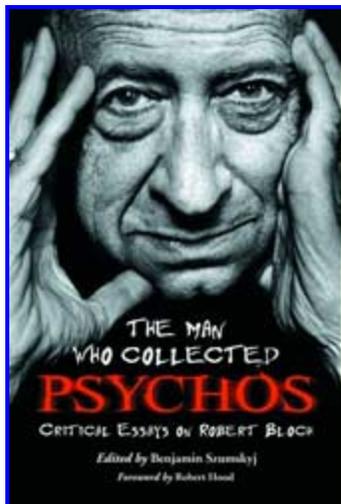
There is nothing intelligent to say about a massacre.  
--Kurt Vonnegut, *Slaughterhouse-Five*

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# Between the Covers

Artwork by Brad Foster

by Earl Kemp



I thought he was one of my best friends for years...Bob Bloch. We managed to get together several times a year when I lived in Chicago and he lived in Milwaukee suburb Weyawega. And we wrote lots of letters back and forth to each other, and then he moved to California.

That was all right because I did too, a few years later, and we were still 100 miles apart only those 100 miles were much longer than they were from Chicago to Milwaukee. And I became a California person...something quite a bit different from an Illinois person.

A new book, just published, tells damn near everything there is to know about Robert Bloch. *The Man Who Collected Psychos*, edited by Benjamin Szumskyj, is a must for old-hand fans who knew and loved that wonderful man from Wisconsin.

There are twelve excellent articles, each delving into a different aspect of Bloch's life and career, as a fan and a filthy pro writer...plus an Introduction by Robert Hood. There were, fortunately, several mentions of *The Eighth Stage of Fandom*

and of Advent.

Closer to Home

There are three new books that deserve extra special mention by me because, in some manner, I am involved with all three of them. That's a cheap way to force me to write plugs for them, hoping someone would actually buy copies of any of them.

The first new novel so deserving recognition is *The Case of the Little Green Men*, by Mack Reynolds. This is the eagerly awaited first republication of this long out-of-print sf fan classic, and it comes in quite a handsome package as well. It's a product of Dick Lupoff's Surinam Turtle Press and he forced me to write a memory piece about my old friend Mack to include in the book, along with a similar memory piece from Mack's son, Emil Reynolds.

You really should get a copy of it for no other reason than my ode to Mack.

#

The second book is a real blast: *The Golden Age of Gay Fiction*. This is quite a detailed study of the subject conducted by a handful of people who either worked directly within the genre from the 1960s through the '70s or studied it in depth. It is also quite well illustrated with cover scans and other significant visuals of the period.

The book was edited by Drewey Wayne Gunn and contains my piece, "Strolling Through Tumescant Town," reliving my experiences publishing some of those Golden Age tomes from some of the very contributors to this study: William Maltese, for instance, and the ever-popular Victor J. Banis.

One of the best pieces from the book, Rob Latham's "World Well Lost," has been excerpted and reprinted elsewhere in this issue of *eI*.

#



The third book is the best of the lot for many reasons: *Cult Magazines: A to Z, A Compendium of Culturally Obsessive & Curiously Expressive Publications*.

Luis Ortiz and I edited this book for Ortiz' Nonstop Press. It was literally years in the making, as anyone associated with the project can testify. And it turned out to be both a much larger and a significantly more valuable book than either of us thought it would be.

It's damned wonderful! I am so proud of my work, with Luis, to make this fascinatingly occupying book possible. It is a beautiful, visual delight with hundreds of color reproductions of favorite cult magazines of yesteryear.

I'm going to fondle my copy religiously.

### **And next month**

...the November issue of *Science Fiction Studies* will carry my essay "Sultry Sluts from Outer Space" which is recommended for a laugh or two.

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One of the few good things about modern times: If you die horribly on television, you will not have died in vain. You will have entertained us.

-- Kurt Vonnegut

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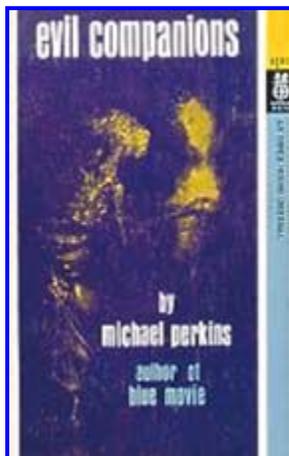
# Michael Perkins's *Evil Companions*: A Porn Noir Classic

by Jay A. Gertzman

There are many significant noir novels which incorporate porn or the porn business, from *The Big Sleep* forward. The first PI tale to do it is the pseudonymous *Crimson Hairs* (1934). But pornographic depictions are most often part of the plot, not, except in a few cases, essential to the desires and behavior of the protagonists. The fusing of pornography and the noir crime novel is very difficult to do without erasing the noir themes of guilt, loss of identity, or sinister response to either gut-level needs or social injustice, and replacing them with language and behavior that aims at stimulating the reader's sexual curiosity or excitement. James Elroy does it in *LA Confidential* with the manufacture of fantasy, snuff films, and child porn (none of this is in the film). Terrill Lankford does it in *Shooters*, his novel of the disintegration of a fashion photographer's personality and creativity when he lends his skills to versions of erotica, both those of the designer clothing and the extreme porn industries. William Hjortberg's *Falling Angel* exploits the formulae of tough guy slang and probing investigation to expose the PI protagonist to the blood and semen of devil worship, thus showing him who he is. Vicki Hendrix's *Iguana Love* is about a woman who gives up an intelligent, skilled, and strong lover for the raw maleness of a psychopath. She can either kill him or be his victim. Given the way the narrator describes her pet iguana, the title suggests penis envy. In *The Story of the Eye*, George Bataille ties disintegration of the ego under an obsessive fetishism so tightly to rape, torture, and murder that it is hard to tell what is cause and what is effect.



Jay Gertzman and Feathered Serpent, 2008.



Michael Perkins' *Evil Companions*, which Essex House published in 1968, is another example, and one of the genre's best. Perhaps the essence of the vision in all of these porn noirs is what literary critics call "hard primitivism." If a writer depicts the fulfillment of two people discovering a sensual and spiritual mutuality by discarding their social and religious sex taboos, he is describing a pagan celebration of the senses. This is "soft primitivism": Eden rediscovered. Its opposite is a vision of the unleashing of the ego as a result of which the individual's lust preys upon other people's bodies, destroying both the body and the soul, and eventually his/her own prerogative to exist in any human group. The transgression has been too deep. The protagonists have freely expressed their desires, but can only stare into a void they have created within themselves; their will to exist is paralyzed. An example from *Evil Companions* is the narrator's strategy of referring to his mother when engaged in sado-masochistic acts. "If I talked about her enough in circumstances she would regard as evil, I could obliterate her image in me." Another is his feeling for his lover, Anne, whom he sees as a guide into the mystery of casting out conscience and rationality in order to live at the most instinctual, primal level. "Love isn't expressed in kindness or fancy, meaningless

words or gestures." He wants to get beyond words, to consider Satanic symbols and animal noises as much closer to the truth. Evil is necessary. In Perkins' review of Bataille's *Madame Edwarda*, he writes that evil "makes us feel the anguish of mind which is the experience of sin. That terror found at the heart of sensuality helps us escape our individual discontinuous beings and become one with the continuity of existence." But this soul-revealing transformation does not happen in *Evil Companions*. Not when the novel ends, anyway.

Susan Sontag's "The Pornographic Imagination" is the best analysis of this literature of hard primitivism. Her examples are de Sade, *The Story of O*, and Bataille. It is the unstable, predatory, heat-seeking aspect of human behavior, and ironically not very different from the Darwinian nightmare of imperial occupation, with its torture, outsourcing of torture, terrorizing of women and children in their homes, napalm, carpet bombing, unmanned bombers, and other military refinements that we are familiar with as the "war on terror." Of one blood orgy, the nameless narrator says, "And then it began, the hour of the wolf, the hour of teeth and claws, the razor's descent." "Nature, red in tooth and claw" is Tennyson's phrase. The poet was referring to the empty, Godless universe of natural selection. This is what, it seems, Anne has to show Nameless about sex. He asked for it.

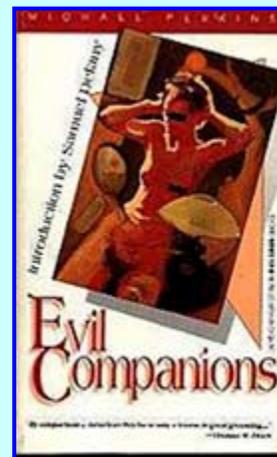
What he got was the specifically human version. Anne gives him a classic example. It features refinements for prolonging sensation and probing the excellence of complete control. Partying with a motorcycle gang, she lies in a drug-induced coma, the needle still deep in her arm. One of the bikers helps Nameless bring her around. She performs oral sex on him, brings him to the point of orgasm, then extracts the needle from her arm and plunges it deep in his throat. His last words were advice for Nameless about Anne: "She's a nice piece. But a warped, twisted, I mean *down* head."

*Evil Companions* has a seminal (the pun is deserved) place in paperback publishing. The first edition was one of Milton Luros' Essex House "High Porn" paperbacks, which included books by Philip José Farmer, Charles Bukowski, David Meltzer, and Richard E. Geis. It was one of seven novels by Perkins for the imprint. His *Blue Movie* was its first publication. *Evil Companions*, in which the scatology is an inevitable reflection of the characters' contempt for order, was too pornographic and violent for two British distributors. Therefore it suffered informal suppression (without reliance on law, and effected by distributors, librarians, and private groups with boycott power and contacts with popular media). Its suppression is similar to that of novels by Thompson, Willeford, Sade, Bataille, and Ellroy. Such novels are seen not just as "distasteful" but as incitement to harm, as a direct challenge to a belief system and a nullification of values, taboos, and trust between people. They are the mark of the Other, the sign of the devil. That such a work as *Evil Companions* could be published in a small-format paperback the distribution of which included college bookstores is amazing. It could only have been done by a publisher whose interests include bringing a variety of erotic literature to general readers. His motives may be venal, but mainstream publishers, equally venal, would satisfy their mass clients with meretricious and clichéd throwaways. Out on the margins is where innovative pop culture lives.

*Evil Companions* is set in the East Village during the depths of the Vietnam War. Its plot features several murders and mutilations of people enticed to the apartment shared by Nameless and his mad guru, Anne ("she has something to tell me"). The plot largely consists of episodes of sexual mutilation and humiliation, rape, torture, necrophilia, castration, and finally the implantation of male sex organs to the female pudenda. Events are taken over the borderline of predatory sensuality, reducing the sex partner to dead meat. It is a species of cannibalism, if by that is meant possessing in hate the body of the other, rather than feeling part of a divine universal living organism, as soft primitive peacefulness envisions. If the characters were not so remarkably feral, they would be overshadowed by the scenes themselves, which feature anarchistic co-mixtures of bodily fluids: urine, feces, semen, milk, vomit, and blood.

This Grand Guignol is described with cold, plainly spoken, non-judgmental ferocity. The writer, not only his protagonists, treats people like puppets. One reviewer called *Evil Companions* a satanic carnival; another said "it made *American Psycho* look like a lesson in good grooming." Perkins wrote only one other book that could be called a crime novel, but his acknowledged influences included Willeford, Thompson, and Highsmith. He described that second novel's protagonists as like "Bonnie and Clyde, or other sets of young American anarchist-killers out on the margins where the cowboys of Sergio Leone are." One can say the same of Anne and Nameless in *Evil Companions*. Hallucinatory events are naturalistically described, almost in the Hemingway style important to noir writers such as Paul Cain, Hammett, Goodis, and Thompson.

Porn noirs usually focus on extreme, psychopathic, neurotic, dysfunctional psychic states. Doubts about identity and paranoid insecurity are inherent in explorations of and transgressions against sexual restraint. *Evil Companions* integrates that facet of noir with hard-boiled critique of 1960s American society. More than any of the other porn noirs named above, Perkins builds a case against the way normal citizens use money, the media, and underclass outsiders to satisfy needs they are afraid to openly express. The filthy streets, begging children, alcoholic and indigent working class men, office workers seeking fixes and underage prostitutes exemplify the average



The cover painting for the Rhinoceros 1992 ed. of *Evil Companions* is by Michael's first wife, Rennie, who committed suicide while he was writing the book. The naked woman is probably herself. She was a talented artist who doubted her ability, and had creative periods mixed with major depression. The immediate event which set off her suicide might have been post-partum depression (she died, by swallowing turpentine, yet!), about two weeks after giving birth. —Jay A. Gertzman

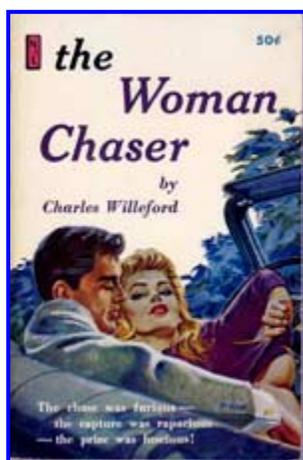
person's disinterest in the social injustices surrounding them, and the repression that people from the "real world" apply to their own psyches. In the background is the hypocrisy about Vietnam and its war crimes. Samuel Delany notes the political violence that took place while Perkins was writing: MLK's and RFK's assassinations, the Warhol shooting, attacks on hippies and long hairs (in one of which Perkins was knifed) and police indifference to them, and of course the war. Perkins, in his Postscript printed in the 1992 edition of his novel, says that the war made him furious. "I meant what I said in *Evil Companions*. I still do." That confirms the author's intent to combine the two sides of noir: the abnormal psyches of the protagonists and social criticism. The motorcycle gang that Anne hosts for about a month is named The Vipers. That's a venomous snake. There are at least ten missiles, rockets, and jet engines to which the military applies the name Viper. Both the "squares" and the mad Anne and her companions behave like diseased, lethal, and vicious life forms.

From the "real world" comes the wealthy, jaded Mr Purdom, looking for new experiences with multiple sex partners. "Our client was wide and very soft." Finding Anne's meanness irresistible, he takes her and the narrator to an expensive hotel where he reverts to infantilism, including spanking, tickling, and using feces to create "mudpies." As Mr Purdy "looked up at me, his eyes sick with love, begging me to hit him again." Nameless feels those eyes "wanted to infect me." With a knife, he cuts from Purdy's skin the splotches of feces, byproducts of his infantile substitute for manly sex play. "Even after the infection was out, the patient died."

The second murder is that of a "mark," also "soft and white," who asserts he knows "what's what." He finds out too late he has visited, not a whorehouse, but a house of horrors. Anne, Nameless, and his former girlfriend Paulette stifle him with soil from their houseplants. It's a planting, a return to nature as degrading as any public execution. And, as such, its victim is entitled, as the Other, to no shred of dignity, only a perverted ritual in which he is used as a kind of toilet. His murderers enjoy the sight of the corpse's erect penis as much as they do the odor of his decaying body, which remains in the apartment, used first as a piece of furniture and later as the centerpiece in a necrophilic orgy. The Vipers, soon after they buzz into Anne's space, are involved in the later. Sex fused with Death, and death-wish, are as strong in the *Evil Companions* as is transgressive sex.

The victims from the straight world of New York need to furtively experience sex. If they have anything in common, it is that they seem to be conventionally tentative in satisfying needs, as if looking over their shoulder to see if the decency police are watching. The East Village radicals from Anne's place are their nemesis.

Anne exploits "the real world" by sending Paulette out whoring. In so doing, she has increased opportunity to further entrap and humiliate, not satisfy the prurient itches, of the "squares." The narrator, like the bikers, attacks them as if they, and he as well, were animals. Nameless has stopped bathing, shaving, and cutting his hair, and enjoys "spooking" passersby. They make his blood boil just by sharing his public space, as do the cops who arrest, and then hunt and attack him as a "bum" or "longhair" who, because he is a vagrant, does not share the most essential rights of a citizen.

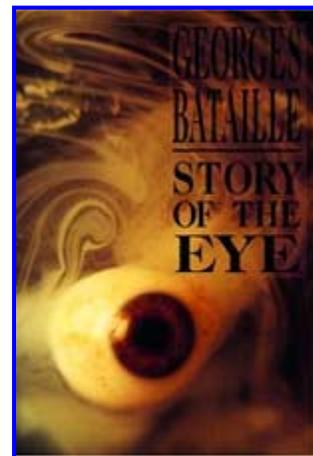


The contempt and misanthropy is similar to that of Richard Hudson in Willeford's *Woman Chaser*. He makes a film, ironically titled *The Man Who Got Away*, about a trucker who accidentally runs over a little girl. The trucker is hunted down by police and described as an inhuman maniac by media newscasters who turn the tragic accident into a race to capture a terrorist. Accepting this pariah identity as an improvement over that of a beaten-down nobody, the trucker goes on the warpath, barreling through roadblocks and killing two cops at one barrier. Police rig up a mountain-high set of vehicles and a massive crowd gathers to watch the windup. The driver, his clothing aflame, staggers out of his wrecked Semi. One man tries to make him comfortable in his last moments and is beaten up by the mob for doing so. Hudson's genius as a filmmaker is how he got the extras at the crash scene to look like turned-on voyeurs. The camera pans the faces of the spectators, showing a remarkable range of expressions: horror, fascination, excitement, satisfaction, open-mouthed amazement. Hudson got these effects by hiring a strip tease dancer to perform just outside the range of the camera. Hudson's acts, like those of Nameless, are fueled by hate of people who insulate themselves from life by engaging in vicarious cruelty in

order to live within conventions and taboos. In doing so, the squares and marks who come under the evil companions' eyes reaffirm their image of them as subhuman. Result: an anger inseparable from the sexual aggression, and in itself a form of it. Richard Hudson and the trucker in *Woman Chaser*, like Anne, Nameless, and their friends, accord no human status to the "straights." Nor do the protagonists in *The Story of the Eye*, who invade

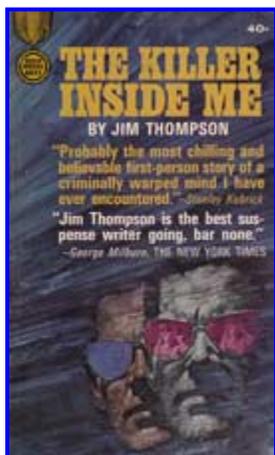
a confessional to reveal a priest's erection, and then fellate, mutilate, and strangle "the unspeakable creature."

