

# MONADNOCK #1

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## Still Alive, Despite Everything

Yes, I'm still alive—unlike a lot of people I could name—but I haven't done a lot of meaningful writing since July of last year, when I was parted from the magazine formerly known as Prince. Or *Science Fiction Chronicle*. Or something. Yes, I really did sell the magazine to DNA Publications in 2000, shortly after I came down with Type 2 Diabetes, and after I realized that SFC had begun to lose money. Frankly, after all these years (a column in *SF Times* in the early 1960's, publishing *Degler! / SF Weekly* from 1966-68, then SFC starting in 1979) I was pretty much burned out on writing news. The fact that my writing the news and publishing the mag was something that I had to do to continue to make some sort of living was Not a Good Thing. Or, to quote the title character in that otherwise really bad SF film *Robot Monster* (you know, the one with the guy dressed in the ape suit who wore a space helmet), "I must, but I cannot." I think that sums things up nicely.

Events after that disappear into a ghostly fog composed of my trying to forget what happened, and my signing a legal agreement with DNA not to say what happened. If anything happened. Which, perhaps, it didn't. I think this is part of my own personal don't ask, don't tell policy. All I can tell you is that I get my news now from *Ansible*, *Locus*, or on the web.

## Why Monadnock?

I thought long and hard about a name for this zine. I could have revived *Algol*, or *Degler!*. Both date from the early 1960's, and both have long histories. Better to let dead dogs alone, as Stephen King showed us. Will Dick Geis end up being known for the confusing name changes of his zines, rather than for their contents?

Then I thought of *Monadnock*, a name which I have been captivated by since first I saw it in a history of the warship *Monitor*—which has fascinated me since I was a kid. If you're not aware, the original *Monitor* evolved into a class of ships with a low freeboard and revolving turrets. *Monitors*, for so the class was called, were used extensively by the US Navy until World War I, by the British and European navies into WWII; we used them in modern form on the rivers of Vietnam. They were superseded by submarines, as in turn the *Virginia/Merrimack* evolved into the ironclad and then steel naval vessel, also using rotating turrets and iron plating, then protective armor.

According to the 1905-06 *Jane's Fighting Ships*, the US fleet contained four *Monitors*, the *Arkansas*, *Nevada*, *Florida* and *Wyoming*, all built in 1890-91; the *Monterey*, from 1891; and five ships launched in 1883: the *Puritan*,

*Amphitrite*, *Monadnock*, *Miantonomoh*, and *Terror*.

The *Monadnock* displaced 3,990 tons, with a complement of 163, mounting 4-10 inch, 2-4 inch, 2-6 pdr, 2-3 pdr, 2-1 pdr, and 2 machine guns. She carried a 9 inch armor belt amidships, and was designed to steam at 12 knots, with a 300 ton load of coal. Incredible as it may seem, with the decks just a foot or so above the water in a calm sea, *Monitors* actually crossed the Pacific and fought in the Battle of Manila!

So I thought of using the name *Monitor* itself, but there are a lot of those, including one for Christian Science fandom. There's a section with the name on the *Locus* website. Not a good choice. And it sounds too much like the name of a newszine for me to be comfortable with it.

But what does it *mean*? From my Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary, the same one I used at the Milford Academy 41 years ago: "Monadnock: [from Mt. Monadnock, New Hamp-shire, a typical example.] *Phys. Geog.* A hill or mountain of resistant rock surmounting a peneplain." A peneplain is a plain that's worn down from a higher level. Think the Black Hills of South Dakota, western buttes, Devil's Tower. Thus *Monadnock*. I like it. I consider myself a survivor, active continuously now in SF fandom for 44 years. Been here, still doing this.

## I Barely Remember 1953

After spending many months not doing anything, this spring and summer I did a fair amount of work on a publication telling you more than you ever wanted to know about the 1953 Hugos, put to the task by Joe Siclari. Frankly, my heart wasn't into it; I really couldn't work up any great enthusiasm for the 1953 Retro-Hugo project.

1953 was way before I got into reading SF (being 7 that year) and although there was a lot of great fiction done then (which I've of course read subsequently) I'm not too strong on the fannish aspects of the day. Which is why I got Juanita Coulson and Robert Silverberg (the former not yet married to Buck Coulson, the latter a teenager still a few years from college and the days of writing 10,000 words a day) to do the fannish stuff.

Don D'Amassa did a piece on 1953's stories and novels, which was supplemented by Mark Olson and Jim Mann on the short fiction, and a long article by Alex Eisenstein on that year's art and artists, and Dan Kimmel on the films, TV shows and other dramatic stuff.