The end comes when the actions of Anne and Nameless precipitate an equally violent response. They are kidnapped by people who, like grave robbers, "deal in bodies." They undergo a transcendence, forced on them by scientific experimenters, power brokers of the real world. The kidnapers have been observing the couple and have chosen them for their wildness, especially Nameless' escapades as a hairy naked provocateur in the park. Perhaps they caught his act when instead of arresting him, a Nordic-featured cop was overwhelmed by his desire for Nameless and simply wept, his body armor torn from him and his naked erection exposed in public. A cadre of scientists, whose goal in doing what they do is anybody's guess, subject the couple to a medical examination and prepare them for surgery. Always curious and in need of transcendence, Nameless says to Anne that he is not frightened, and for the same reason nothing Anne did appalled him. "I think they may have something I'm looking for."



If I wasn't here, or with her, I was sure I'd be in a hospital somewhere, vegetating on Thorazine, and rolling around in my own shit. It may come to that anyway, but at least it'll be my own doing. If I ended that way, my only regret would be that I hadn't destroyed more.

Richard Hudson, and Lou Ford in Thompson's *The Killer Inside Me*, might have so stated. "How did we get into this, anyway," Anne asks. It is now Nameless who speaks like a guru. "By living, only by living." It's clear by now what he means by living.



By a team of blood-obsessed surgeons led by one Dr. Ozone, reminiscent of *Naked Lunch's* Dr. Benway, Anne has male sex organs grafted above her vagina. They have been torn from a boy without benefit of anesthetic. Nameless undergoes an operation that affects a segment of the brain that affects "the sexual aspects of life." Dumped back in the East Village, he has become a priapic madman. This penultimate episode ends with an homage to Bataille, but the tone changes from that of detached realism to surrealistic slapstick horror. He takes a teenage druggie to a filthy bathroom where he extracts her eye and replaces it for a moment with his penis. Sucking on the eye, he runs into the park, where he spooks a tourist by tossing him a scorpion he picked up in the bathroom. He kills a wino and attacks a Nun; she responds by becoming his double. "She knew, and her body was key. She was willing to treat my prick as part of her body." They rut, rise hairy and with a thirst for hunting. The moon came out, and they "frolicked."

Years later, Nameless must have acquired a name, for he has a dull, executive-level job. On a Long Island commuter train, he sees his "tortured, demonic" Anne again. She is married to a lawyer, is pregnant with her second child, and still has "her twentieth-century pussy." Apparently the operations have had belated effects on the one-time lovers. Anne says, "If you don't know what happened, I can't tell you . . . not now at least." The tables have been turned. Anne and Nameless have been controlled, violated, manipulated, and changed. Nothing is revealed. Whatever the scientists did, it has destroyed the protagonists' anarchistic energy and pegged them seamlessly into a clockwork suburban routine. All that the narrator can do is write *Evil Companions*. And it is one hell of a great book.

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The sermon was based on what he claimed was a well-known fact, that there were no Atheists in foxholes. I asked Jack what he thought of the sermon afterwards, and he said, "There's a Chaplain who never visited the front."

-- Kurt Vonnegut

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# Letters to Jim O'Meara.2

or

## California, Here I Come

by Earl Kemp

In *eI45* "Letters to Jim O'Meara.1" was published. It covered the years 1961—3, before, during, and after we produced ChiCon III over the Labor Day weekend in September 1962.

"Letters to Jim O'Meara.2" begin in 1964 and are concerned mostly with my move to California in 1965, along with William Hamling's Greenleaf Classics.

For me it was a life-changing move. Living in California, even for a short time, brings about many changes and I wasn't prepared for the things that would happen to me. Or to my reaction to those things...whole new adventures, new people, new locations....

### 1964

June 22, 1964 no time

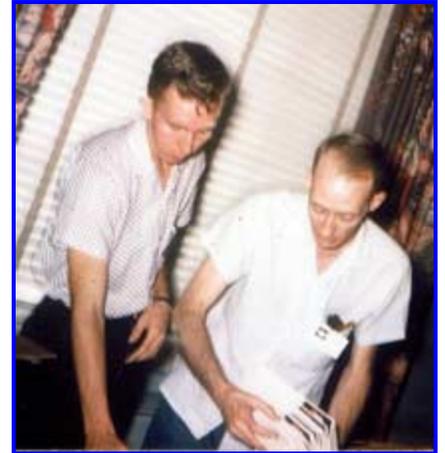
What I am writing about is Cincinnati, this upcoming weekend. I am going to call the North Plaza up tonight and try to get a reservation. I should be in Cincinnati well before midnight Friday evening. As usual there will be room for you and you should sneak in, not register.

July 29, 1964

This is a preliminary run-down on what Advent will be doing at the convention. I am writing this note this much ahead of time because I have time to do it now, and might not later. I will check last minute details with George Price before he leaves here just in case something happens that I don't turn up there, then the rest of you can take it from that point.

Personally all my travel plans to the con have been junked in the face of a company business trip that (with all good fortune) will find me flying into Oakland Friday AM of the con, straight from a tour of southern Calif. and northern Mexico. (I will arrive with Frank Robinson, Wm Hamling, and I don't know whom all else.) So it now becomes impossible for me to transport anything Advent-wise to the con. I am having a few things sent directly there. Some portion of the packages will be shipped to me c/o Alva Rogers at Alva's house. Some portion of the packages will be shipped to me c/o the Lemington. In any case, the first one there of our group should make every attempt to claim all these packages and get them in one central place (like their room). Some material will have to be moved from Chicago to the con, either via George or Jon and I think the two of them should iron that out between them. Only a minimum amount should go, we can always take orders for anything we (lucky?) sellout of. I will have material sent to only those two places. That material will be: (1) between 100 and 200 copies of Avalon books that Advent has on consignment at 75 cents each to retail at \$1.50 each. Advent partners can purchase their choice, first opening of packages, at 80 cents a copy (the extra nickel is to pay the freight. Advent pays 50% of the freight total for both ways). There might possibly be some cheaper Avalons in the group, check with George in Oakland for details on this if they materialize, it is not for sure at this writing that they will. (2) There is a possibility we will have some Gnome titles on a similar arrangement; no details now, again see George in Oakland. We will be retailing no one else's material, and we wouldn't be handling these except for the high profit possibilities. (3) New edition of *SF Novel* in paperback, for sure, and a possibility of having some bound copies for sale. (4) *Of Worlds Beyond* in paperback for sure, and similar for bounds as #3. (5) A very slight possibility of having *Requiem* in bound only, no paperback for a year or so. Holdup is at binders who are swamped; pulling all possible strings and will settle for air express partial shipment to Oakland. Be sure to check George for details on all these, especially prices, as some are not marked right now.

*The Issue at Hand*, by William Atheling, Jr. is definitely out as a possibility, but we can take orders...we will have



Jim O'Meara and Earl Kemp. Pittcon, Pittsburgh, PA, September 1960.

the book by late October. *Proceedings 21* has a slight chance of appearing February 1965...hand out that date anyway.

On the Avalons, we might take orders for other titles far drop-shipment later, ask George for details.

According to George we made a pile of money this year, all this heavy manufacturing (4 titles) at the end of the year is going to eat up all that lovely profit and save our necks income tax wise, *except* if we don't hustle and sell like mad at Oakland we will have to dig into the savings account again to pay for this manufacturing. I estimate a total outlay from July to October at \$2,300.00 for manufacturing alone. So, all you guys, sell like mad at Oakland. (And even at that it means spending some of the \$700 advance for *Proceedings 21*, and we'll have to dig into our own recourses to replace that. Again, unless we sell like mad at Oakland.)

I can't think of anything else right at the moment. While this sounds like I might not make it (or will arrive late), believe me I will make every attempt to be there. ((Afterthought, the royalty statements are due August 28, before the con, and this will use up an additional block of cash. Sell harder.)) For all I know, once again we will all be assembled en masse. We will have a meeting to discuss the next year's output, which should be a hell of a big impressive year (and expensive, but the payoff will be wild). George, before you leave here be sure to check with me on all these specific points because I just might forget to tell you. I should be leaving town around Aug 29 to 31st. See you all soon.

Undated

Advent Partners:

This is not your once a year letter; that's two years away. I do want you all to know that Advent has due before Christmas two manuscripts, Blish's Atheling collection and Rogers' *ASF* book. I would like to propose the following four items for publication soon and invite your comments, nay, request that you force yourself to comment on these to me as soon as you can.

1. *The Illustrated Tarzan Book*, an oversize picture book, similar to a big-little book but in 8½ x 11 format, I believe. Produced in 1929 and now believed to be in the public domain and ideal for offset reproduction.

2. *Tarzan and the Crystal Vaults of Isis*. This, in 1933, was a set of 50 premium cards with candy bars. One side a picture, the other text. Ideally lending itself to "small" book production. There is only one known, to me, complete set in existence. I have written trying to borrow it to quickly and Photostat a copy. This, too, is believed to be in the public domain.

It would be ideal to produce either of these above items quickly to capture some of the Edgar Rice Burroughs market which, if you don't know, accounts for damn near half of all current paperback sales. And, in either case, we would pay the Library of Congress to institute a copyright search to make sure they were free and clear before any production would be done on either.

3. *Francis Towner Laney and Ah! Sweet Idiocy*. This would be Alva Rogers' long article on FTL and *ASI* just published by Dick Eney as a fanzine by itself, to serve as an introduction to *ASI* itself. Both these items are pd. Ideally they would be souped-up by delving into someone's collection of period photos to show the people actually involved at the time. It might even be possible, at this late date, to prevail upon Forry to open his photo vault and cooperate with the project. Ideal for the "wronged" man to show such good grace, etc. Possible, too, to include additional articles by people who knew FTL and the *ASI* incidents well. i.e. J. Francis McComas, etc. This one would have to be rushed because rumor hath that LASFS (Pelz personally) is conducting extensive tape interviews of the people involved about the incident and whatever it is he has in mind would have to be nipped in the bud by us evil depraved crooks.

4. *Who Killed SF?* It suddenly occurred to me, a few days ago, that there might be a market for this as an historical item, a curiosity item, or what have you. Since, I know for a fact only 122 copies are floating around, it might be shrewd to revise (meaning proofread, restore RAH and PJF to their proper place) and reissue it. Remembering, in this case, we can trade on the Hugo symbol for whatever prestige it offers.

There is nothing else to report of any significance. *Proceedings '63* are being transcribed, with first installment due before Christmas. One of six, I believe. Putting production on this somewhere around March or April.

All of the above four items exist in handy, locatable form. No. 1 might have to be purchased at a ridiculous price, \$3.50 to \$35.00, depending on where. No. 2 is not for sale anywhere that I know of, and may have to be rented at a very ridiculous price. No. 3 and 4, I have on hand except for any special material to be gathered for No. 3.

*Of Worlds Beyond* to the printer momentarily with *SFNovel* following quickly on its heels.

## 1965

Tuesday, May 18, 1965

Last weekend we had open house at our new house in El Cajon for the people I work with. There are so many of them now that we had to have two consecutive parties (Friday and Saturday) to squeeze them all in. It was quite a drag, but that particular obligation is done for at least a year. We still have, staring us in the face, a similar, invitation only, affair for LA fandom. I don't know when we'll get up nerve enough to pull it off though. The weekend before, Frank Robinson came to visit us. We took a quiet little trip down into sleepy Mexico with him, to Tecate (the home of Carta Blanca beer), because he didn't want to be exposed to any of the tourist traps of Tijuana.



Erik Kemp at Fuck You rock.

This Thursday night Nancy and I are going out to dinner (to Tijuana) and to what is becoming "our" place, the Flamingo nightclub. Jim, you will remember this is the place I described with the great dance orchestra and the over-the-cliff urinal. Well, the men's room has now been walled in, spoiling all the fun. Half of the people I work with are ex-Chicagoans, and that makes for some form of compatibility, but none of them swing.

Here there is a vast desert mix between gaps of communication, but none so wide as those there. We have toured the deserts and the mountains with great joy, saving lower Baja California for some extra special occasion.

We had a real live nude model at work the other day. We have our own photography studio in the office. She was the first of many to come. Some fifty usable shots were made.

Some fun. My private office has a picture window opening directly into the studio. It was a different day.

Tuesday, July 13, 1965

I have done many things, and been to many places since I last wrote you. I have a million things to tell you, if I could have an opportunity to talk to you, if I could talk to you. There are many new acquaintances, but no real friends, there is no one to talk to.

Bob Briney came to visit us and stayed a little over a week. His visit included attending the Westercon, which, incidentally, will be in San Diego next year (?). While there, Ed Cox and Doreen Webbert both made repeated points that I should say hello to you for them. Bill Rotsler was there, with another professional, this time a stripper in full breakaway regalia. Not nearly as impressive as Jodi, but I'm sure Bill got lots of good pictures of her anyway. Harlan Ellison was there, in rare form, and it was a genuine pleasure to see him again, especially just to talk with him without his cutting wit (?) interfering. To hear him, he's doing great guns and working on a "really big" script of *The Oscar*.

Went to the bullfights this Sunday past, they were reasonably good. It was our first live fight, even though fights are on TV every Saturday from Tijuana (videotaped). It was a most impressive afternoon that had many oddities about it aside from the fights themselves...oddities involving the spectators, the widely different types, the tourists, the natives, the Mexicans, etc.

As far as Baja California is concerned, I find it very intriguing, compelling, captivating, pulling me back again and again (once or twice a week). So much so that I have almost talked Greenleaf into doing a book about Tijuana, with me writing it and Rotsler photo-illustrating it. At least I got a tentative go-ahead to work up sample chapters. Rotsler agreed to the collaboration, too. But more than Tijuana and its synthetic sin, its fraudulent bullfights, is the land itself, the cliffs along the seashore, the massive waves that roll in and crash along the white beaches, hundreds of feet below. The sounds, the smells, the stinks, the perfumes, all subtly different. The food, out of this world. I am just now getting to the point where I am brave enough to divert my pathway from the tourist's traps and strike out seeking native places (where the prices drop by 75%). They are the best of all. I must take a night course in Spanish soon, the world is leaving me silently behind.

Sunday, around 6:30 PM, as the height of the crush of the bullfight tourists crowd sought restaurants, we walked into the Fronton Palace. The place was jammed wall to wall, there was a long waiting line of grumbling people behind the red-velvet rope. We pushed through the crowd to the rope where the headwaiter informed us that it would be almost hopeless to wait. I said, "How long do you think it will be, Felix?" And he looked at me again, harder, and said, "Sorry, sir, I didn't recognize you. I think we can fix you up." And he took us to the biggest, ringside table right against the dance floor beside the music. Many people grumbled, but it felt awfully good. .

Tomorrow night a visiting fireman is to be shown the fleshpots of Tijuana. Saturday I am going mountain climbing with the neighborhood kids (Edith's group of swains who are going to take the old man out into the desert and see how he sizzles) and Sunday cruising out to the Coronado Islands off Mexico some 60 miles offshore.

Monday August 30, 1965

I have gone through many series of traumas since you last saw me, and the end result is absolutely no time left over for communication this does not mean "out of sight, out of mind."



King of the mountain...somewhere in Mexico...land of the freer.

And what do I have in exchange for my monumental losses, not much. At best it can be summed up in two categories, cash and health. I am making more money out here, and I have never felt so good in my life, and I don't trust the latter. The money, just pass it over as the fortunes of war that carry with it some of the damnedest responsibilities I have ever imagined and supervision of a staff now comprising six full-time workers (excluding me) plus four part-time workers, with no end in sight. The health, you will have to blame that on the sun, and on the atmospheric conditions. Only incidentally that I gave up smoking some seven weeks or two months ago. I have gained around 32 pounds, my lungs have cleared out the Chicago smog, and I have the damnedest suntan in existence. It is an all-over tan (the California kind) that is peeling in three separate layers but at bottom, a lush tan. This one will stick with me all year round, they tell me.

Southern California living is a fraud that can't really be described. Housing is ridiculously easy to come by, and

priced just about at Chicago prices, everything else is priced off the map, some 15 to 30% higher than Chicago. This particular area is very small, and does not yet have a smog problem as such, but rumors are that one will be imported. San Diego is a disgusting town that is old and dirty and very dead. The downtown area is nothing but a few blocks of crumbling buildings that house tawdry bars and pick-up joints for sailors. There are a few strip joints (with one really first-rate old-time burlesque theater) and many interesting bookstores selling photographs (“the kind men like”). The entire population of downtown (nighttime) San Diego seems to consist of fags and sailors trying to be picked up by fags, the local shows don’t stand a chance with the sailors because they aren’t interested.

Whatever industry there was locally has long since departed leaving the area in almost disaster area conditions. The only industry is in navy retirement and tourism. There are roughly some ten superb restaurants; all else is dreck of the worst sort. Every nightspot of any type, of any measure of goodness, has an orchestra, a floorshow, and dancing (usually rock ‘n roll music and the latest dances, jerk, watusi, etc.). I have never seen so many bands and danced so much. SD is also a water area and water rates are very cheap. We water the lawn almost every day like it’ll be outlawed tomorrow. We also spend almost every spare moment somewhere near water. I have had to buy two new bathing suits in the last month because I don’t have a dry one; there is always one or two wet ones hanging up on the patio. I have learned to roll in the waves off La Jolla, to jump and be buffeted by the harsh salt water, and to love it. On Silver Strand, or North Cove, or Mission Beach, or (best of all) the totally deserted stretches of sand about five miles south of Rosarita Beach (roughly 20 miles south of Tijuana) where the primitive comes out when the civilized clothes disappear.

The house; at the risk of repeating myself...we are mortgaged up to here on a four-bedroom house that’s around five years old. It is on a huge lot in El Cajon and we have planted a wide variety of trees and plants, mostly citrus and fruit trees. Our first orange is almost the size of a ping-pong ball at the moment, and we examine it every day. The lime tree is just turning from blossom to fruit and it looks like some two-dozen will eventually grow. Three other orange trees have beginning fruit on them. The lot is fenced on three sides (open on the front) and within the very near future we hope to fence in with a barbecue table and a barbecue grill, and eat out there frequently. We hope to be able to enlarge the patio and to put in a swimming pool within the next few weeks. We feel out of place because almost everyone we are newly friends with have pools and we are like beggars running from one of their pools to the next one.

The original intention was to avoid all the new neighbors like the plague. We were successful except in three instances, immediately besides us on both sides, and one house away on the left. Other than that we ignore the neighbors. We have discovered a small group of expatriate Chicagoans and do most all our socializing with them.

We spend a little time in Tijuana, now that we have learned a few of the better native spots to go to. Go to the jai alai games frequently, and to an occasional bullfight. But mostly we just go to various places to hear the local bands, or favorite being a big Latin band at the Flamingo with the sexiest little vocalist I ever saw. Getting adept at faking the rumba, maybe I’ll take lessons some day.

Another friend of ours has a 16-foot sailboat and I have been out in the Pacific with him a time or two, including one wild chase when the harbor patrol tracked us down while we tossed weed overboard, but that is another story.

Since there is absolutely nothing to do big-city entertainment wise (roughly five first-run movie houses, some twenty rerun houses), I have picked up a little on the rural bit. For instance, I have a resident hunting license (legal, six months), and have applied for and received permission (only some 1,500 such granted) to participate in this year’s special antlerless deer hunt (which means doe to you). I go out target shooting (15 minutes from the house) where there is an abundance of jackrabbits, funny birds, pack rats, and rattlesnakes. The local 18-year-old male population that hangs around Edith is very nice to me, for some unexplained reason. A few weeks ago they took me out mountain climbing and I learned a horrible lesson; 35 year olds can’t quite keep up with 18 year olds. Coming down the side of a treacherous mountain I suddenly found myself at a point where there was no way to go but straight down some ten feet. I jumped, fracturing one foot and severely bruising the other. Undaunted, I managed to climb the rest of the way down the mountain, walk two miles to the car, drive some 50 miles to home, then to the



Mary Bonfils in their fabulous sailboat in Baja de Toto Santos, Ensenada Harbor, Baja California, Mexico.

local hospital where some \$70 and ten minutes later, I had my cast on. I am still not totally recuperated, walking painfully with a slight limp. Nevertheless, swimming is very good for my feet, it says in fine print. Another of the local kids has a speedboat and I went out water skiing with them last Sunday, but I did not try to ski, using my still-aching feet as an excuse, however I know I will try it soon, you may never hear from me again. But it sure is fun cutting through the waves in that boat...wow!

Coming up in the near future is horseback riding, desert camping, and mountain climbing (when I can again). Everywhere you go around here (except the real expensive joints) you get served and/or entertained by "topless" girls. I am getting sick of bare tits and feel it's just a little much when the barmaid, table-hopping, comes a bob-bobbing along. Knocked hell out of the local strip joints, too, with no end in sight.

I can't figure out why I have no time, but I don't. I had much more time in Chicago. We have entertained publicly twice since we have been here, privately (meaning one to three persons) a very few times. We have avoided all the local fan types to the point of being rude about it. Not, however, friends (we did entertain Alva and Sid Rogers and have open invitations out to several more California types). I do mow the lawn (and it is a big one, requiring half a day via power mower), prune the trees and shrubs, fertilize the citrus, etc. Sometimes I feel like a real hick again, and then I want to go out and do something metropolitan and know that it's over a two hour-drive to Los Angeles (where something metropolitan is possible if you can avoid the Hollywood crowd) and the smog is deadly. These are the times when I cry because I can't jump into the car and zip down to X theater, or to Y club, to Z restaurant.



Bob and Mary Bonfils with Earl Kemp as boatmaster in "Little Red" exploring Mexico.

I thought I escaped from ruralism when I was 16, but no, here I am again. As far as the house is concerned, it is some three minutes from an expressway exit, and (when we finally put in the rest of the fence) is a self-contained unit existing free of the neighbors, so that doesn't matter if it is in the suburbs or not. The ruralism I mean is a state of mind. Local television, for instance, caters to an exaggerated "hayseed" theme that makes me want to vomit. There is no formalized nightwear, except in very exceptional spots, and you might find yourself mixing with people in suits and ties, and cowboy boots and Levi's, and any degree between. 25 percent of the people I see day to day do not wear shoes at all, and fully another 25 percent wear thongs (Japanese rubber, toe-through). Shorts and open shirts are accepted for most offices, and it is the very rare person (of either sex, ever caught wearing underwear of any sort. Most males under the age of 25 have hair longer than the girls of the same age group. 25 percent of that is natural platinum blonde; another

15 percent is peroxidized. Most of it is well-tended, curled, set, waved, etc. Surfing is a way of life. The Japanese have taken over locally, transportation wise, with Honda, Yamaha, and Datsun. The close second, ironically, is Mercedes Benz (about every sixth car you see out here).

It is very pleasant to know that any atmosphere you want, geographically speaking, you can find within 15 driving minutes of the house (including roads impassable in the winter). It is distressing to know that it has snowed once (on record, in the city of El Cajon where the year-round temperature is supposed to be 65 to 90 at noon. But it does get quite cold in the winter, they tell me, even frosts occasionally. Also the city boasts more horses than Phoenix and more swimming pools than Miami (per capita), why, I don't know. Swimming pools are year-round things here, and the last heat wave of the old year always comes in January (hearsay again). You can never go out anywhere after dark without a coat, or if you stupidly do, you deserve whatever happens to you in the way of pneumonia. There is a drastic temperature drop around 7 PM, and you sleep under blankets every night and we (though it infuriates the neighbors) have even been known to boost the thermostat at night to turn the heat on for a few minutes. The last person who lived in this house boasted to us that they had never had the furnace turned on the entire time they lived here.

This whole area is a very unusual phenomenon. I hope I have made you feel a bit of it.

Monday August 30, 1965 2:00 PM

We went fishing again from Ensenada. We went out to the Todos Santos islands and caught several nice fish,

including two big bonitas; enough to keep all our neighbors in fish, anyway. This was a particularly exciting fishing trip because we managed to adopt a native Tijuanan (in Ensenada) who turned out to have a better command of English than either of us and much more money (including a 200-acre ranch some 40 miles from our house. Damned clever these 15-year-old Mexican kids. He lives in a big fancy house on the outskirts of Tijuana and we plan to get to know him better. Among other things, this last trip coincided with the opening of lobster season and we were determined to bring back our limit (10 each; there were four of us). Unfortunately, by the time we were ready to leave town and headed for the fish market to make our purchase, it was late in the day and they were sold out of lobster. Undaunted, we persuaded the fishermen to slip out under cover of darkness (which necessitated our staying over until after dark) and rob some illegally placed lobster traps. They did, and we headed home with 40 of the most gorgeous live lobsters you ever saw, big and fat and noisy. We got back to the Bonfils house (in San Diego) at 11:30 PM and proceeded to cook, clean, package, and freeze the beasts for the rest of the night. We were in good shape for work Monday morning.

As to the house, the yard is in a hell of a mess, it is torn up in every possible direction. Also I have had my first run-in with the El Cajon city building department. We had some nice little arguments about our swimming pool, but it is almost all ironed out by now. Most of the arguments consisted of "placement" questions; I wanted something here and they said I couldn't put it there, but ten feet away would be okay. So after I finally got argued out about the pool, I had to start arguing again about the fence around the pool.

To make a long story short, yesterday with the pool clean and operative for the first time, with the fence 90 percent finished, we went in swimming...us and five neighbor children. We stayed in most all afternoon and had a hell of a good time, and this morning I noticed I have the start of a new suntan working for me.

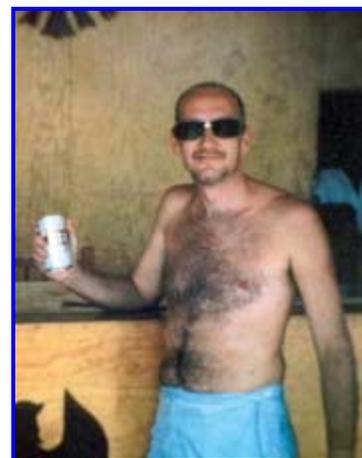
That was our unofficial opening ceremonies, the first time anyone went into the pool. We are planning to have our 3rd annual Halloween Costume Party and Pool Grand Opening this Halloween. Of course there won't be anyone there, but it is the thought that counts.

## 1966

April 18, 1966

Frank Robinson has just left here yesterday after almost a month (on a while, off a while) visit. While he was here I managed to introduce him to a fair sampling of the things that I do these days, the people I now know, etc. The next time you are in Chicago call him up, ask him about me, about the woods, the bamboo jungle. Ask him anything. He can tell you more than any letters can.

I have a short-term lease on a reasonably close friend. Harold, a neighbor, who is going into the Marines in June (hence short-term). We share a phenomenal amount of similar inclinations, empathize, but can't vocalize on hardly anything but out-of-doors subjects. It was he with whom I broke my leg. I have at the moment (since Saturday) four beautiful fang marks in my right hand where his king snake bit me. We, in the company of various others (Frank, Bob and Mary Bonfils, etc), somehow manage to spend part of each weekend out in the wilds of nature somewhere. Swimming (although I haven't been in the pool since just before Christmas) seems to be our major past time, with damned near every stream around here tried out for size, varmint hunting, lizard chasing, beer drinking. We have now discovered where the more interesting shows take place in TJ, where the more private type movies are displayed, and where to buy XXX cheapest. (XXX being the brand name for superior quality beer.)



My first favorite Mexican *cerveza*, *Tres Equis*...the fabled XXX.

I was in a head-on automobile collision (the passenger in the back seat) a couple of weeks ago on a desolate road. It cost me the loss of three front teeth, buckets of blood, and a split lip (I will have a small scar). But it really was quite minor. My feet are cut and scratched like mad from running barefoot through underbrush. My left kneecap is bruised like crazy from slipping on a mossy rock Saturday while wrestling in a mountain stream. My muscles ache all over.

I have changed. Mostly for the better. I think I will shave off my beard next. My goatee, rather. I have a very close-chopped hair cut. I gave up smoking totally last mid-June. I now weigh 160 pounds, yet still wear 31" trousers. At first my extra weight was all fat, but I've managed to trim it down to something closely resembling muscle. I have a little suntan all over, and a great deal above the waistline for the more prudish neighborhoods. I eat like a horse, run a lot, roll and tumble, and have never felt so goddamned good in my life. Believe me, there's something delightful about clearing all that nicotine shit out of your lungs.

Ray and Dick Sieben, I'm sure you will remember them, are arriving tomorrow to spend a week with us. I'm sure we will have a great time. I'm only sorry that a month isn't time enough for all the good things. With Dick and Ray, though, it will have to be a very quiet, inexpensive time. We have just paid the income taxes, both Federal and State, and are in the worst possible fix. The only thing they really wanted to do was to go fishing around the Todos Santos islands off Ensenada, so we will go Friday and Saturday.

Wednesday November 9, 1966 no time

We went to the bullfight a couple of Sundays ago to see El Cordobes, the world's greatest etc. and believe me he was magnificent. Totally unbelievable, the things he did in that ring, and the things he made the bulls do. Nancy and I have discovered a particularly good restaurant in Tijuana that we know you would like and we are very anxious to show you around TJ.

**1967**

March 8, 1967 no time

Tonight we are planning to go see *Tobruk*. I understand that the movie is a dog from every viewpoint, but it has special significance. During the filming of it several of us camped out on the set itself, and went wrestling around on the beach (that had just been swept and made photogenic), disrupting the soil placement and scrawling wicked words all over. Also, one of the canals used as a checkpoint in the film has been a place of frequent bareass swimming. Terry is going with us to this film, as all the places in it (particularly the sand dunes) are also favorite spots of his. He is growing up quickly, and turning into quite a precocious pain in the ass. Precocious only in that he works at it; it isn't natural I don't think. Last year I turned both he and Erik onto swimming without suits on; now they can keep up with most of the neighbors.

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Sometimes I think it is a great mistake to have matter that can think and feel. It complains so. By the same token, though, I suppose that boulders and mountains and moons could be accused of being a little too phlegmatic  
-- Kurt Vonnegut, *Sirens of Titan*

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# Bartender, a Case of Reynolds for My Pal!

by Dick Lupoff

Few years ago Fender Tucker turned up in Berkeley. We had a great time alternating visits to local pubs and antiquarian bookshops. Fender was running a little publishing company called Ramble House and he'd reissued a couple of my older titles as well as doing first editions of some of my more offbeat and difficult-to-market books.



Richard Lupoff. Photo by Earl Terry Kemp, LAPB, Mission Hills, CA, March 2009.

Computer scanners, handy software packages, and print-on-demand production have led to a proliferation of companies like Ramble House. And dedicated bookmen like Fender Tucker have done an amazing job in recent years of turning out books of real but specialized value. The term, I am told, is “niche publishing.”

Fender and I spent many happy hours in Berkeley and neighboring Oakland prowling through dusty corridors lined with musty volumes, seeking obscure and out-of-print novels that might be fodder for Ramble House and its many thousands of enthusiastic customers. Once we got back to my own house, there was no keeping Fender from trolling the Lupoff catacombs in search of more candidates for resurrection.

At the time, Fender lived in Shreveport, Louisiana, a town not widely known as a Mecca for antiquarian book lovers. Since then he has moved to Vancleave, Mississippi, a metropolis that offers more – perhaps I should say less – of the same. In Berkeley, California, a university town that would rather be known as the Athens of the West, its onetime identity, than the stewpot of anarchy and radicalism that it was a few decades ago, Fender was in heaven.

As he wandered past the bookcases in my home, he would stop occasionally and ask me about an odd volume. Finally he halted in front of a modest volume with a white spine, covered in protective cellophane. He pulled it from the shelf and saw that it was *The Case of the Little Green Men*, published in 1951 by one of the less successful (and consequently, nowadays, most sought-after) of poverty row publishers, Phoenix Press.

“What’s this?” Fender asked.

“Mack Reynolds’ first novel,” I told him.

In case the reader is a very young child or perhaps the victim of Deros who was held in the caverns beneath the earth’s crust for the second half of the twentieth century, I should mention that Mack Reynolds (1917 - 1983) was one of the better science fiction writers of that period. He was never quite a headliner of the Heinlein – Asimov – Bradbury class, but his stories were original, they moved fast and they made an impression on the reader. He appeared in many science fiction magazines including *Galaxy*, *F&SF*, and *Analog* as well as numerous anthologies. As far as I can determine, he also wrote more than fifty books, but the latter were almost all paperback originals which have long since disappeared from bookstore shelves – they never made it into libraries -- and out of print, preserved when at all mainly by collectors.

Despite its suggestive title, *The Case of the Little Green Men* is not a science fiction novel. Its protagonist, one Jeb Knight, is a standard-model private eye. He operates out of a generic American city which seems to be cobbled together from pieces of Chicago and Los Angeles. Business is lousy and he’s thinking of throwing in the towel and looking for other work when a trio of prospective clients arrive. They are local science fiction fans. They assert that aliens have infiltrated the fan community and they want Knight to find them.

Knight pegs the fans as wingnuts and the assignment as ridiculous, but he also figures it for a simple job and a chance to pick up an easy buck, so he takes the assignment.

I will tell you no more about the plot, except in very broad terms. A leading fan is murdered, Knight is – par for the

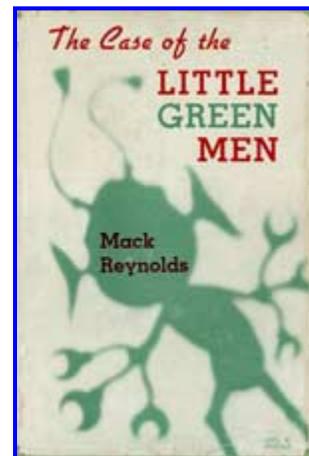
course, naturally! – suspected by the police, and the whole wild chase ends in a boffo scene at the World Science Fiction Convention.

Here's a clue for practitioners of the Higher Criticism. The First World Science Fiction Convention took place in New York City in 1939 in conjunction with the World's Fair of that year. The convention in *The Case of the Little Green Men* is called the Annicon, and if I read correctly, it is so named because it takes place on the tenth anniversary of the first Worldcon. Exercising my limited mathematical talents, that would place the Annicon in 1949. The actual Worldcon of that year was the Cinvention, located in Cincinnati. Which dovetails nicely with a book published in 1951.

But I digress.

Why, one asks, had this *tour de force* been out of print for more than half a century, following its sole appearance from a minor, a very minor, publisher? It isn't for lack of readability. Not that *The Case of the Little Green Men* is exactly the Great American Novel. It's grand, lightweight fun. It also provides a fascinating look at the inner workings of the fan community in its era. As such it should stand with Fredric Brown's *What Mad Universe* and Anthony Boucher's *Rocket to the Morgue*.

No, not lack of readability. I think – and I'm mainly guessing here – it was because Reynolds soon established himself as a science fiction writer. His publishers, aside from the major SF magazines of the day, were mainly science fiction publishers, most often Donald Wollheim's Ace Books. *The Case of the Little Green Men* was fun but it just didn't fit in.



And Mack Reynolds, a man of towering social consciousness and serious political convictions, had other fish to fry.