Aided and abetted by Joe and his enthusiasm, this was finished just a few weeks before Torcon. Noreascon had it printed up and copies were to be distributed at the Torcon Hugo ceremony and then, so I understand, by Noreascon. So we'll have a Long Time to contemplate who to vote for.

Well, actually, you and I will have a time to

contemplate. The way my cynical mind works, I'm just assuming that the vast majority of Hugo voters are going to disregard any names they don't know, like Walt Willis or Ed Emshwiller, and vote for those still alive, like Silverberg or Freas. It happened in earlier Retro-Hugo voting, and there's no reason it won't happen again. Thus do towering talents become forgotten. Even by us, the great Time Binders...

The best part of the whole process was spending three days early in August working on the final details at Joe and Edie Stern's house in upper Westchester County, north of NYC. There I was surrounded by bird feeders and lots of plants. Alas, this summer being what it was, overcast, hot and rainy weather prevented me from getting into their pool. The weather didn't stop the frogs and baby mice, the latter drowning. Joe taught me how to ladle the frogs out of the pool before the chlorine in the water killed them. Then you whip them through the air like a living Lacrosse ball, hoping they'll land somewhere their tiny brains won't let them get back into the water.

While Joe was busy downloading images of the books, magazines, movies and artwork to use in the thing, I developed a nice relationship with their Labrador, Baskerville, who taught me how to throw a ball. The secret: it's boring when the ball falls into high grass; much more satisfactory when it bounces on the brick walkway between the pool and the house. She liked being scratched, too, as do we all...

### Too Busy to Look for Work

There's a saying which I have learned is one of the True Things which happens to all of us, eventually. It's wondering how I ever had the time to make a living. Having been either unemployed or semi-retired (the Sunday *NY Times* employment section having shrunk from 48 pages to 8, the times being what they are) I'm finding that I can't quite find the time to do anything meaningful. My days are taken up with getting up, eating breakfast, watching entirely too much TV, going out for my daily walk, buying and reading the newspaper, then watching more TV at night, and another 24 hours have gone by. I've been busy, but not productive. All the stuff I'd planned to do when I didn't have the time hasn't gotten done. I have vast piles of photographs which I want to go through, throwing out unwanted stuff and organizing the balance. There are a couple dozen bankers' boxes full of stuff, including fanzines, and letters here, but actually getting stuff done is Real Hard.

### How Walt Cole's Collection Died

Last December, New York fan Walt Cole, 69, was found dead in Brooklyn. He'd been an active fan for more than 50 years, first heading the Centaurian League in 1948. For decades he was an officer of the Lunarians. He compiled the extremely useful 1964 *A Checklist of Science Fiction Anthologies*, reprinted by Arno Press in 1974, and was Fan GoH at the 1994 Lunacon. But that's not the end of his story.

When he died, I wrote for *Locus* and *Ansible* that "no information is available about the disposition of his major

SF collection." He lived in a basement apartment in a vacant one family house. Just before he died he'd planned to move, so he was in the midst of packing. All his paperbacks were on the floor, plus a lot of other books. His collection contained all sorts of wonderful first editions by major names, going back to the 1940's. There was a lot of other stuff from recent years of no value, plus a whole bunch of Morris Scott Dollens paintings, a Schoenherr cover from *Analog*, and a Jack Gaughan cover.

A month or so after he died, neighbors noticed water draining into the street. A pipe broke directly above a metal cabinet containing some of Walt's collection. He'd wrapped all the hardcovers in plastic, which ended up being good and bad. Good because the books that had water raining down on them were still okay; bad because those books that got submerged in the two feet of water in the place retained the water and were ruined.

I was brought in by the executor, a fan, who was understandably overwhelmed. A lot of mistakes were made, including airing out individual books, so they ended up warping and being ruined. The water was apparently in the place for a couple of weeks, though the heat was off. The paperbacks and everything in boxes on the floor were ruined. Some boxes had been stacked up, lost their integrity, and fallen over. Many of the oldest pulps were ruined. Blue mold started to cover everything.

All in all, it was a disaster. If Walt hadn't already been dead, it would have killed him. I tell people about rows of first edition hardcovers—a dozen each by Heinlein, Bradbury, other classics, fit only for the dumpster.

We managed to save hundreds of other books, taken by several dealers. When I saw the nonfiction untouched, I rescued what I could and sold 5 boxes full at Lunacon, for the estate. I still have a few items that the executor gave to me, and there are some really smelly early 1940's *Astoundings* that I may yet sell.