Still and all, the book shouldn't be forgotten.

Where did my personal copy come from? I must confess that I don't know. You can find copies of the Phoenix Press edition for sale nowadays, but they're pricey. You'll shell out many shekels for one. My own copy has a used-book dealer's price still on the flyleaf. Eighty-five cents. I must have picked it up long, long ago off a bargain table. Or maybe at a neighborhood yard sale.

I'm losing my mind, Dave.

Oh, my!

In the meanwhile, Fender Tucker had asked me to establish a kind of boutique imprint under the Ramble House aegis. This led to the creation of Surinam Turtle Press. *The Case of the Little Green Men* looked like a perfect candidate for a Surinam edition, but the question arose, were the rights to the book available?

We couldn't find either a Reynolds estate or an agent for the estate of Mack Reynolds. A query to SFWA was ignored – one of a number of such queries we have attempted, none of which have drawn even a courtesy response. Fender and I had pretty much decided to go ahead anyway, including a disclaimer in our edition should any claimant to the Reynolds rights send a shot across our bow.

When what to our wondering eyes should appear, but a buzz from longtime pal Earl Kemp. Brother Earl, it turned out, had been a good friend of Mack Reynolds's. Further, Earl had been in contact with Mack's son, Emil Reynolds.

Sometimes God works in mysterious ways, his wonders to perform!

In due course Ramble House / Surinam Turtle Press had obtained rights to the book. Not only that, Emil Reynolds wrote a brief memoir of his dad and Earl Kemp wrote a splendid essay recalling his friendship with Mack.

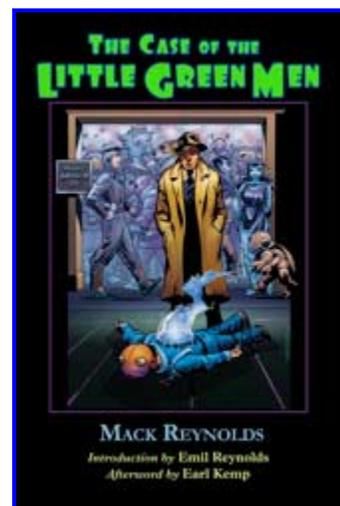
We were ready to roll!

When we set about to design the Surinam edition of *The Case of the Little Green Men* the first thing we did was look at the dust jacket of the 1951 version. It features a fuzzy-edged, vaguely humanoid green figure against a white background. It's credited to Carl W. Bertsch, about whom I have been unable to learn very much. He did illustrate several books published in the early 1950s, and I have located books on home carpentry (!) by Carl W. Bertsch. Is this the same fellow? Deponent knoweth not.

We decided on a new cover design, and were incredibly fortunate to catch Steve Leialoha in a mellow moment. Steve was just finishing up a huge (and presumably lucrative) job of illustrating a graphic novel for DC Comics. We got him to read *The Case of the Little Green Men* and he enjoyed the experience so much that he agreed to do the job for Surinam's generous pay rates (an expired BART ticket and a stale candy bar).

The result was a glorious illustration which appears on the dust jacket of our hardcover edition and the cover of our paperback in spectacular color, as well as serving as a frontispiece in black and white. Our designer, Gavin O'Keefe, fit Steve's illustration into the standard Surinam cover design and added lettering in (naturally) eye-searing green.

You really ought to check this book out. What the heck, spend a few rupees. You won't regret it. You can order it directly from the publisher at [fender@ramblehouse.com](mailto:fender@ramblehouse.com). You can also get it from Amazon.com, but believe me, you'll perform a *mitzvah* if you cut out the middleman and buy it from Fender. And you will enjoy visiting the Ramble House / Surinam Turtle Press website. Just google [Ramble House](http://Ramble House). You'll be amazed at some of the books you find there.



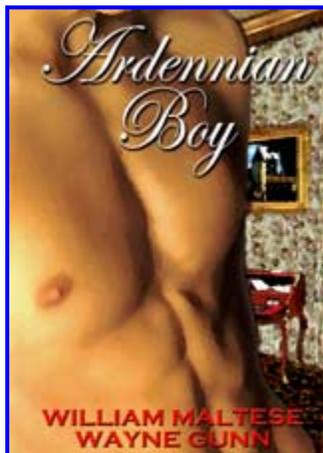
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And I asked myself about the present. How wide it was, how deep it was, how much was mine to keep.  
-- Kurt Vonnegut

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# The History of a Collection

by Drewey Wayne Gunn



William Maltese and Wayne Gunn. *Ardennian Boy*. MLR Press, 2007. Artist: Deana C. Jamroz.

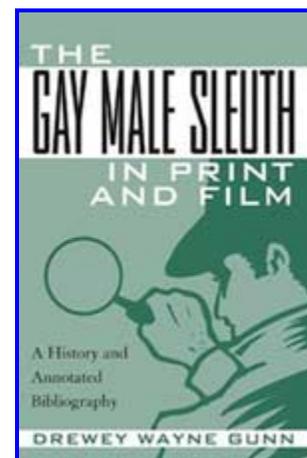
Laura Baumbach is a class act. She is the publisher of MLR Press. To this day I still have not thought to ask William Maltese how he hooked up with her; I just remain grateful that she published our book, *Ardennian Boy* (2007), a novel about the French poets Rimbaud and Verlaine. To William's shock it went on to be shortlisted for a Lambda Literary Award (to Laura's disappointment it didn't win). Sometime in the midst of that adventure, Laura and I spent a delightful afternoon at a restaurant in Corpus Christi. We found that we had many things to talk about, and it may have been then that I mentioned to her an idea that had long been taking shape in the back of my mind: to edit a collection of essays about the importance of gay pulps to the development of contemporary gay literature.

(At this point, Robert Speray and Chris Eckhoff, if they are reading this, have started shaking their heads. They have not given up trying to convince me that *pulp* is not the appropriate term to use for those wonderful naughty paperback originals that flourished during the 1960s and 1970s before running out of steam in the 1980s under the onslaught of even naughtier, readily available videos. And maybe for the straight world, *pulp* is a term to be used only for magazines. I don't know. But "gay pulp" and "lesbian pulp" for at least twenty years have been the acceptable labels we gays have given to the books. For me to pretend otherwise seems, well, pretentious.)

I first became aware of the importance of gay pulps to contemporary gay literature as the result of another book I wrote, *The Gay Male Sleuth in Print and Film* (Scarecrow Press, 2005). Before my study, the little that had been written on the subject held that, although a few gay mysteries had been published in the 1960s and 1970s, as a rule they had not flourished until the 1980s and 1990s. Yet I discovered more than 80 mysteries that had been published before 1980 by Greenleaf Classics, Brandon House, Midwood, and other such publishers specializing in erotica. True, in length they were all more novellas than full-fledged novels, but some of them were as good as the stuff published in *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine*.

The very first gay American mystery, aptly titled *The Gay Detective*, was, in fact, published in 1961 by one of those "suspect" book publishers, Saber Books. Written by San Francisco chef Lou Rand Hogan as Lou Rand, it is good enough that Cleis Press reprinted it in 2003. Then in 1966 Greenleaf Classics brought out not only the very fine whodunit *Good-bye, My Lover* by J.X. Williams but also the cult classic *The Man from C.A.M.P.* by Don Holliday. Both have also seen recent reprints under the name of their true author, Victor J. Banis. Because of the rapidity with which Victor could turn out books and the quickness with which Greenleaf could publish them, he willy-nilly also ended up writing the very first gay mystery series — not, as is generally asserted, George Baxt (*A Queer Kind of Death*, 1966). Brandon House in 1968-1969 published the first two mysteries by Shamus Lifetime Achievement writer Joseph Hansen, under the pseudonym James Colton. All these books still deserve an audience.

Though back in the late 1960s and early 1970s I was reading pulp novels by Holliday, Richard Amory, Larry Townsend, and names I have long forgotten, I admit that they were serving purposes other than literary ones. But now, as a result of having discovered how good some of these pulp mysteries were, I went on to explore other pulp genres: westerns, military novels, coming out stories, romances. I discovered that, if there are probably no works that measure up to Baldwin's *Giovanni's Room* or Forster's *Maurice*, there yet remain a lot of fine novels that deserve to be collected for their contents as much as for their covers. And I began to realize that such books must have played a greater role in the development of gay pride than had previously been suspected. Heck, they had helped me to come out.



Drewey Wayne Gunn. *The Gay Male Sleuth in Print and Film: A History and Annotated Bibliography*. Scarecrow Press, 2005. Artist: Allison Nealon.

I also became positive that they had to have played a greater role in the development of contemporary gay literature than is generally acknowledged. In another manifestation of the strange double standard always at work in American culture, critics have long given earlier lesbian pulp writers credit for their importance but have ignored similar gay male writers. Yet I find it hard to imagine contemporary gay writers having achieved what they have, had the pulps not led the way.

What was different about pulp novels? For the first time one had fiction that was about ordinary gays having adventures, falling in love, and engaging in lots (and lots) of sex without remorse rather than all those sad, young, self-destructive queers that had been the staple of mainstream writing to that point. And one had for the first time fiction that was marketed directly to gay readers. I cannot possibly over-emphasize the importance of that last fact. Greenleaf, Brandon House, and other such publishers continued to bring out pornography for straights, but for the first time in American history presses began soliciting manuscripts from gay writers on gay subjects targeted for gay readers. Actually, Guild Press in Washington never even looked at the straight market, but went (forgive the word play) straight for gay readers from the beginning.

When I pitched the idea to Laura, what I then envisioned was a collection of essays that would treat this literature with the same respect that Vidal, Baldwin, Forster, Isherwood, and Capote normally received. I thought it would be wonderful to collect reminiscences by some of the writers of those pulps, too many of whom have succumbed, earlier to AIDS and recently to age. Until this point we had only Tom Norman's privately printed history (*American Gay Erotic Paperbacks*), Susan Stryker's collection of gay and lesbian pulp covers (*Queer Pulps*), Michael Bronski's collection of excerpts from some of this writing (*Pulp Friction*), an important essay by David Bergman, the section in my book on gay sleuths, and a few backward looks in various magazines (generally those featuring naked, quite well endowed males). When one examined contemporary gay criticism, it was evident that none of our studies had had any impact on the conservative academic worldview. Since the young were certain that gay liberation began with Stonewall, the Violet Quill continued in all innocence to promulgate the idea that its members had been the ones first to write for gay audiences.

For a long time I heard nothing back from Laura. Her MLR Press (the initials standing for Man Love Romance), after all, is geared to continuing the tradition of the earlier gay pulps, not to reflecting on their existence. Thus, I was delighted when her house editor Judith David wrote me out of the blue to say that MLR Press wanted to do such a collection. Who would I suggest as editor? No blushing violet, it took less time than it is taking me to type this sentence to answer: "Me." And thus I took off on an exciting challenge to my learning curve. I knew the general shape I wanted the collection to take, and I even knew some of the people I wanted to invite to contribute. There were the actual makers such as Victor and William and Earl Kemp. There were the literary and cultural historians such as Norman, Bronski, Ian Young, and QueerHorror.com webmaster Dave Doyle. But there were all sorts of blanks in my knowledge.

For example, I knew nothing about early gay science fiction. Tracking down Rob Latham, whose resulting chapter appears in this issue of *eI* as an example of what you will find in the collection, became an adventure in itself. Dave suggested a possibility, but he didn't work out. None of my other friends knew any more about gay science fiction than I did. So I called upon Charles Flowers, the director of the Lambda Literary Foundation. He hooked me up with an expert in London. After a bit of correspondence, we both realized that he was unable to write the kind of essay I needed. He suggested someone else. Repeat of story. But finally that person got me to Rob, and he proved to be exactly what we needed. (At the time, I had no idea that all I had to do was turn to Earl, and he would have linked me up immediately with Rob.)

I called Ian at the very beginning of the project. He was equally excited and got me in touch with Philip Clark, who is studying Guild Press, and Jan Ewing, another pulp writer (working under the pseudonym Jack Evans). Perfect! But Ian himself wanted to do an article on Rodney Garland, an important British writer who died before gay pulps even existed. There was no way I was going to pass up an essay from the grand old man of American gay letters (even if he is not that old and happens to be Canadian). But that meant that we were going to have to change the shape of the anthology slightly in order to accommodate his chapter. Too, he pushed me to ask Joseph Ortiz to contribute



Wayne Gunn, summer of 1968, as counselor at a summer camp and secret reader of pulp novels. Photographer Daniel Flannery, future cinematographer and Emmy nominee (for *Rosanne*).

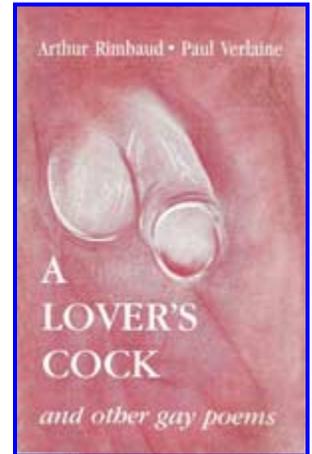
something on Gordon Merrick.

Well, I had already vowed that gay pulp writers were going to be treated with the same respect that the so-called mainstream writers had achieved. Didn't that mean, then, that I had to treat non-pulp writers who had not gained respect in the same way? As I was beginning to discover, anthologies begin taking on a life of their own. I started trying to fill in other holes I saw, such as the importance of Greenberg: Publishers in the early days. As I worked away, I became exhilarated by the discovery that there is much more out there than I had suspected.

So, what is this collection called? After trying out title after title, MLR and I took the easy way out and settled simply on *The Golden Age of Gay Fiction*. It covers the period from roughly 1948 to 1978; that is, from Vidal's *The City and the Pillar* to Amistead Maupin's *Tales of the City*. This is the period when gays in literature began to be, well, gay — gay in all senses of the word. This is the time when publishers discovered there was a market out there for such writing. At the same time, they discovered there were lots of writers willing to provide the books for that market. And, as I said, some of it is quite brilliant in its own way. It was the golden age not just in being first, as Ovid wrote; it was a golden age in terms of quality of writing.

Thus, I was a little taken aback when Christopher Bram (the author of *Father of Frankenstein*, better known in its movie incarnation, *Gods and Monsters*) protested that the title "is kind of a slap for those of us who've been writing *after 1978*." No slap was intended to contemporary writers. But yes, we do want to shake up people a little, give them a little slap on their hind-ends at least, for ignoring too long the very foundations on which writers today are building their own literary domains. There are 19 contributors to the collection, and I guarantee that, when gay readers close the book, they will have compiled a long list of books to try to find from used booksellers. In addition to the chapters I have already mentioned, one will find essays on romance, mystery and crime, military, westerns, and changes in law. It includes the first thorough study of all the books Hansen published as Colton. Curiously, it even has the first set of all the *C.A.M.P.* covers to appear in glowing color within the covers of a book. For yes, the collection also contains almost 200 illustrations, only 15 of which appear in Stryker's book.

Okay, I'm biased. But this work is without question an important contribution to gay letters, bringing together as it does information nowhere else available. It is also a pleasure to hold in your hands. Deana Jamroz and Kris Jancen created a very handsome, quite distinctive 8.5" square format. It sets off artist Paul Richmond's nostalgic cover, recording an age already vanished before he was born. And it brings all 23 chapters vividly to life. Look: if for no other reason, do regular *eI* readers really want to pass up the chance to read witty, delightfully opinionated, and quite enlightening essays by Earl and Victor and William? I hope not!



Arthur Rimbaud and Paul Verlaine. *A Lover's Cock and Other Gay Poems*. Trans. Wayne Gunn and Jacques Murat. Gay Sunshine Press, 1979. Artist: Nuki.

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Say what you will about the sweet miracle of unquestioning faith, I consider a capacity for it terrifying and absolutely vile.

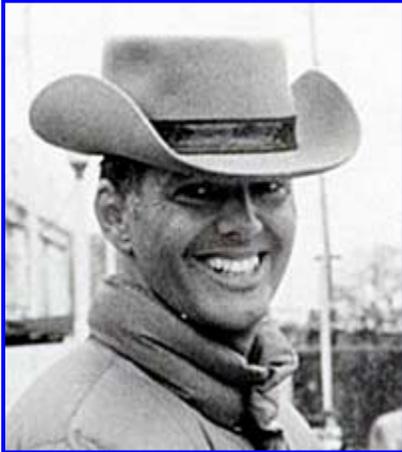
-- Kurt Vonnegut, *Mother Night*

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# ...Whip It Out!

by William Maltese

As readers of Wayne Gunn's book, *The Golden Age of Gay Fiction*, will learn, if they don't know it already, I've been around a good many years, having cut my literary teeth writing articles for men's magazines, like *Argosy*, in the sixties, and, then, having gravitated to the likes of Greenleaf Classics, during the heyday of pulp fiction, gay and straight.



William Maltese

I've written a good many things which saw the light of day soon after being written; a few, though, simply got filed away, literally, into a deep dark trunk. Some emerged only recently for publication by Wildside/Borgo, including my straight bondage-and-discipline book, *SS&M*, that's so hard-core I thought it would probably never make it to the book stands. Also, brought to light has been my autobiographical *Confessions of a Porno Writer—at Twenty-Two*; firstly, because Wayne checked in, asking me to contribute to his book, and I needed a quick reference for that particular time of my life (my memory not what it used to be); secondly, because Wildside/Borgo asked if I'd be interested in an autobiography, and I thought the long-neglected book might make for a good beginning; thirdly, because Earl asked if I'd like to contribute something by way of promoting Wayne's new book. As regards the latter, there's nothing likely to portray what I was about, during those years, than excerpts from the journal I was keeping at the time.

At the dawning of pulps Golden Age, I had just been honorably discharged from the U.S. Army, after an enlistment of three years, and I was in Seattle trying to get my shit together to figure out what I wanted to do with the rest of my life. Frankly, writing books wasn't anywhere near the top of my wishlist. While I'd already had success in writing for men's magazines, during college and the military, I actually assumed I'd soon be headed into some aspect of advertising to take advantage of all the time, effort, and money spent on my university degree.

Excerpt from *Confessions of a Porno Writer—at Twenty-Two* © William Maltese (all rights reserved):

I moved into my Seattle condo. It was split-level. It had a sauna. It had wall-to-wall carpeting in every room, the bathroom included. It had a terrace with a spacious city panorama that included the Space Needle. It came equipped with a bar, formal dining room, gourmet kitchen with large refrigerator and walk-in freezer.... master bedroom with mirrors on three walls; the bed was Dura-king. The living room was two-stories high with vaulted ceiling, a chandelier hanging over an orchid-strewn central table. The furniture was rich green and blue. The walls and ceiling were off-white. There was a potted plant with huge waxy leaves in one corner that would likely soon die if it counted upon me for water. There was a barbecue out on the terrace, reached by walking through a pair of wide sliding panels sandblasted with lattice designs.

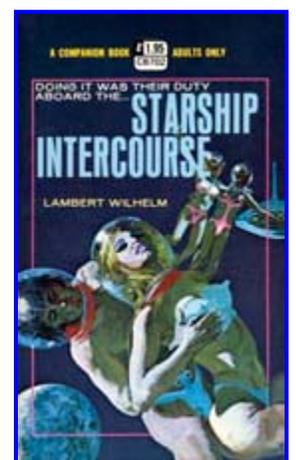
"How can you afford all of this if, as you insist, you're not drawing heavily from your trust?" my mother asked suspiciously, having flown in with my father to see what I had gotten myself into.

"I've started writing dirty books," I told her.

"Very funny!"

#

I had tossed the fuck book to one side of the bed.



Cover painting by Robert Bonfils.

*My God, I had thought. I can do better than that!*

*The Sex Lab* was really written to prove I could “do better than that.” I had my acceptance letter from Orpheus Press in less than three weeks, plus a request to see more of the same.

Needless to say, my parents, for the longest time, wished that first book of mine had never been published.

#

I left the bar early to walk home. It was chilly out. I was wearing a tan jean jacket, tan jeans, tan turtleneck T-shirt, tan boots, and tan gloves. Obviously, I was into my Brown Period.

I walked by JC Penney’s. I always walked passed Penney’s on the way home from the bar. It was on the way. That the area also happened to be Seattle’s infamous “Meat Rack” was purely coincidental.

I noticed the Thunderbird quite awhile before it pulled up to the curb beside me and stopped. The driver motioned me inside; and, I surprised myself by obliging.

“Well, what did you have in mind?” he asked.

“Isn’t that my line?” I asked him.

“I thought maybe you’d like to go to my place for a drink.”

“Why not?”

The car was new. The driver wasn’t; definitely no prize in anybody’s book. But I had never been picked up on the street before. I had never had the guts to go over to a car door, open it, and get in. It really didn’t take too many guts, after all.

“I don’t usually do this,” he said. This was another line of his that should have been mine.

I shrugged my shoulders, by way of saying that was his hang-up.

“My lover’s on a business trip,” he rambled on. “He was supposed to call five minutes ago, but I wasn’t home for his call. I was here, following you.”

“If you’ve a guilt complex, then just take me back where you picked me up,” I told him.

“It’s not that I want to take you back,” he said, “but if *you* think that’s best...”

“Don’t go shifting the responsibility on me,” I said. “You picked me up, remember? You suggested we go for a drink. You’re still making the decisions.”

“I don’t want to take you back.”

“It’s probably better if you do, though. You’ve a lover and a guilty conscience. The two in bed with us could make it uncomfortably crowded.”

“Do you want me to take you back because I’m married, or because you want to go back?”

“You just seem to have enough problems without me helping you make even more.”

He didn’t take me back. Neither of us really thought he would.

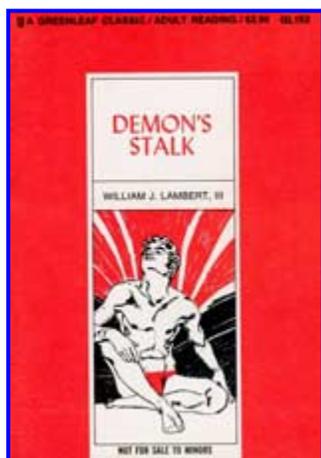
He told me his name was Rob.

Rob drove a new Thunderbird.

Rob gave me a hundred dollars.

#

I wrote two more books, *The Sixty-Niners* and *Pop 'N' Swap*, for Orpheus Press. I quickly discovered I was capable of putting out novels faster than that one publisher could handle them.



Artwork by Harry Bremner.

I wrote Greenleaf Classics in San Diego, including a copy of my *The Sex Lab*. Greenleaf wrote back that it would be happy to take a look at my work; although, it noted, in my *The Sex Lab*, my tendency to include homosexual sex acts with straight. “Please, no don’t clutter up a potential Greenleaf straight fuck book with queer sex!” I was warned.

Actually, Greenleaf was equally, if not more, interested in any kind of all-gay submission I might have available for its new gay line. Did I think I might like to try my hand at that?

#

Toby asked if he could kiss it through my pants.

I told him to go ahead.

He asked me if I was wearing the same underpants I had worn the last time.

I told him I wasn’t wearing any underpants.

He asked if he could see it. He said he promised not to touch it. He just wanted to look. He said he would even stand across the room.

I told him no.

“You’re mad at me, now,” he said. “You’re mad and you’ll go.”

“I won’t go for awhile,” I said.

“Please,” he said. “Just let me kiss the bare thing.”

“I should probably go,” I said.

“Oh, Jesus, don’t go,” he said, turning back to me.

“If I let you go any farther, I *will* have to have a little something,” I said.

“God, yes,” he said. He already had the money ready. It was the same amount he’d given me last time. “Didn’t I already tell you I’d give you anything?”

“Shall we take off our clothes?”

“Would you mind if we didn’t?”

“Why should I mind? It’ll just mean fewer clothes to put back on when I leave?”

#

“I don’t usually do that, you know. Only with you.”

“I really have to go,” I said, reeling my now partially soft flesh back into my jeans. “It’s getting late.”

“You will come back again, though?”

“We’ll see.”

“Just like this time,” he said. “You won’t have to do a thing. I’ll do it all.”

“Sure,” I agreed. “Just like this time.”

He’d given me a hundreds bucks.

#

For Greenleaf, I wrote *Starship Intercourse*, *Gray Flannel Swap*, and *Faculty Wife*.

The publishing house was even more excited about my contributions — *Adonis*, *The Young Master*, and *Demon’s Stalk* — to its gay line.

For Barclay House, I wrote *Sex Between Children and Their Stepparents*.

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Sleazebook cover scans courtesy Bruce Brenner Collection [www.vintagepbks.com](http://www.vintagepbks.com)

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I had to add, though, that I knew a single word that proved our democratic government was capable of committing obscene, gleefully rabid and racist, yahooistic murders of unarmed men, women, and children, murders wholly devoid of military common sense. I said the word. It was a foreign word. That word was Nagasaki.

-- Kurt Vonnegut, *Timequake*

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# O, Pioneers

Artwork by Harry Bell

by Victor J. Banis

Between, roughly, the years 1966 and 1972, a revolution happened in the realm of gay publishing. To be sure, the revolution was not solely about gay literature. Heterosexual literature had been censored, banned, and abridged as well for generations. Truth be told, the gay segment of popular literature was by far the smaller part of it, just as the publishing revolution was only a small part of the larger social revolution then taking place throughout much of the Western world.

The story has been much told, however, of that social revolution and even, to a large extent, the publishing revolution. But not so much has been recorded regarding the gay publishing revolution, and much of what has been told has been incorrect or incomplete, whether deliberately or inadvertently.

For one thing, and it is an important thing, that history has been written mostly by East Coast (mostly New York City) writers for East Coast readers and New York remains a stubbornly provincial town, in the worst sense—that of recognizing almost nothing of value beyond its own province.

Most especially to be ignored is anything to do with the West Coast, and California in particular. So we read again and again that the gay social revolution began in 1969 with the demonstrations at the Stonewall Inn, with never a nod to the various events that took place mostly in California and that led the way to Stonewall. This is not to minimize the importance of the Stonewall demonstrations. They marked the beginning of the organized gay liberation movement; but those demonstrations did not spring up in a vacuum. The stage had been set for them throughout the decade that preceded them, and mostly in California.

This is true in pretty much every area. Opera, theater, publishing, and restaurants—those on the West Coast are hardly mentioned at all in the New York press, or if mentioned, are treated patronizingly.

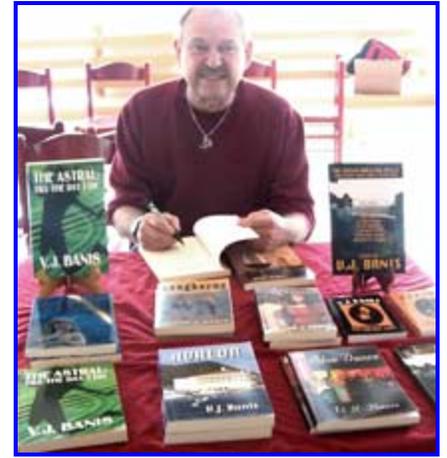
But with rare exceptions—H. Lynn Womack's Guild Press comes immediately to mind—the gay publishing revolution was indeed a West Coast, a California phenomenon. Publishers like Milt Luros of Parliament News, William Hamling of Greenleaf Classics and Lou and Ruth Linetsky of Sherbourne Press; editors like Earl Kemp, Gil Porter, and Yvonne McManus, to name only three, and writers like William Maltese, Joe Hansen, George Davies, Sam Dodson, and scores of others, too many to list here, fought a decade-long war with the Federal authorities over what could and could not be said in print. Yes, I was one of those writers, too, but I have come to believe that is of no great significance. I was one small man in a big cause.

It was a big cause, too. We intended nothing less than to change the world, the publishing world at least. And we succeeded. By the mid-seventies, that landscape had been changed forever, and this was thanks entirely to this hardy band of pioneers. I have always felt it an honor to have shared the trenches with them.

#

Fast Forward now to 1980. A group of writers began to gather in New York City to share one another's manuscripts and in time dubbed themselves The Violet Quill. To be sure, some of them were good writers, and the books they produced are, some of them anyway, good books. It should probably be pointed out as well that some of these writers had already published books before 1980; but 1980 is the date from which its members date The Violet Quill.

Somehow, though, the members of The Violet Quill took upon themselves the mantle *en toto* of the gay publishing revolution. Henceforth, in their pronouncements, it began and ended with them. Here are the words of Felice



Victor Banis at the arts festival, Martinsburg, West Virginia, autumn, 2008.

Picano, one of the members, on this, their singular status:

“We were the first who insisted on sex, intellect, and emotion all together in our books.”

Is this woeful ignorance or bald-faced lie? Or just self delusion paired with a generous dollop of self aggrandizement?

Whatever the case, The Lambda Literary Foundation abetted him in this misreading of history when, in 2009, they presented a gay pioneers award to the remaining members of the group (Picano, Andrew Holleran, and Edmund White.)

Here is what the Foundation had to say on that occasion: “In doing so, they were doing what few gay writers had risked doing before, they were making explicit the love that dared not speak its name.” And, “They were not the first successful gay writers. But they were the first to write gay books for a gay audience.”

Huh? And the rest of us, in those several years before 1980 were doing, what? I know that I for one certainly thought of *The Man From C.A.M.P.* as a gay book, and I imagined it being read by a gay audience. I surely never thought it suited to the church ladies.

Ironically, Edmund White, another member of the group, has this to say: “To have been oppressed in the 1950s, freed in the 1960s, exalted in the 1970s, and wiped out in the 1980s is a quick itinerary for a whole culture to follow.” He is speaking, of course, of the whole turbulent era from gay oppression, through the liberation movement, to the eruption of the AIDS epidemic; but, ironically, he could have been speaking as well of all those early gay pioneers, apparently erased from the history books by the arrival of the Violet Quill, to exist never more.



For the record, then, let me say clearly and definitely: As far back as the 1950s and increasingly in the 1960s and the 1970s, there were a great many of us writing, editing, and publishing gay books for a gay audience. Not just a few of us but many of us were consciously and deliberately making explicit the love that dared not speak its name. And we were entirely conscious of the risks that we were taking in doing so. We worked every day with the threat of arrest and imprisonment hanging over our heads.

For some of us, the threats were more than abstract. Many of us suffered through lengthy federal and local trials, and some of us in fact went to prison. We took those risks because we believed wholeheartedly in what we were doing, and what we were doing was struggling to change the rules of publishing. So that, in fact, those who came along later, say in 1980, could write and edit and publish without the fear that informed our every action. That is to say, without risk.

Some of those who came along in 1980 and after have condescendingly labeled what we did earlier as porn. So what? We were at war, and our weapons were words. When you're in a battle and you stoop down to pick up a rock to throw, you don't worry yourself over its cleanliness.

Now, make no mistake, much (though certainly not all) of what was written and published in those early years could be considered failures in literary or artistic terms. But they were noble failures. It's easy to come along later and improve things. Far harder to be the first. The Model A had none of the conveniences taken for granted in today's cars—turns signals, air conditioning, stereos—but the Model A changed the world.

So did we. In my book, those brave publishers, editors, and writers of the '60s and '70s were not just pioneers—they were and are my heroes. The great Oliver Wendell Holmes said, in a famous speech in 1884, “To act with enthusiasm and faith is the condition of acting greatly. To fight out a war, you must believe something and want something with all your might. So must you do to carry anything else to an end worth reaching. More than that, you must be willing to commit yourself to a course, perhaps a long and hard one, without being able to foresee exactly where you will come out. All that is required of you is that you should go somewhither as hard as ever you can. The rest belongs to fate. One may fall at the beginning of the charge or at the top of the earthworks; but in no other way

can he reach the rewards of victory.”

I can't imagine a better description of what those publishers, editors, and writers did in the '60s and '70s, in changing the world of publishing. And we did ultimately reach the rewards of victory, though many fell in the charge.

I believe wholeheartedly that the members of The Violet Quill and the Lambda Foundation should be ashamed of themselves for so egregiously dismissing those true pioneers of gay literature, upon whose shoulders they were in time permitted safely to stand.

It is my fervent hope that *The Golden Age of Gay Fiction* will help to correct this blatant and unseemly rewriting of our history. My sincere thanks to Wayne Gunn for his efforts on this behalf, and to MLR Press and its publisher, Laura Baumbach, for her wholehearted commitment to this project; and to all of those contributors who took part.

History is on our side; but history sometimes takes persuading.

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Newton was advised by those who were his nominal supervisors to take time out from the hard truths of science to brush up on theology. I like to think they did this not because they were foolish, but to remind him of how comforting and encouraging the make-believe of religion can be for common folk.

-- Kurt Vonnegut, *Timequake*

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# Review: *The Golden Age of Gay Fiction*

Edited by Drewey Wayne Gunn

by Ann Bannon

From time immemorial there have been stories, often cherished and secretly preserved by readers, that were published under a cloud of censure. Sometimes this had to do with an author's too-fragrant reputation, sometimes with cheap production values, and often, because the subject matter was considered too hot to handle. In the case of gay fiction, all of these factors were in play. There were novels in hard covers from established publishers that still couldn't catch a break from the critics. Others were pulp paperback originals, inexpensive, mass-marketed stories printed on acid-riddled paper, with covers to make even a sailor's eyes pop. But all of them did a more or less brilliant job of capturing their era: the years following World War II up to the aftermath of the Stonewall Rebellion. Yes, there was some gloom and sorrow in them. But there was an amazing amount of true grit and romance, too—far more than contemporary readers may imagine.



Ann Bannon in 1955, writing her lesbian pulps during *The Golden Age of Gay Fiction*.

We have needed an informed review of the extraordinary work done by gay male writers of the mid-20th century for a long time. Now, Drewey Wayne Gunn has given us one. In his edited collection of essays called *The Golden Age of Gay Fiction*, Gunn and his able cohort of fellow essayists lay to rest many old myths about the content and quality of the gay fiction that was produced during this repressive era.

It has always struck me as odd and unfair that lesbian pulp fiction should have been setting the house afire in the 1950s and '60s, acknowledged as a true publishing phenomenon if not a respectable one, while relatively few works of gay male fiction were in evidence. It is true that no critic worthy of his adjectives would be caught dead reviewing Paula Christian, Valerie Taylor, or Ann Bannon. But at least their books were being taken seriously by the women for whom they were intended, and more than that, heartily enjoyed by a huge crossover audience of males. But too few gay novels were readily available. One is prompted to ask *where the boys are?* Where, in this yeasty and profitable period, were the gay male authors? Is there anybody there? Yoohoo?

Of course they were there, and doing good work. It is a sad acknowledgement of the lack of recognition accorded them, that too few in the younger generation of LGBT readers know about them. At long last, we have an examination of their challenges, their achievements, and the memorable stories they produced.

Gunn has organized his book into four sections, beginning with an apt overview of the historical period and the reasons for the rise of gay fiction and pulp paperbacks. The second section reveals the effects of legal constraints and the stifling consequences of government meddling, ostracism, and fear. In the third, the mood lightens somewhat with the injection of humor, wit, and happy endings in works by Victor J. Banis, Lonnie Coleman, and others. The fourth and final section takes us into the various sub-genres of the pulp paperback field, where gay authors begin to explore detective stories, science fiction, horror, the classic western, and the military world. Archetypal figures like the cowboy loner, the strong silent cop, the creature from another world who will never fit in, the seeker in the pastoral landscape, join characters from the earlier romances.

The global cataclysm that was World War II wrenched many young men out of their ordinary lives and deployed them around the world in one another's very close company. Not surprisingly, they took notice of each other. It wasn't all bad being cooped up on a troop ship with five thousand other men. And in the down hours, they avidly read the newly available "pocket books," often paperback reprints of the classics. This made voracious readers of them, and the demand continued when they came marching home.