The valuable lesson is that these things may be your babies, but you've got to learn to let go. If Walt had sold even some of his collection, he wouldn't have been living in squalor. You *can't* take it with you. If you've got relatives who love SF, or antiques, or whatever, great. If—like Walt and an increasing number of fans who live alone with dwindling resources—your love of SF dies with you, keep a few of your treasures and part with the rest, before it's too late. And no matter what you decide, make sure you have a will that states what you want done. Otherwise, your fanzines will end up like Harry Warner's collection, or Ray Fisher's.

### I Gave a Hugo Away

I gave a Hugo Award away, but it wasn't really mine. Sort of. From 1966 to 1974 I was I was assistant editor at F&SF. When the mag won the Hugo at the 1970 worldcon, Heicon, F&SF Editor Ed Ferman suggested I keep the statue. Why? Heicon was mostly run by students, on the cheap. Apparently, days before the con, they realized they had no Hugo bases. So they cut up a plywood door into big squares and smaller squares, which they glued together, smothered in brown enamel paint, and on which the award plaques were glued. The result: definitely one of

the ugliest Hugo Award bases, ever!

So it was no big deal for Ed to allow me to keep that year's Best Magazine Hugo. He has a lot of other ones, from other years. And I've had the 1970 F&SF Hugo all these years, even after leaving the mag in 1974. I offered to give the thing back to Ed several times, but every time, he graciously declined.

Jump forward to the present, when Gordon Van Gelder is the new Editor/Publisher, all the fiction mags have seen better days, circulation and profitwise, and the mags themselves don't win the awards: their editors do. I've mentioned giving the award to Gordon several times, mostly at conventions. I've even threatened several times to travel across the Hudson River to far-off, exotic Hoboken, New Jersey, to give Gordon a big, shiny, phallic rocketship thing. But a guy who can't keep himself in razor blades probably has other things on his mind.

So instead of blowing \$2 on a subway ride and \$1.50 on the PATH train to Hoboken, I decided a Hugo Surprise, minus the whipped cream, would be the best idea. I used as a venue a neutral meeting point, the monthly KGB reading series hosted by Ellen Datlow and Gavin Grant. And there, to stunned disbelief on the part of many, perhaps even including Gordon Van Gelder, the transfer was completed. It was dutifully written up in *Ansible* and *Locus*, and you can see photos on Ellen Datlow's KGB website.

Not as dramatic as the exchange of spies at Checkpoint Charlie during the height of the Cold War, but far more satisfying for at least two of us. Meanwhile, I still have three Hugos, all with my name on them.

### By Subway to the Worldcon

In decades past I've taken trains to worldcons in Boston, Philadelphia, and Chicago; I took the train to New Orleans for an ABA convention, and in 1994 I took the subway to Penn Station, a train to Toronto, was greeted at Union Station by John Millard, spent the night at the Royal York, then entrained the next morning for Winnipeg. In 1975 I took a train eastbound across Canada from Vancouver to Regina, staying overnight with Eli Cohen. And of course I've taken trains all over the UK. So I'm firmly committed to rapid transit, railroads and rail fandom in general. Please *don't* ask to borrow all my books about the London Underground. Online, I'm on the e-mail list that talks about transit and train topics, from which the following grew.

Ed Meskys wrote about the Myrtle Avenue El, "Originally it, like the other Brooklyn Els, had gone over the Brooklyn Bridge. The Myrtle was the last line to continue using the bridge but then around 1950 the bridge was rebuilt removing el and trolley tracks...making it 3 auto lanes in each direction. The Myrtle was cut back...to Jay when Myrtle itself was cut off for a park with underground garage."

Ed's memories go back before I ever lived in Brooklyn, but thinking about Brooklyn's downtown, I realize that unlike Brooklyn Heights, downtown has changed *a lot*. The park had underground parking with a street-level entrance on Jay across from the stub end of Myrtle

Avenue; it was closed and vacant for a decade and is now a 35-story court building with the Brooklyn Marriott on the first 6 floors, courts and offices above. It was the site of a recent kerfluffle between Mike Tyson and two would-be autograph seekers.

A former subway power substation on the next street over, Adams Street, is being torn down. All the power equipment inside was removed several years ago, and it was most recently in use as an MTA parking lot. On its site will be placed another tower to contain 200 more rooms for the Marriott, bringing it up to 750 rooms, to be connected to the main hotel by a bridge over the pedestrian way which follows the now-long disremembered Myrtle El. With that number of rooms, and the function space it now has, the place could hold a Lunacon. It's already been the site of at least one media con.