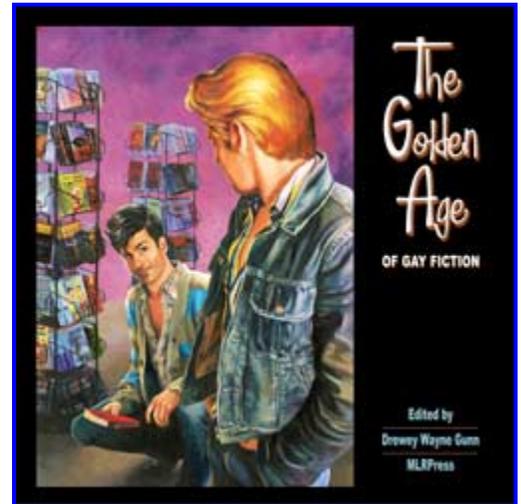
The gay book parade commenced, and Gunn dates his study from 1948, when a clutch of important new stories by intriguing young authors started it off. These included Gore Vidal's *City and the Pillar*, and Truman Capote's *Other*

*Voices, Other Rooms*. Oh, and a scholarly tome that came to hold great significance for the nascent Gay Community: *The Kinsey Report*. The other terminus is 1978, when four members of the Violet Quill published novels: Edmund White, Andrew Holleran, Felice Picano, and Michael Grumley. So 1948 and 1971 become the fitting bookends for this Golden Age.

One must view the remarkable range of writing produced during the era in light of the extreme hardships imposed on its authors by law, by social opprobrium, and by internalized shame. That some fine and memorable novels came out in spite of the barriers, and that we have literary historians to place it in context for us, is a wonder.

Part of our relative ignorance about gay male fiction is indeed owing to the critics' scorn. But part is the misapprehension of today's younger readers who did not encounter these stories when they were new, and know of them, if they do at all, only by hearsay. This has led them to assume that these tales ended in unavoidable hopelessness or suicide. There was some of that, to be honest. But there was a great deal more that was hopeful and life-affirming. That these books were beacons to the men who read them as contemporaries is attested over and over by those who saved them and loved them, and even by a few who went home and had dinner instead of jumping off the bridge.

In his thoughtful essay, "A Conversation in a Coffee Shop," Dennis Bolin talks to some gay men who were young when the first wave of gay novels was being published after WWII. He had selected six books that he knew were significant in the lives of men a generation older than he, including Vidal and Capote, James Baldwin (*Giovanni's Room*), John Rechy (*City of Night*), Christopher Isherwood (*A Single Man*), and E.M. Forster (*Maurice*). He read them all for the first time, some with reservations and some with newfound admiration. And then he talked to the older men in the coffee shop, and arrived at a useful insight: that these books, dark though some of their chapters were, provided the first powerful corroboration that even in a homophobic society, there was hope for "a bigger and more accepting world."



*The Golden Age of Gay Fiction*. Ed. Drewey Wayne Gunn. MLR Press, 2009. Artist: Paul Richmond.

Michael Bronski (author of *Pulp Friction*), in his informed and affectionate commentary, admits that his "life began with Stonewall." In other words, the possibilities opened up by the famous fairy rebellion against police brutality were so inspiring that almost all his reading post-dated that time period. To some degree, gay liberation itself was defined by a rejection of the past—that "sad, sorry, and sordid" time when people hid in closets living "shocking" and "unnatural" lives. Who wished to identify with that? But then he began to wonder whether there might be anything of value dating back to the era following WWII, and started an exploratory journey. He found a rich treasure trove, and more importantly, discovered that the literature produced by gay men before Stonewall could in fact be positive and finely written.

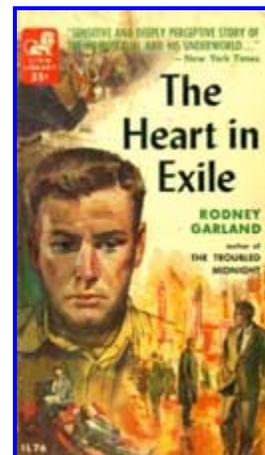
Bronski—and several others in these essays—looks at some of the best known works by earlier writers: Fritz Peters' *Finistere*, Nial Kent's *The Divided Path*, Forster's *Maurice*. But he also looks at some interesting lesser lights, among them the works of Willard Motley. Motley was an African American author who produced several stories that became movies: *Knock on Any Door*, *Let No Man Write My Epitaph*. But nobody remembers him today. Was it because he was a gay black man? A black man writing about white characters? One can hope that Bronski's insightful examination of these early works, not sparing his own original bias against them, will bring readers back to them and to a new appreciation of their worth.

Several of the Golden Age novels deserve particular mention because of the strong and continuing impact they have had on gay literature and readers. It is hard to credit in this day and age when so much progress has been made, but it is true: to write a book as an out gay author took courage in the last century. Not only that, but it took courage just to buy one. As Victor Banis notes, somebody in the community had to steel himself to approach the local bookseller, and then, "in a kind of underground lending library," pass the book around to all his friends. It's not hard to imagine the dogears, creased spines, underlines, and tear stains that ended up on such a cherished commodity.

No review of the Golden Age can omit to mention Rodney Garland's *The Heart in Exile*, a book that "begins with an apparent suicide and ends with the budding of a gay romance." What a treasure, what extraordinary affirmation when it was published in 1953. The young protagonist is not only a gay man, but one who accepts himself. This had a value beyond belief in the midst of such horrors as the McCarthy hearings, obscenity trials, job loss, shattered friendships, family rejection, religious shunning, and other miseries.

Lonnie Coleman's novel *Sam* lit another lamp in the wilderness. Noel Briscoe, in his essay, gives us a moving portrait of Coleman in his later years. We hear about Donald Webster Cory, whose *The Homosexual in America* was an immensely successful and influential work, despite the author's clear ambivalence about his topic: on the one hand, an eloquent plea for tolerance and understanding; on the other, an almost abject submission to prevailing cultural norms.

Among the best-known authors was Richard Amory, who, with his *Song of the Loon* and its two sequels, took gay readers into a pastoral romance in the American Northwest. The novels were competently written and much loved, enough to provoke a brilliant satire that some thought even better written than the original: *Fruit of the Loon*. Amory's publisher was the now-legendary Earl Kemp, Vice President and Editorial Director of Greenleaf Classics that was founded in 1964. Although a straight man, Kemp was no more a bigot than a tree in a field. He found and cultivated gifted young gay writers, and had the great good sense to sign up Victor J. Banis when he read *The Why Not*, soon followed by *That Man From C.A.M.P.* A little restorative laughter never comes amiss.



Greenleaf was one of several publishers with a substantial—or in some cases, exclusive—stable of gay authors. Another, Guild, was run by one of the truly unique characters in this fascinating history, H. Lynn Womack, described in Philip Clark's essay, "The First King of Pornography," thus: "A near-sighted, 300-pound, albino philosophy Ph.D., driven by the desire to make money, to create community, and to provide gay men with the same outlets for the intellectual and sexual needs that were available to the heterosexual majority." His best-known publication was Phil Andros' *Stud*. Through good times and bad, in and out of jail and a psychiatric facility, from romance to S&M, Womack stood fast against blackmail, social contumely, and the Feds.

In a wry and witty essay, Earl Kemp describes the frantic three-month schedule on which new books were produced at Greenleaf, the general tenor of his communications with readers (of the sort: *we adore your books, to: be very afraid—God will get you*), his jousting bouts with the ever-vigilant postal inspectors, and even throws in a confession: he took a shot at writing a gay novel himself, candidly titled *Cock Watch* by one Steve Maier.

"The Gay Publishing Revolution," Victor J. Banis's essay, makes the crucial point that "most of the changes...that occurred in gay literature occurred before Stonewall, in an astonishingly brief period ...of not more than four years." He points out that libraries and bookstores would not even carry these books; perhaps booksellers feared that putting pulp paperbacks on shelves next to hard cover fiction would "contaminate" the quality stuff, just as the public believed that rubbing a gay man and a straight man together would yield two queers. It's clear, Banis goes on, that romance novels get the credit for starting the whole phenomenon off: "Not until a man could woo another man, fall in love, and start a life together...could we have a truly gay literature."

Roger Tuller, in "Subject of Absorbing Interest to Mankind": U.S. Supreme Court Obscenity Rulings, 1934-1977," illuminates the acute difficulty of defining obscene materials. Is "I know it when I see it," the exasperated comment of Supreme Court Justice Potter Stewart, an adequate legal foundation? Today's *dreck* may well be tomorrow's masterpiece; *vide* Miller's *Tropic of Cancer*, Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley*, and Burroughs' *Naked Lunch*.

There is a helpful overview of the value of camp in the development of gay culture and consciousness by Fabio Cleto: the ability to laugh *with* rather than laugh *at* marginality, which brings mainstream readers into cahoots with the coolest members of the gay community.

The final section of the book offers some subtle and satisfying insights into the value of archetypal figures in several genres for gay readers. For example, in his essay "Worlds Well Lost," Rob Latham points out that science fiction had remained a relatively chaste medium of story-telling, preserved from "erotic contamination" by a "small contingent of gatekeepers" from the science fiction magazine days. But as the new wave of paperback books overwhelmed the

magazines, that began to change. Starting with moving pleas for tolerance from path-breakers like Theodore Sturgeon (a straight man, incidentally), writers of gay science fiction began to explore gays as exemplars of a different path, and gave their stories a tinge of increasingly sensual fantasy. Of course, visitors from other worlds were bound to bring with them reproductive strategies and romantic norms entirely unlike those considered usual on this planet. It made exploring queer sex more like an experiential flight to the moon that readers across the sexual spectrum could empathize with. (In this regard, the attraction between the heroes of the 1960s television show, *Star Trek*, Mr. Spock and Captain Kirk (“Cock and Spurt”), has not gone unnoticed by their many fans.

*Rob Latham's essay, "Worlds Well Lost," has been excerpted from The Golden Age of Gay Fiction and reprinted below.*

*—Earl Kemp*

In another essay, Gunn highlights the fascination of both gay and lesbian writers with detective fiction. The writer creates a protagonist with a dawning awareness of her/his own sexuality, for whom the search for a solution to the mystery transitions to a search for personal identity and romance. Perhaps it is fair to include here a reference to the long-suspected romance between Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson (*The Sexual Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* by Larry Townsend.)

The gay prison novel, like the gay military story, describes a world composed entirely of men, often with authority figures unwilling to face up to their true sexual nature, and younger subordinates more likely to have accepted their orientation with some degree of equanimity. Intriguingly, “...of all the books with gay themes from this time period, military novels have been the basis of the most Hollywood movies,” according to Gunn.

Early gay horror fiction focused on the need to exorcize the demon within, but later recognized the drive to conquer one’s fear of “differentness,” to refuse to be victimized by it. Stories of the Old West, even those by straight writers of the 19th Century, had an unavoidable amatory subtext, relying as they often did on tales of two men alone together on a long, arduous quest. There were conjunctions between white explorers and Native Americans that often led to idyllic pastoral romance. As Neil DeWitte observes, “...the lawlessness of the western frontier [,] created an open space for gay writers to have gay protagonists, with the Native Americans and cowboys operating outside traditional societal norms.” In a land where the individual becomes a law unto himself, who is there to say you nay?

Reading about the past is like running into an old acquaintance: so much is familiar, and yet you find that much of what you thought you knew has changed or is different. The authors of these essays will not let us forget that much of what we believed about the gay literature being produced in the third quarter of the 20th century is outdated, inadequate, and unfair. While these novels indeed present a picture of some of the fears and difficulties that beset gay men in that era, they also contain surprising stories of courage and determination, and enough happy endings to satisfy even the grouchiest skeptic. If you are one of those who has shied away from books written in this “golden age,” afraid they were all too grim or too lacking in writerly sophistication, try another tack. Use Drewey Wayne Gunn’s wonderful collection of essays to guide you through the literature, and then, read some of the originals.

*The Golden Age of Gay Fiction* belongs on every LGBT bookshelf, or on every gay person’s Kindle, as an essential reference.



Ann Bannon in Tacoma, WA.  
Photo by Jason Ganwich, June  
2008.

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It takes a ton of money to make a movie or a TV show. Never mind that you have to deal with the scum of the earth if you try to make one.

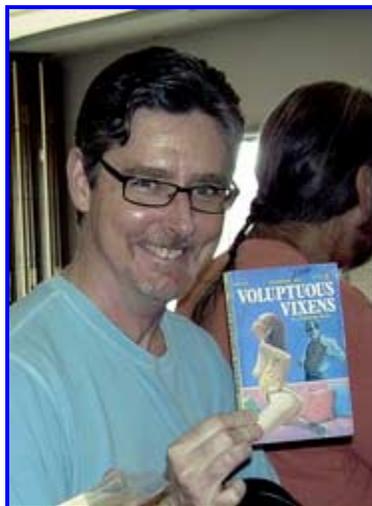
-- Kurt Vonnegut, "Coda to My Career as a Writer for Periodicals"

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# Worlds Well Lost: Male Homosexuality in Postwar Science Fiction\*

by Rob Latham

Prior to World War II, American science fiction was largely a magazine culture, dominated by pulp periodicals like *Amazing Stories*, *Astounding Stories*, and *Wonder Stories*. These were exuberant if rather puerile publications geared, as their titles imply, toward evoking astonishment at the vastness of interstellar space and the staggering vistas of futurity.



Rob Latham (Rob Speray in the background). Photo by Earl Kemp, LAPB, Mission Hills, CA, March 2009.

Unlike the detective story or other popular genres, science fiction (SF) was seldom published in book form in the United States before the early 1950s, when Doubleday initiated the first hardcover SF line. By the middle of that decade, a number of paperback houses (Signet, Bantam, Ballantine, and Dell, among others) had also begun to feature SF among their regular output. At first this was mostly material reprinted from the magazines, but by the end of the 1950s a substantial market in paperback originals had emerged as a competitive alternative for both writers and readers. During the decades that followed, the SF book trade gathered momentum, supplanting the magazines as the central repository of new fiction by the middle of the 1970s. Today, the magazines are at best vestigial, sustained by a modest audience of die-hard fans, while hardcover and paperback SF flourishes, sometimes placing titles on the best-seller lists.

This transition — from a niche market controlled by specialty journals to a mass market centered on book publication — affected not only the way SF was disseminated during the postwar period but also its range of content. Nowhere was this more evident than in the genre's handling of sexuality. Despite the lurid covers of the pulp magazines, which often featured scantily clad females fending off the ambiguous attentions of phallically bristling robots and betentacled aliens, SF stories were usually quite chaste, conscientiously scrubbed of risqué content by editors fearful of inflaming their largely juvenile male audience or antagonizing parents. As Philip José Farmer (1918–2009), an ambitious writer

who always chafed at these constraints, observed: “We had a field wherein, theoretically, the writer was unlimited in choice of subject matter, wherein he had the whole cosmos to roam. ... Yet the writer was far from being unlimited. He avoided any sex except for the inclusion of the dummy figure of the professor's daughter or an occasional superfemale who was almost always evil. ... Perhaps the hero and the [heroine] kissed as the story ended and red Mars sank in the background, but this did not take place often.” (“Reap,” *SF Review*, 1968).

Thus, for much of its early history, SF studiously ignored a vast dimension of human experience. A pervasive climate of censorship forbade not only such putatively outré topics as incest and homosexuality but even depictions of the most vanilla sorts of sexual acts and relationships. The career of a writer like Farmer, who consistently butted heads with editors over his handling of sexually suggestive themes, is an exception that proves this rule; his 1952 story of human-alien crossbreeding, “The Lovers,” was reportedly rejected by one editor with the note: “I'll publish this if you can get rid of the sex — I run a family magazine!” (qtd. John Brunner, “Interference on My Wavelength,” *Niekas*, 1967). That Farmer succeeded in getting such controversial material into print during the decade is a testament to his stubbornness and persistence; other writers were not so lucky.

In short, instances of homosexuality in SF prior to the 1960s are rare, although tales on the topic did, now and then, manage to pass the desks of sympathetic — or more likely, desperate — editors. The complex and rapidly evolving publishing landscape of the 1950s allowed for the occasional experiment. The pulps that had long dominated the scene were tottering as the decade commenced, succumbing to a fierce competition not only from SF digests (less seedy-looking periodicals that sought to appeal to a more adult readership) but also from general-circulation magazines willing to dabble in a once-disreputable field whose outlandish prewar predictions — atomic power, space exploration, television — were now palpable realities. When one realizes that Hugh Hefner's *Playboy* was among this latter cohort, it appears inevitable that some of these SF stories would begin to breach longstanding

taboos.

On top of this growing diversification of the market, the boom-and-bust cycle that characterized SF publishing also had an impact on what sort of material could appear. During boom years, a veritable host of SF magazines (well over thirty during 1953 alone) had pages that needed filling; as a result, provocative tales that during leaner times would probably have been rejected managed to sneak their way into print. And of course, the nascent but burgeoning book culture systematically undermined the power of the small contingent of gatekeepers who had historically worked to keep the genre free from erotic contamination. While it is true that the general relaxing of restraints on the representation of sexuality in popular culture during the 1960s had a large role in revolutionizing what was possible in SF, this only happened because an autonomous book market had emerged in the previous decade that could effectively exploit this liberalization. In this regard, the SF magazines were always a step behind the curve.

There were occasional exceptions to this stricture, however. Interestingly, of the roughly half dozen SF stories published during the 1950s that dealt even vaguely with homosexuality, two of them — “The World Well Lost” (1953) and “Affair With a Green Monkey” (1957) — were written by one author, Theodore Sturgeon (1918–1985). A bohemian spirit with a pronounced ribald streak, Sturgeon held progressive and cosmopolitan views that put him at odds with the social and political conservatism of the field’s dominant editor, John W. Campbell of *Astounding Stories*. After a series of skirmishes with the intransigent Campbell, Sturgeon essentially boycotted that magazine after 1950, the period of his greatest productivity and most experimental bent.

Though married three times and the father of seven children, Sturgeon clearly had a deep, empathic understanding of non-normative sexuality, as evidenced throughout his voluminous oeuvre. His 1961 vampire novel, *Some of Your Blood*, for example, refers pointedly to “the Kinsey Boon” — sexologist Alfred Kinsey’s hugely valuable (if controversial) revelation, during the seemingly staid and conformist 1950s, of the irrepressible variety and complexity of human sexual appetite. Perhaps Sturgeon’s most abiding theme is the loneliness of social outcasts, grappling with their painful singularity and pariah status, who gradually come to perceive the underlying humanity that links them even with those who fear and despise them.

While “Affair With a Green Monkey” is a casually whimsical work (a husband who mistakes an effeminate alien for a homosexual man leaves the creature alone with his wife, with unfortunate results), “The World Well Lost” is an extraordinarily frank, searching tale of homoerotic desire and the psychosocial price of its repression. The story’s impact is hard to calculate given its relative uniqueness; certainly, it did not inspire imitators during the 1950s. Longtime SF fan Richard Delap (“Tomorrow’s Libido: Sex and Science Fiction,” *The Alien Critic*, Feb. 1974) remarked on the genre’s lingering silence regarding this “touchy item,” which “seems to embarrass the shit out of most people.” One of those it embarrassed — or more likely, infuriated and disgusted — was Campbell, who actually wrote to other editors warning them against publishing it, one of whom “out of sheer spite very nearly bought the story but finally decided against it, the temper of the times being what it was” (qtd. Thomas N. Scortia, *Strange Bedfellows*, 1974). The tale eventually appeared in the first issue of *Universe*, a new digest struggling to establish itself in a crowded market and thus eager for submissions from major writers like Sturgeon. For once, the hyperbolic rhetoric of a magazine’s cover blurb, which trumpeted “The World Well Lost” as the author’s “Most Daring Story,” seemed entirely apt.

The story concerns a pair of aliens from the planet Dirbanu who arrive on Earth and immediately enchant the populace. People take to calling them “loverbirds” due to their “wondrous delight in each other”; the mere presence of the two seems to evoke a youthful intensity of desire, “the feeling you had when you were twelve, and summer-drenched, and kissed a girl for the very first time.”

It turns out, however, that the visitors are fugitives, perpetrators of some nameless crime on their home planet, whose ambassador angrily demands their extradition. Consigned to a prison ship piloted by a mismatched duo of buddies — the sprightly bantam Rootes and his lumbering sidekick Grunty — the aliens try to persuade their captors to release them, an appeal given emotional force by the aura of loving partnership surrounding them: “They lay quite still, but love so permeated them that their very poses expressed it. Their lax bodies yearned each to each, and



the tall one's hand seemed to stream toward the fingers of his beloved, and then back again, like the riven tatters of a torn fabric straining toward oneness."

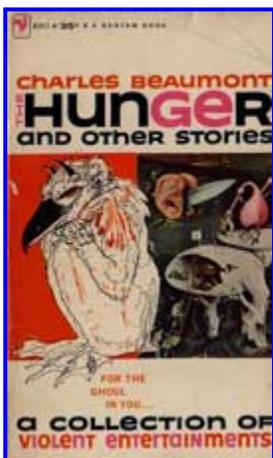
Through a combination of line drawings and telepathy, the aliens manage to communicate their secret to Grunty, in whom they sense a bond of kinship — a truth now readily evident but undoubtedly shocking to SF readers in 1953: the "loverbirds" are gay and their wayward form of love is outlawed on their planet. While Rootes sleeps, Grunty permits them to escape on a shuttle, only to face his homophobic shipmate's rage for letting "these pansies," "a coupla God damned *fairies*," gain their freedom. The story closes with Grunty dotting over the sleeping Rootes, stroking his lips "with a feather touch" while wondering "*Why must we love where the lightning strikes, and not where we choose?*" (All the italics are in the original.)

"The World Well Lost" is an astonishingly moving plea for tolerance of unchosen sexual difference, as well as a scathing exposé of the deforming effects of closeted desire. It was published in June 1953, appearing only two months after President Eisenhower's executive order #10450 barred homosexuals and other "sexual perverts" from serving in the federal government. It thus ran counter not only to the conspiracy of silence on sexual matters that dominated the genre but, even more bravely, to the encompassing climate of antigay backlash and repression.

The story has since been reprinted a handful of times, most notably in a lurid 1962 Belmont paperback anthology edited by Groff Conklin, entitled *Twisted*, whose cover promised "an unholy bible of weird tales," a gathering of stories the editor claimed would "revolt" readers. Sturgeon's text culminates the volume, coming on the heels of Poe's "The Tell-Tale Heart" and H.P. Lovecraft's "The Shunned House," indicating that the horrors it depicts (presumably homosexuality itself and not the homophobic reaction against it) were even more revolting than those gruesome precursors. It wasn't until the emergence, in the late 1960s and early 1970s, of an expressly gay strain within the field that Sturgeon's pathbreaking story could be acknowledged for what it was: the first sympathetic treatment of homosexual identity and desire in the SF canon.



Certainly its compassionate message was more than outweighed by a short story that appeared in the August 1955 issue of *Playboy*: "The Crooked Man" by Charles Beaumont (1929–1967). Not only did this work, featured in a major general-circulation magazine, reach a much wider audience, but its antigay message was more in synch with the prevailing prejudices of its time. The story opens in a luridly rendered gay bar discreetly dubbed The Phallus, a shadowy place reeking of "musk and frangipani" and populated by simpering queens with "predatory little eyes" and preening narcissists in "gold-sequined trunk[s]."



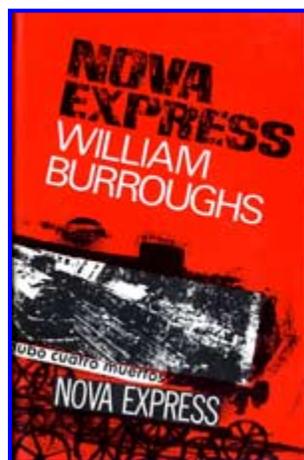
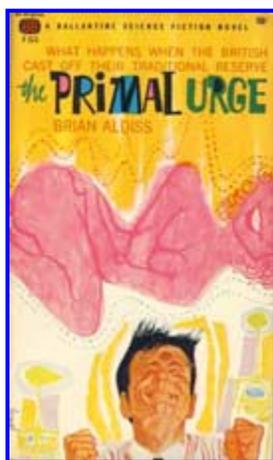
Into this randy, ersatz utopia comes our hero, Jesse, there to meet with his true love, Mina. Why should a straight couple choose this strange location for their rendezvous? This is the twist in Beaumont's tale: the story is set in a future United States where heterosexuality is outlawed, homosexuality is the norm, and gay bars are the only socially approved sites for intimate meetings; straight people, as a consequence, live a furtive existence, compelled either to pass as gay (when Mina arrives, she is wearing male drag) or else submit to an involuntary surgical and psychiatric "cure" for their despised condition. In other words, Beaumont inverts the actual social situation that prevailed during the 1950s.

One initially wonders whether he does this for ironic or even critical effect — to bring home to homophobic readers (of which *Playboy* undoubtedly had plenty) the torturous effects of society's stigma against homosexuality. Certainly he shows real insight into — and seeming sympathy for — the plight of a closeted identity: Jesse recalls his confusion and embarrassment while on his first date with a man, his dawning sense of difference from others; feels shame and self-loathing combined with a smoldering anger at being thought of as "queer" or "crooked"; and yearns to express his true feelings even as he makes complicated arrangements to camouflage and conceal them. Moreover, the extremist rhetoric used to attack heterosexuality borrows directly from 1950s discourses pathologizing gays and lesbians: "The perverts who infest our land must be flushed out, eliminated *completely*, as a threat not only to public morals but to society at large" (the italics are in the original).

Yet the possibility that Beaumont is criticizing the reigning sexual ideology seems unlikely given the story's grotesque caricatures of gay men, its tone of queasy disgust, and especially its citation, as an epigraph, of St. Paul's denunciation of unnatural and "unseemly" same-sex lust (Romans 1:26–27). Gathered into the author's 1958 Bantam collection *The Hunger and Other Stories*, "The Crooked Man" features as one of several "awful" and "ghoulish" entertainments (according to the back-cover blurb), suggesting once again that SF tales dealing with homosexuality were largely perceived — and certainly had to be packaged — as horror stories, at least prior to the mid-1960s.

Yet Sturgeon's and Beaumont's texts are clearly SF, and they show the ways in which the genre might have engaged gay themes had it not been for the tacit ban against such an undertaking. The SF figure of the alien being, for example, conveys a potent charge of otherness that could have been deployed to evoke, metaphorically, the mysteries and complexities of sexual difference; this is essentially Sturgeon's approach in "The World Well Lost." By contrast, SF's proclivity for what-if scenarios exploring hypothetical worlds could have been used to portray future times and far-off places in which sexual hierarchies run counter to those operative in the present day; this is basically Beaumont's tactic in "The Crooked Man." Any number of other traditional SF themes or techniques — from time travel to telepathy to alternative history — might have been exploited to grapple with the topic as well.

Genre authors largely failed to follow up on these openings throughout the 1950s and early 1960s, however, instead reverting to predictable stereotypes of homosexual men as grotesque villains or swishy comic foils when they broached the subject at all. The corpulent pederast Baron Harkonnen, grossly doting over his nubile nephews in Frank Herbert's award-winning novel *Dune* (serialized in *Analog* magazine from 1963 to 1965 before being released in book form), could easily have been inspired by the mincing film heavies of the 1930s played by Charles Laughton and Sidney Greenstreet. Only activists within the early homophile movement seemed to sense the genre's potential for shaking up the status quo: two short stories published in the pro-gay magazine *ONE*, Curt Merrick's "Half a World" (1954) and Roger Barth's "The Homosexual Aid Society in the Middle of the 21st Century" (1962), boldly imagined a flourishing future of gay integration and sexual equality — but had no impact on the SF field at the time.



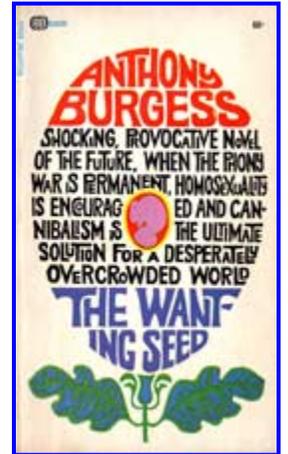
While a few SF novels during this period tentatively engaged the topic of "deviant" desire, usually in a humorous mode — Brian Aldiss's *The Primal Urge* (1961), for instance, depicts a future Britain in which citizens wear metal gadgets on their foreheads that register their sexual arousal, an arrangement that immediately outs any closeted person — it was left to nongenre writers such as Anthony Burgess (1917–1993) and William Burroughs (1914–1997) to aggressively press the boundaries of acceptable content. The fact that these authors were published by mainstream and avant-garde imprints — Burroughs's *Nova Express* was released by Grove in hardcover in 1964, with a paperback edition the following year, while Burgess's *The Wanting Seed* was originally published in the United Kingdom in 1962 and appeared in the United States as a Ballantine paperback in 1964 — meant that their imaginations could operate free from the SF field's constraining taboos. At the same time, the proliferation of a paperback market ensured that their work would reach a broad audience, including SF writers and fans.

A savagely dystrophic portrait of an overpopulated near future, *The Wanting Seed* follows Beaumont's lead in envisioning a world where heterosexuality has been proscribed while homosexuality is officially condoned (a "Ministry of Infertility" circulates posters bearing the slogan, "*It's Sapiens to be Homo*"), with deviations from this

norm policed by a thuggish militia known as “greyboys.” As in Beaumont’s tale, straight lovers, hounded and hunted, struggle to preserve their illicit passion in the face of a quasi-fascist gay tyranny.

Burgess’s novel is both grimmer and more salacious than “The Crooked Man.” While it is definitely homophobic, its portrait of a restored heterosexual order — dominated by ritualistic orgies and “[i]ndiscriminate cannibalism” — is hardly comforting. Ultimately, *The Wanting Seed* conveys the melancholy sense that human sexuality is nothing better than a fleshly madness, an abject sump of frenzy and misrule, regardless of which particular orientation has the upper hand.

And yet, for all its grisly delirium, it cannot hold a candle to Burroughs’s *Nova Express*. An hallucinatory collage rather than a conventional novel, *Nova Express* was inspired in part by Burroughs’s avid consumption of trashy SF paperbacks, but what seem to be familiar scenarios of alien invasion and futuristic conspiracy come filtered through the author’s intense preoccupation with the psychosocial mechanisms of desire and control. (His earlier novel, *Naked Lunch* (1959), had been a literary (and legal) cause célèbre, prompting a prosecution for obscenity that eventually led the Massachusetts Supreme Court to determine that the book possessed “redeeming social value.”)



Anthony Burgess [John A. Wilson]. *The Wanting Seed*. Ballantine, 1964.

The third volume in a loose-knit trilogy, following *The Soft Machine* (1961) and *The Ticket That Exploded* (1962), *Nova Express* chronicles the exploits of the “Nova Mob,” a shadowy gang of extraterrestrial monsters who manipulate earthlings via their media consumption, sexual obsessions, and drug addictions. Deliquescent SF imagery swirls through the book, fused with queasy fragments of homosexual and sadomasochistic fantasy: slutty green vampire boys from Venus cruise human prey at the direction of “The Insect Brain of Minraud,” whose “diseases and orgasm drugs and...sexless parasite life forms” have infiltrated and corrupted the planet; meanwhile, “Lesbian Agents with glazed faces of grafted penis flesh sat sipping spinal fluid through alabaster straws.” Impossible to summarize or to forget, *Nova Express* brought the lingo and attitudes of 1950s gay subculture into weird, distorted conversation with the technological dreams of postwar SF.

While the vast majority of SF fans undoubtedly found *Nova Express* repellent or simply unreadable, a small cohort of U.S. and U.K. authors affiliated with the British magazine *New Worlds* — under the editorship of Michael Moorcock (b. 1939) — began to champion the novel as a “New Literature for the Space Age,” and “a kind of SF which is unconventional in every sense” (in the words of Moorcock’s first editorial for the magazine). Not only fearlessly experimental, but also willing to venture into the most forbidding psychosexual terrain, Burroughs’s work pointed the way forward for a fresh generation of SF writers eager to shake off the last vestiges of the pulp tradition and confront contemporary realities.

As *New Worlds* gathered steam it also drew enemy fire, generating furious debates that consumed the field during the late 1960s and early 1970s. The term “new wave” came to be applied to this literary-philosophical movement by contemporary commentators, some of whom championed its innovations as a revitalization of science fiction while others bemoaned the “overthrow of all standards and morals” by a new fiction filled with “shock words and shock scenes, hallucinatory fantasies, and sex” (Donald A. Wollheim, *The Universe Makers*, 1971). Yet given the swelling ranks of paperback publishers, ever avid for fresh material and quite willing to experiment if there was a market for it, the opponents of the new wave were compelled to fight a perpetual rear-guard action against it.

The advent of the new wave coincided with the rise of the youth counterculture, and there was definitely significant overlap between the two factions. According to Moorcock, contemporary SF, to be fully “relevant to the world of Now,” had to “use images apt for today” and feature “characters fitted for the society of today” (“Symbols for the Sixties,” *New Worlds*, March 1965). In the view of many new wave partisans, old-school SF was dominated by the antiquated social attitudes and claustrophobic gender ideologies of the 1950s; it could not possibly speak to an audience weaned on LSD, Vietnam, and the sexual revolution.

Much of Moorcock’s own fiction — for example, *The Final Programme* (1968) — celebrated the exploits of sexually ambiguous secret agent Jerry Cornelius, whose raffishly hip persona contrasted starkly with the ultra-square astronauts and super-nerd engineers of more traditional “hard” SF. From the perspective of an older generation of writers and fans, the values of this beloved tradition seemed under assault by a dreamy cabal of long-haired

barbarians, inspiring one pulp-era author, Poul Anderson, to draw a clear line in the sand: true SF, he proclaimed, “remains more interested in...the survival and triumph and tragedy of heroes and thinkers, than in the neuroses of some sniveling fagot” (“Introduction,” *Nebula Award Stories No. 4*, 1969). This nasty crack, which inspired *New Worlds’s* associate editor James Sallis to mail Anderson a letter of complaint on pink, lavender-scented paper, makes it clear that old guard condemnations of the decadent excesses of the new wave movement had a homophobic edge.

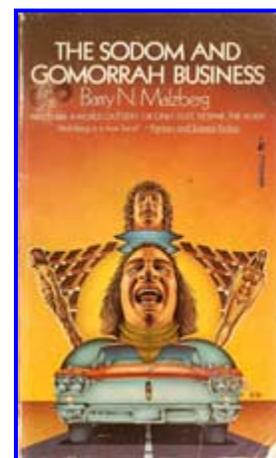
(To his credit, Anderson, in a “Letter to the Editor” in *SFWA Review*, August 1970, acknowledged that his “sniveling fagot” comment had gone over-the-top and that he’d had the fact pointed out to him by “an anonymous but amicable and witty note from a self-proclaimed homosexual who informed me that, while he had tried a great many things, which he listed, sniveling was not among them. ... He also prefers to be spelled with two g’s.” For an amusing printed riposte to Anderson, see Damon Knight’s “Pretentious Intellectuals, Sniveling Faggots, and the Milford Mafia” in the same issue of *SFWA Review*.)