Meanwhile, the several blocks from Jay to Flatbush Avenue Extension—itsself cut through many blocks and houses when they built the Manhattan Bridge—is the site of the multi-million sq. foot Metrotech development. It has several 35-50 story office buildings and a campus for Brooklyn Polytechnic University. There's a pedestrianised area with lawns, seating, and artwork. The new I.M. Pei-designed Federal Courthouse, on the site of the old Javits Building of the Federal Court, on Tillary Street between Cadman Plaza East (ex-Washington St.) and Adams (and on-ramps to the Brooklyn Bridge), includes the redevelopment of the old Brooklyn GPO across Tillary as a multi-use federal office building. When they tore up the street in front of it, exposing the old Washington Street trolley tracks, they paused for a very short time before putting all the tracks and switches into the dumpster. *Owell...so much history burns down, is bombed down, or ends up in the dumpster.*

Thirty-five years later, I'm still in my Pineapple Street apartment in Brooklyn Heights. It was the first place I moved from home in 1968 and, as now seems likely, is where I'll eventually be carried, feet first, some time in the future. My building was built in 1883, the same year as the Dakota, where John Lennon lived, but was substantially rebuilt in the 1920's, taking a lot of the Victorian ornaments off. In a fairly plain one bedroom apartment, there are built-in bookcases in the living-room where I think there was a fireplace, and I still have terra cotta windowsills in the kitchen. The ceilings are 11 feet high, and the place, as I've said elsewhere, still has too much stuff in it. But I'm working, ever so slowly, on it.

I did some research recently, and am now pretty sure that Henry Ward Beecher, Civil War-era pastor of the Plymouth Church of the Pilgrims on the next street over, lived here until his death. Plymouth is famous for Lincoln worshipping there, and as a stop on the Underground Railway before and during the war. Beecher's sister wrote *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. My conjecture is that from the upper floors Beecher could see over the now demolished two-story Federal houses to his church, which remains active in the community, with stained glass windows by Louis Comfort Tiffany.

The Heights itself has only gotten better through the

years. Because it was the first Landmarked neighborhood in New York City, it has changed remarkably little, save for the better, in all these years. You can't build anything new taller than 50 feet and can't change the appearance of a building without permission. If you replace the windows, they have to look like the old ones, with, say, 6 over 6 mullions, even if, as here, you replace the original rotten wood windows with double-glazed ones. There are a lot of 19th Century houses, some Georgian in style, a lot of post-Civil War brownstones, Romanesque, Queen Anne, and other wonderful styles. Here, people restore their houses, remove stucco and restore the wood sides, rebuild stoops that were taken off in the 1920's, rebuild windows using the original 150-year-old glass, replace the dirt foundations with finished basements, and fight continuing battles to prevent the city from replacing the bluestone sidewalks with concrete.

### Mike Hinge

Word comes of the death in Philadelphia in mid-August of Mike Hinge, New Zealand-born artist who did the cover for the 24th issue of *Algol*, the first in full color. He also did a couple of wonderful interiors for that issue. I overprinted the cover and still have copies of the thing, some of which I used once as a Christmas card. Mike was born in 1931 and came to the USA in the late 1950's, attending LA's Art Center School of Design.

He was a genius but an incredible pain to work with; he wanted absolute control of all the design elements of my cover, which I was loathe to turn over to him. Among other things, he didn't want to have any type on the cover except for the logo. He was also a very big supporter of artist rights, which may have made him anathema for publishers who paid for their covers. Despite this, he did some wonderful posters, a famous cover portrait of Richard Nixon for *Time*, and lots of work for Ted White's *Amazing Stories* and for *Analog* during the 1970's.

Mike went through several periods of absolute destitution, during which he seems to have lost most of the stuff he accumulated during his periods of affluence. I remember having him over for a Thanksgiving meal one year during which he must have been starving: he managed to eat an entire stick of butter spread on a couple of rolls. I last saw him at the worldcon in Philadelphia, when he was, I'd hoped, coming out of another period of inactivity and joblessness. But I guess time and years of neglecting his health caught up with him.

### The March on Washington

Forty years ago this pre-Torcon weekend was the historic March on Washington, with Martin Luther King's famous "I Have a Dream" speech. The fannish connection was the 1963 worldcon, Discon 1, held at the Statler-Hilton a week later. The question on everyone's lips before the March, which went off in what was undeniably a very Southern city, was whether there was going to be any violence. Of course, we know now, there wasn't. But at the time, before so many of the famous events on that long road through Montgomery, Selma, Little Rock and Memphis, to name a few cities marked by the struggle,

there were a lot of questions. And precious few answers.

A few fans attended both. One was George Nims Raybin, a fellow member of the Lunarians, a lawyer for the NYC Rent Board, I think. I don't know how the March on Washington actually affected people's decisions to attend the worldcon. Did some fans rule it out, fearing that Washington would be in ruins a week later? What was the amount of apprehension versus the desire to attend the fannish event of the year? Frankly, I was too young to have any kind of perspective. Ask George Scithers, Dick Eney, Dick and Pat Lupoff, or others who were there—and are still around to recall those days.