This lingering homophobia is unsurprising since some of the major works of the new wave, especially in the United States, were written by authors who were not only insufferably arty and pretentious (from the perspective of SF’s traditionalists) but also openly gay or bisexual. Samuel R. Delany (b. 1942), when not restlessly cruising the Christopher Street waterfront for rough trade — as he describes in his astonishingly frank memoir *The Motion of Light in Water* (1988) — was penning one counterculture classic after another for Ace Books, with his handling of sexual themes growing increasingly bold and adventurous. *Babel-17* (1966), for example, essentially queers the space-opera subgenre so favored by pulp SF writers, depicting galaxy-spanning starships whose crews are bonded in ambisexual threesomes.

Several of his tales feature lovingly evoked male rogues — Comet Jo in *Empire Star* (1966), Lo Lobey in *The Einstein Intersection* (1967), Kidd in the surreal masterpiece *Dhalgren* (Bantam, 1975) — who clearly form an archetype of erotic fascination for the author (or perhaps an idealized self-portrait): young, scruffy, streetwise, they are objects of temptation for men and women alike — and even for trisexual aliens. Delany’s friend and sometime traveling companion, Thomas M. Disch (1940–2008), also produced work with a strong gay flavor. A master of bitchy irony on a par with Oscar Wilde, Disch drew fiercely satiric portraits of near-future America, devolving into fascist tyranny in *Camp Concentration* (1968) or lapsing into bohemian decadence in *334* (1972).

Even straight authors began to approach homosexual themes and characters sympathetically, inspired by both the new wave’s heady shattering of taboos and the dawning gay rights movement, which circulated striking images of activism and pride that began to counterbalance longstanding stereotypes of gay men as weak and self-loathing. While some, such as Norman Spinrad (b. 1940), still seemed in thrall to macho attitudes that mocked or stigmatized homosexuality — his 1966 story “The Age of Invention” features a flamboyant gay caveman named Peacock who flounces around “in a skin-tight sabertooth skin dyed bright violet” — others, like Edgar Pangborn (1909–1976) and Robert Silverberg (b. 1935), took the opportunity to explore the newly fluid boundaries of sex and gender in their writing. Pangborn’s series of tales set in a pastoral America after a nuclear holocaust — e.g., *Davy* (1965) and *The Company of Glory* (*Galaxy*, Aug.-Sept. 1974) — depict a world cleansed of puritanical ideologies and open to unconventional forms of erotic bonding.

For his part, Silverberg flirted with bisexuality in *Son of Man* (1971), wherein a dazzled time traveler consorts with the androgynous denizens of a dreamlike far future, and drew extraordinarily sensitive and detailed portraits of two gay college students in *The Book of Skulls* (1972) — one self-confidently out, the other desperately closeted. Under multiple pseudonyms he had, during the early and mid-1960s, churned out dozens of pornographic novels, several with lesbian themes, for publishers like Midnight Reader and Nightstand Books; he was thus well positioned to capitalize on the new climate of sexual openness and experimentation pioneered within the genre by the new wave movement. (He wittily discusses this background in his essay “My Life as a Pornographer,” *Sin-a-Rama*, 2004.)



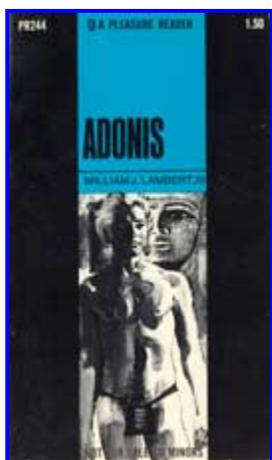
Barry N. Malzberg. *The Sodom and Gomorrah Business*. Pocket Books, 1974. Artist: Charles Moll.

Other SF writers who wrote porn on the side, such as Barry N. Malzberg (b. 1939), also displayed a facility for depicting full-blooded gay and lesbian characters, though sometimes with an edge of heterosexist snobbery. Malzberg novels like *On a Planet Alien* and *The Sodom and Gomorrah Business*, both released in 1974 by Pocket

Books, feature gay protagonists aggressively confronting extraterrestrial wonders and near-future catastrophes, respectively. Though both works tend to equate homosexuality with overt misogyny and a loveless existence, thus reviving traditional stereotypes, the mere fact that by the mid-1970s SF novels could be written and published with gay men at the center of the action, adopting roles traditionally reserved for straight male heroes, indicates a significant degree of progress.

(Interestingly, these same stereotypes occasionally recurred in works of feminist SF published during the 1970s, such as Suzy McKee Charnas's 1974 novel, *Walk to the End of the World*, which depicts a society in which women are subjugated by a gay male hegemony. That said, it is undeniable that the works of feminist SF published during the period, especially by lesbian or bisexual authors like Joanna Russ and Alice Sheldon, a.k.a. James Tiptree, Jr., had a significant influence in legitimating same-sex desire within the genre.)

While some SF writers moonlighted as pornographers during the 1960s and early 1970s, the reverse was also the case: some gay erotic novelists produced works of science fiction. The most visible of these figures was William J. Lambert III (b. 1942), who wrote about a dozen SF and fantasy titles between 1969 and 1971 for Greenleaf Classics (the first three under its Phenix imprint), based in San Diego and run by William L. Hamling, an editor of SF digests during the 1950s, and Earl Kemp, a prominent fan.



William J. Lambert III.  
*Adonis*. Greenleaf  
Classics, 1969. Artist:  
Harry Bremner.

Greenleaf had published Victor J. Banis's *Man from C.A.M.P.* books (as by Don Holliday) earlier in the decade. But while those had been hilarious send-ups of popular spy stories, Lambert's works were earnest, ambitious fusions of hard-boiled detective stories, occult thrillers, and SF. His *Adonis* trilogy — *Adonis* (1969), *Adonis at Actum* (1970), and *Adonis at Bomasa* (1970) — features the exploits of gay gumshoe Adonis Tyler as he confronts pseudoscientific marvels of various sorts; the back-cover blurb for the second volume in the series gives a flavor of their lurid weirdness: “Over the hills and through the primeval passes, the four of them fought their gory way to Actum, the site of the grave of Kutamehan II. Their goal — to find the beetle which, when crushed and eaten, provided thirty-six nonstop hours of sodomistic bliss!” Scenes of gay sex run rampant through the texts, as also through Lambert's *Demon* series, kicked off by *Demon's Stalk* (1970), and his occasional singleton novels — *Valley of the Damned* (1970), for instance, which deploys the werewolf legend as a metaphor for hidden, uncontrollable lusts.

The most significant publisher of SF porn during the period, however, was Essex House, an imprint of the California-based Parliament News, a distributor of sexually explicit materials of various kinds. The brainchild of editor Brian Kirby, Essex House sought to feature works of serious sexual extrapolation, inspired in part by the example of Burroughs, but also building on a long tradition of strenuous and challenging erotica

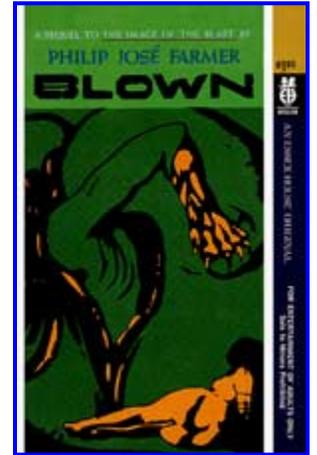
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The real achievement of the Essex House books, as Michael Perkins (*The Secret Record*, 1976) has observed, is that, rather than subordinating the generic impulses of SF (mind-expanding adventure, confrontation with extra-human otherness) to those of pornography (titillation, sexual gratification), they were genuine *hybrids*, “graft[ing] an erotic vision onto a previously established form” with results that were “often startling.” Moreover, unlike Lambert's breezy genre splicings, which tend to preserve the essentially affirmative tone of mainstream porn (in which pleasure is seen as an individual right and a mode of psychic liberation), the Essex House books are usually dark and discomfiting, grim revelations of the ways in which desire can be used to manipulate and exploit, to debase and enslave.

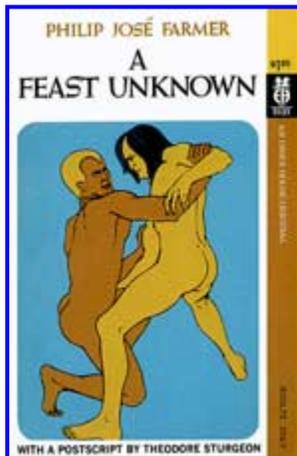
Few of the Essex House books deal centrally with homosexuality, but most of them treat the subject in some fashion. In the satiric *Agency Trilogy* (1968) by erstwhile Beat poet David Meltzer (b. 1937), a tyrannical government apparatus extends its gray, pleasure-denying tentacles throughout everyday life, turning sexual exchanges into empty parodies of sensual intimacy, and showing how straights and gays alike suffer under the smothering strictures of modern technocracy. Kirby also persuaded SF author Philip José Farmer — who, as we have seen, fought a longstanding battle with editors to expand the genre's sexual horizons — to produce new work for him, and the result was a series of phantasmagoric horror fantasies, such as *Image of the Beast* (1968) and *Blown* (1969), the latter featuring real-life SF fan Forest J Ackerman (1916–2008) in dubious battle with interdimensional sex monsters.

The Essex House book with the strongest gay content is probably Farmer's *A Feast Unknown* (1969), which exposes the homoerotic longings and frustrations underlying classic superhero narratives. Identified by Perkins as "a wondrous concoction," the novel features Lord Grandith and Doc Caliban (stand-ins for Tarzan and Doc Savage), who, engaged in a blood feud rife with repressed desire, clash furiously while sporting enormous erections, with Grandith involuntarily ejaculating as he snaps Caliban's neck.

Although Essex House had a limited circulation, Farmer's titles were picked up by genre publishers in the late 1970s, when the standards for acceptable content had definitively shifted toward total liberalization — a real vindication for the author, who had struggled to get even modestly controversial stories into print three decades earlier. This shift had been signaled as early as 1973, when Lancer Books — the paperback imprint under which genre stalwart Isaac Asimov appeared — printed Samuel Delany's *The Tides of Lust*, a work of extreme erotic fantasy, with unflinching homosexual content, that had originally been commissioned by Kirby before Essex House folded in 1970. While not really a work of SF, the fact that the novel was released by a genre publisher under the authentic name of an award-winning and well-respected SF author indicates that the times had well and truly changed. (The British paperback edition in 1980 resulted in a successful prosecution for obscenity due to Delany's depiction of underage sex. When the book was reissued by Rhinoceros in 1994 — under Delany's original title *Equinox* — he arbitrarily added one hundred years to the age of every juvenile character, giving the text an odd if unintended science-fictional gloss.)



If the mid-1960s to early 1970s marked a moment of experimentation during which the genre began to accommodate itself to unsettling new content, including homosexuality, the mid-1970s to early 1980s can be seen as a period of consolidation during which these transformations were assimilated to the point of being taken for granted. This does not mean that homosexuality entirely lost its hot-button connotations — many treatments of the subject still bore a tone either of prim disgust or prurient fascination — but the proliferation of novels and stories with gay characters, situations, and relationships during this decade inevitably made the topic less shocking for the average SF reader. Writers could explore, whether with sympathetic interest or vague aversion, a range of gay-inspired content: the links between homosexuality and artistic aspiration in Elizabeth Lynn's *A Different Light* (1978) and Thomas Disch's *On Wings of Song* (1979); the complexities of intergenerational relationships in M.J. Engh's *Arslan* (1976) and Orson Scott Card's *Songmaster* (1980); the allure of S and M power play in Janet Morris's *High Couch of Silistra* (1977) and Delany's *Stars in My Pocket Like Grains of Sand* (1984); and much more.



Above all, the straightforward inclusion of openly gay men as protagonists in typical SF plots was, by the 1980s, a fairly common affair, hardly the fraught, secretive business Sturgeon had depicted when he first broached the subject in "A World Well Lost." Today, closeted characters in SF stories are more likely to be treated as comically behind the times, held back by their own inhibitions rather than society's prejudices. There is now an active gay presence within SF fandom, spearheaded by the Gaylaxian SF Society, founded in Boston in the mid-1980s, which sponsors an annual conference, Gaylaxicon, and the Gaylactic Spectrum Awards, which recognizes work, past and present, that treats LGBT themes in imaginative and sympathetic ways (Sturgeon's pathbreaking 1952 story is comfortably ensconced in their Hall of Fame). When a major original anthology of gay and lesbian SF — Nicola Griffith and Stephen Pagel's *Bending the Landscape: Science Fiction* — appeared in 1998, it was showered with praise by reviewers and fans alike, all of whom seemed pleased to have the field's openness to such material so visibly and categorically affirmed.

Since the SF genre essentially thematizes the process of change — the ongoing, unstoppable transformation of the inadequate present into the unimaginable future — it was hardly likely to be held back long by archaic fears and biases. Indeed, what is well lost in today's SF is the antediluvian world of the 1950s, when the pulp-era reticence regarding sexuality conspired with the political climate of antigay repression to render the topic of homosexuality almost entirely taboo. "We're here, we're queer, get used to it," is a message that contemporary science fiction has unquestionably heard and absorbed.

## Notes

For a fuller discussion of the traditional taboos against depictions of sexuality in SF, and their gradual breakdown during the 1960s, see my essay “Sextrapolation in New Wave Science Fiction,” *Science Fiction Studies*, July 2006. For an overview of the new wave movement itself and the controversies surrounding it, see my essay “The New Wave,” in *A Companion to Science Fiction*, ed. David Seed (Blackwell, 2005).

In writing this essay I have relied heavily on Eric Garber and Lyn Paleo’s excellent bibliography *Uranian Worlds: A Guide to Alternative Sexuality in Science Fiction, Fantasy, and Horror*, 2nd ed. Garber and Paleo distinguish between texts in which “[m]ale homosexuality or bisexuality is a major component” and those in which it is “mentioned in the work but is not a major element.” Generally speaking, in this essay I have looked at only the former category of stories — i.e., works in which a character’s sexuality is clearly marked and forms an integral aspect of the plot or theme. Yet even Garber and Paleo’s more widely cast net gathered few examples prior to the 1960s, and some of those are debatable: for instance, they include texts such as Isaac Asimov’s 1951 story “The Encyclopedists,” in which “effete” or “foppish” characters appear, suggesting that these may signal an ambiguous sexuality. By my somewhat stricter reckoning, even including stories about lesbianism published in the SF magazines during the 1950s would not bring the total much above one dozen, and lesbian SF is, of course, beyond my scope here.

Finally, considering his prominence in the history narrated here, I would like to dedicate this essay to Philip José Farmer, who died while this book was going to press. Thanks to his trailblazing efforts, SF is today a more exciting and open-minded genre.

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\*Excerpted and reprinted from *The Golden Age of Gay Fiction* with the permission of Man Love Romance Press, Laura Baumbach, and Rob Latham.

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I always had trouble ending short stories in ways that would satisfy a general public. In real life ... people don't change, don't learn anything from their mistakes, and don't apologize. In a short story they have to do at least two out of three of those things, or you might as well throw it away in the lidless wire trash receptacle chained and padlocked to the fire hydrant in front of the American Academy of Arts and Letters.

-- Kurt Vonnegut, *Timequake*

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# Everything You Ever Wanted to Know About Cult Mags...

by Earl Terry Kemp

*Cult Magazines: A to Z*

*A Compendium of Culturally Obsessive & Curiously Expressive Publications*

Edited by Earl Kemp & Luis Ortiz

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While not comprehensive, it certainly covers the era of the golden age of cult magazines. The main elements of which are sex, celebrity gossip, illustrations or photographs of scantily clad and nude women, salaciousness, crime, contrariness against political and religious authority, sadism, and obsession. This book can be read as a tribute to the daring of a few non-conformist publishers and editors, and their readers.

After an all too brief introduction, "Dirty Laundry," by Luis Ortiz, the reader is taken away on a fully illustrated trip down memory lane, to all those memories they had and never had. Beginning with Acme News Company, seeing the four columns of detail that surround pages filled with major illustrations, the reader can clearly see this title is a major work of importance, a must encyclopedia for every bookshelf.

This book is worth every penny. The full color, crisp, detailed magazine covers pop right out of the page. Every cover is a delicious selection of either camp, fantastic art, or gorgeous girls. The illustrations make this a very special treat. There is enough eye candy for hours of reading, and re-reading.

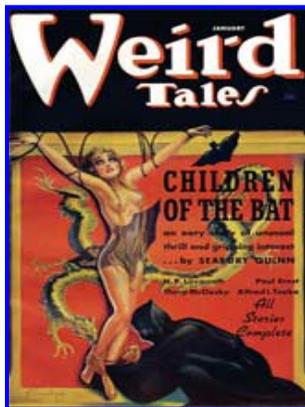
Even a book of this length sadly can't reprint every cover of every magazine, but it does manage to pick the best, some rare, and some unknown covers that represent the essence of the cult experience.

The overall typography of the typeset page is a work of beauty, the four column layout allows one column, two column, and larger reproductions. There are fine representatives of the best back cover art that jog old memories with those standard ads that used to promise the world. The editors have made a fine selection of interior artwork as well.

This book shows that it is a major work throughout. The various contributing writers each have left their unique stamp on their articles. They take the reader on a journey of knowledge, wonder, and even reverence for those magazines they each clearly loved.



You want to find out about *Battle Birds*, it's all here, so are *Black Hat*, and *Blackstone's Magic*. And it's not just about the magazine, it's about their era, the publishers, the editors, those unique characters that made it all so weirdly strange, like Calvin Thomas Beck.



Everything is masterfully indexed and cross-referenced for instant access for an up close and personal journey through the most original publications ever. Some of the articles contained within are significant works of scholarship, such as the one done by Robert Weinberg for *Weird Tales*.

If you didn't know about this book before, you do now, so go buy it. It's money well spent.

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Thanks to TV and for the convenience of TV, you can only be one of two kinds of human beings, either a liberal or a conservative.

-- Kurt Vonnegut

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**“Leinster’s Plumie,”** by Ditmar