My own memories of the con are still sharp. It was my first worldcon. I was a 17-year-old neofan who came down by Short-line bus, stayed at the un-air-conditioned Y and turned down Dick Eney's offer to buy a copy of *A Sense of FAPA* because I couldn't afford the \$2.50 price tag. I met "Doc" Smith, Murray Leinster, Bruce Pelz, Dave Van Arnam, Fred Patten, others. I ate peanut butter and jelly sandwiches in the N3F room, and White Castle hamburgers. And I still loathe Sigma Alpha Ro...

### September Pro/Fan Birthdays

Edgar Rice Burroughs, 9/1/1875; Virginia Schultheis, 9/1/31; C.J. Cherryh, 9/1/42; Donald Keller, 9/1/51; Brad Linaweaver, 9/1/52; Mike Gunderloy, 9/2/59; Cherry Wilder, 9/3/30; Jack Wodhams, 9/3/31; Marijane Johnson, 9/4; Robert A.W. Lowndes, 9/4/16; Peter Heck, 9/4; Roger Hensel, 9/4/49; Betty Knight, 9/5/28; Walter Breen, 9/5/30; Paul Stinson, 9/5/53; James Odbert, 9/6/36; Dan Cragg, 9/6/39; Mike Urban, 9/6/53; Gerry de la Ree, 9/7/24; Cas Skelton, 9/6/53; John Boardman, 9/8/32; Bill Burns, 9/8/47; Dan Deckert, 9/8/52; James Hilton, 9/9/00; Bill Bridget, 9/9/45; Frank Catalano, 9/9/58; William Crawford, 9/10/11; Leo P. Kelley, 9/10/28; Austin Dridge, 9/10/54; Roy Squires, 9/11/20; Kirby McCauley, 9/11/41; Walter B. Gibson, 9/12/1897; Charles L. Grant, 9/12/42; J.B. Priestley, 9/13/1894; Arthur J. Banks, 9/13/1898; Roald Dahl, 9/13/16; Dick Eney, 9/13/37; Lynn E. Cohen-Koehler, 9/13/55; David Honigsberg, 9/13/58; Bob Eggleton, 9/13/60; Norman Spinrad, 9/15/40; Chelsea Quinn Yarbro, 9/15/42; Art Widner, 9/16/17; Karen Anderson, 9/16; Owen Hannifen, 9/16/38; Lisa Tuttle, 9/16/52; Ralph E. Vaughan, 9/16/54; Eva Firestone, 9/18; Damon Knight, 9/19/22; Tanith Lee, 9/19/47; George "Lan" Laskowski, 9/19/48; Mary Paterno, 9/19/52; Nancy Tucker Shaw, 9/20/28; Keith Roberts, 9/20/35; Beverly Warren, 9/20/45; George R.R. Martin, 9/20/48; H.G. Wells, 9/21/1866; Stephen King, 9/21/46; Alan Frisbie, 9/21/47; Fred Jacobic, 9/21; Richard Byers, 9/21/50; David Dyer-Bennett, 9/21/54; Peggy Crawford, 9/22/24; Walter G. Irwin, 9/22/50; Paul Kincaid, 9/22/52; Joshua Bilmes, 9/22/64; Wilmar Shiras, 9/23/08; Richard Wilson, 9/23/20; Leslie Swigart, 9/23/48; Matthew Tepper, 9/23/53; Jack Gaughan, 9/24/30; Lil Neville, 9/24; John Brunner, 9/24/34; J. Hunter Holly, 9/25/32; Therri Moore, 9/25/53; John Rankine, 9/26/18; Dennis Lien, 9/26/45; Mark Wm Richards, 9/27/59; Bernard Wolfe, 9/28/15; Michael G. Coney, 9/28/32; Ron Ellik, 9/28/38; William Barton, 9/28/50; Cy Condra, 9/30/16; H.B. Fyfe, 9/30/18.

Unless stated otherwise, birthdays are in the 20th century.

### Several News Items, Sort Of

Richard Labonté, once upon a time a young fan from Ottawa, Canada, whose exploits figure in the 1960's fandom chronicled by Mike Glicksohn and Susan Wood in *Energumen*, recently resurfaced. Richard was manager of several of the A Different Light bookstores (LA, the Bay Area, NYC) before disappearing from bookselling. He's going to be editing *Books to Watch Out For: The Gay Men's Edition*. Send review copies, catalogs, news and other stuff (how about fanzines?) to Richard Labonte, 7-A Drummond St. W., Perth ON K7H 2J3, Canada [Note: mark books to Canada "commercial samples/no commercial value" or they'll be returned]. Labonte was active in Ottawa fandom back when Alicia Austin was a young femmefan, and Susan Wood was a student at Carleton University. Good to see he's back in the yoke.

Hubert Rogers was known in the SF field for his many covers, especially for *Astounding*, from the February 1939 issue, through 1952—58 covers in all. His cover for E.E. "Doc" Smith's *Gray Lensman* may be one of the most famous; Noreascon 4 recently used it for a Progress Report cover. What's not known is that Rogers is better known in his native Canada as a portraitist, especially of political and wartime figures. He also did a lot of wartime posters that, obviously, look an awful lot like SF, because they depicted bombardiers at work in the belly of warplanes. If you'd like to look at his works outside the genre, go to the website of the Canadian War Museum, at <[www.canadianwarmuseum.ca](http://www.canadianwarmuseum.ca)>, which holds 22 of his original paintings, including his famous "The Quebec Conference of 1944". Enter his name in the appropriate place to see his work. You can also see at least one of his portraits if you visit the Parliament Buildings in Ottawa, the nation's capitol.

"Faan" may be a term that fannish fans use, but now it's also a place to eat. "Faan," 209 Smith Street at Baltic Street, Brooklyn NY, (718) 694-2277, on the Smith Street restaurant row, is described as a "very hip pan-Asian" eatery, with such dishes as vegetarian spring rolls, miso soup, grilled pork chops with lemongrass, and terriyaki salmon. Sounds like a place for John Hertz to chow down, wearing his trademark propeller beanie.

State officials in Colorado, New Mexico and Utah asked the Federal Dept. of Transportation to rename U.S. Route 666 through the Southwest's Four Corners as U.S. 393. According to State Rep. Ray Begaye (D., NM), many

people won't travel on the highway, convinced that it's named for the biblical Number of the Beast. They fear "that the devil controls events along 666," *The New York Times* reported. After I wrote this, the DOT granted the request. This country is way too Christian for my comfort, and it shows. How about assigning the area code 666 to all SF and horror writers and fans?

### In Future Issues

I want to run book reviews of stuff I've been reading, and maybe other reviews. I'd like to reprise topics I raised in SFC editorials in years past, especially Global Warming, which as we all know doesn't exist (and the war in Iraq is over, too: George W. Bush says so, so it must be true. Would the potus lie to us?). Above all, this is my writing; it is *not* objective. I find I am an opinionated bastard, and two decades of suppressing my own opinions because I had to present a fair and balanced (screw *that* trademark) coverage of the news has soured me on the form in general. I can still do it, but *really* don't want to.

I'm not making any claims of frequency that I can't fulfill; I've been down that road once too often. I don't want to turn this into a newszine, with endless deadlines that I'll soon grow to hate.

I'm not sure where this zine is going, but I wanted to start out small and build from there. I've done it before—the first two issues of *Algol* were a mere two pages each, and look what happened there... But I am, of course, much older, and even more capable of restraining myself from spending money I don't have and can't easily recoup.

One of the things I missed the most about publishing SFC was the ability to make pages of type attractive. Clean, readable type, with stuff clearly presented remained a goal through most of my fannish career, from 1964's issues of *Algol*, to this new zine. Now I know what I've been missing.

A cold front came through last night, and today, August 23rd, is ever so much dryer and cooler than so much of the summer has been. I'd like to think the weather is a major source of my enthusiasm for finishing this and handing copies out at Torcon—where, as always I'll be traveling to have dinner with my friends, as Susan Wood once wrote.

—Andrew Porter

The final two pages are reprinted from the *Roanoke Times*, about how *not* to retire. I was and continue to be shocked by how Jan and George O'Nale of Cheap Street ended things.

# "It Was Time To Go"

by Tim Thornton, The Roanoke Times, June 22, 2003

George and Jan O'Nale kept to themselves—and they kept themselves well armed. What the couple did on Dick's Creek shocked Billy McPherson more than anything else he's seen in 32 years as Craig County's sheriff.

Billy McPherson knew what to expect, but being a sheriff for three decades had taught him not to take chances. He slipped a shotgun from his patrol car's trunk before he and state Trooper Tim Chaney started up George and Jan O'Nale's gravel drive-way. The O'Nales had a lot of guns. They used them often.

George was a target shooter. Jan wore a pistol when she walked along the road that runs by their Craig County home. People who stopped near the locked metal gate at the end of their driveway were likely to hear gunshots from the house—warning shots.

"Anytime you went up there," McPherson said, "regardless of who it was, they always had a weapon of some type, usually a pistol, in their hand."

The O'Nales' driveway climbs gradually from the county road, then turns right. A person standing in that curve can see the O'Nales' house—and can be seen from the kitchen window. McPherson and Chaney crept toward the house, keeping an eye out for movement inside. McPherson checked the back yard, then the front, then slipped in through the kitchen door.

It was dark inside, but the open door let in enough light for McPherson to see a box on the counter marked "SHERIFF." He walked past it, through louvered doors and down the hall. He pushed open another door with the barrel of his gun. Cold air came out. An air conditioner hummed in the window, running full blast even though the temperature outside was no more than 60 degrees—chilly for late May. In the glow from a string of colorful Christmas lights, McPherson saw the O'Nales lying together on a bed, covered by a heavy blanket.

They were dead—just as the letter they sent to McPherson said they would be. Rubber tubing ran from tanks on the floor to plastic bags fastened over the O'Nales' heads.

"I've seen them hung and shot and everything, but I've never seen anything like this before," McPherson said. "I thought I'd seen it all until this."

'Thank you for being my friend'

The O'Nales, both 56, were well-known in Craig County, but few people knew them well. The couple didn't socialize with neighbors. They didn't join groups. They didn't even buy their groceries at the New Castle Mick-or-Mack, the county's only grocery store. Though they banked in town, tellers at Farmers & Merchants Bank hardly knew them.

"I've worked here for about 10 years," teller Amy Price said. "I saw them maybe four times."

Tammy Dudding, another teller, lives near the O'Nale place. Sometimes, she said, George O'Nale would stop and

talk if her husband was working in the yard. But O'Nale never came inside. And he never invited the Duddings to his place. "I don't think they had any close friends in the county that I know," McPherson said.

A few people in the county—and others across the country—got letters from the O'Nales after the couple was dead. People they did business with. People George worked with at Catawba Hospital. People they liked. "The people who worked with George at the hospital said they liked George," McPherson said. "He was a nice fellow, easygoing."

At least two people at the hospital got letters. They declined to talk about them except to say that the O'Nales asked that there be no obituary and no memorial service. The couple wanted their deaths to be a private event. Ellen Horn, co-owner of a Craig County store called the Hunter's Den, got one of the letters. She never met Jan, but George sometimes joined the circle around the store's wood stove.

"He'd stay sometimes for an hour," Horn said. "I love to target practice and that's what we talked about. My letter just said, 'Thank you for being my friend' and 'Due to failing health we're going to take our lives in a quiet and peaceful manner.'"

There was no hint of what the O'Nales' health problems might have been.

Horn said she'd heard tales of the O'Nales' unneighborly behavior, but those stories didn't fit the man who came by her shop. "In here he was a very quiet, gentle gentleman," she said. Horn has 13 of the O'Nales' guns for sale on consignment. George brought 10 handguns in a few weeks before the suicides. The sheriff brought two more handguns and a rifle after he found the bodies. It's not unusual for someone to bring in so many guns, Horn said. But she did think something else George did was a little odd.

"He called me maybe six weeks before all this happened and asked me if I wanted all his gun books," Horn said. "I asked him why he was giving away his book collection. He said he didn't need them anymore."

## A legacy of books

There was more to the O'Nales' book collection than George's gun books. Jan was a collector of science fiction and a dealer in rare books. George collected books, too. They had a first edition of "The Town and the City," Jack Kerouac's first novel. But the collection's real gems were the books they made. For nearly 20 years, Cheap Street Press, the O'Nales' two-person company, produced art-quality science fiction books in limited quantities. They had fewer than 50 regular subscribers. Printed on exotic papers, bound in imported cloth and Niger goat leather, the books were bound and printed by hand. Many were signed by their authors, some of the most respected writers in the genre.

Mark Owings and Jack Chalker included Cheap Street in

their bibliography of science fiction and fantasy publishers—over the O’Nales’ objections.

“Jack began getting semi-threatening calls, while I got nice ones,” Owings said in an e-mail. “Jan was trying to play us off against each other, though quite what she wanted I never understood. My wife thought she sounded very paranoid and got frightened whenever another call came on the answering machine—two or three times a week for a couple of months.”

More than a decade ago, Owings and Chalker wrote in their bibliography, “The O’Nales seem to have renounced much of the world and preferred to live in one of their own design and liking for a decade now, and the mere fact that they’ve actually managed to pull it off so far is in itself notable and to many an enviable achievement.”

Mark Klause of Hyattsville, Md., was one of Cheap Street’s subscribers. He and his wife, Annette, met the O’Nales at a science fiction convention. He last talked to George O’Nale on New Year’s Day. The Klauses got three boxes of books from the O’Nales on May 30, two days after McPherson found the O’Nales. “I was afraid of this,” Annette Klause said. “We had a strange e-mail from them.” She couldn’t remember the message, but she remembered her husband saying, “Are they thinking about doing something drastic?”

“They did beautiful work, lovely books, pieces of art, really,” Mark Klause said. “I believe they would want the books they published to be their legacy.” That legacy is scattered among collectors’ shelves and university libraries. Tulane University in New Orleans has the best of it.

“We pretty much got the core of their collection,” said Wilbur Meneray, who oversees Tulane’s special collections. The university has one of the strongest collections of science fiction and fantasy writing in the country. The O’Nales gave Tulane at least one copy of everything Cheap Street printed along with the company’s correspondence and much of the O’Nales’ personal collections.

“The main thing was these very fine works of art, which the books are,” Meneray said. He began negotiating with the O’Nales in the spring of 2002. In September, he came to their house, loaded more than 40 boxes of books and papers into a van and drove back to New Orleans.

“I thought they were incredibly nice people,” Meneray said. “They’re the type of people I would enjoy having for dinner and sitting on the back patio talking about a number of interesting things. Interesting, interesting artistic people who could get passionate about a number of things. We just had a delightful time together.”

Although he didn’t think they were preparing to kill themselves, Meneray said, “You have it in the back of your mind. I asked them, ‘This is your life’s work. Why are you getting rid of it?’” The answer, he said, was their failing health, though he isn’t clear about exactly what was failing.

“Jan was not in the best of shape,” Meneray said. “George had some physical problems. I know that.” Meneray said the O’Nales had trouble with some of their

neighbors, “the survivalists and the Klan people that were out there.”

McPherson said he didn’t know what Meneray was talking about. “Nobody ever went around them people,” the sheriff said. “They never had any trouble with the neighbors. Nobody ever went up there.”

The O’Nales and their neighbors had a common cause at least once. When AEP planned to build a power line across Jefferson National Forest and through Craig County in the 1990s, residents along the route organized against it. The O’Nales fought along-side those groups, but they never joined them.

“They kind of did the fight on their own,” said Grover Mitchell, a leader of one anti-power line faction. “They just kind of chose to be separate.”

“I never belonged to any group,” George O’Nale told a Roanoke Times reporter in 1999 after he and his wife turned up on an AEP enemies list. “I didn’t think they were doing enough.”

The power line, which would have crossed their property, was a personal affront to the O’Nales, Annette Klause said. They’d moved to Craig County to enjoy the space and the mountains. Living on the edge of a national forest, they hadn’t counted on fighting off a power company. The battle seemed to take a lot out of them. They gradually stopped going to the science fiction conventions where they promoted their books.

“I think they left home less and less,” Klause said.

### ‘People who prized their privacy’

The O’Nales met through the mail. Jan—her name was Jan Landau then—sold rare and collectible books through her mail order company, The Left Hand of Darkness. The company name came from a science fiction novel by Ursula LeGuin. Years later, Cheap Street would publish two of LeGuin’s works.

After college, Landau moved to Los Angeles. She didn’t stay. “The air and the weirdness drove me to the East Coast,” she told a Roanoke Times & World-News reporter in 1981.

Landau ended up in Philadelphia, where she began selling science fiction books—first at conventions, then through the mail. O’Nale was one of her customers. They exchanged letters for three years, then met at a science fiction convention. They married, then launched Cheap Street Press at the 1980 World Fantasy Convention in Baltimore.

The O’Nales moved to Craig County that year. George had a journalism degree, but he was working at a printing company. In 1981, he went to work at Catawba Hospital as a psychiatric aide. He stayed there 20 years. Jan, who was trained as an engineer, continued to run her mail order business.

There’s nothing particularly unusual about the O’Nales’ house—1,000 square feet covered by brick and wood siding, three bedrooms and a bath, with a deck in front and two sheds out back. But the 5-acre lot the house sits on borders the Jefferson National Forest, giving it the kind of seclusion the O’Nales seemed to crave.

“They were people who prized their privacy,” Annette

Klause said.

McPherson said, "They were just loners."

### 'He left nothing undone'

The O'Nales had apparently planned their deaths for months. They closed their business; found a university to take their most valuable books; found an executor for their estate; boxed and labeled things they wanted particular people to have, then stored those things in a rental space; prepared their wills; mailed letters to people they wanted to say goodbye to —and mailed the letter to McPherson telling him what they'd done.

The combination to the lock on the O'Nales' gate was in the sheriff's letter. The key to their back door was taped to a piece of cardboard inside the same envelope. The O'Nales even labeled their back door so the sheriff wouldn't try to open the laundry room door by mistake. "He took care of everything," McPherson said. "He left nothing undone. The only thing he didn't do was remove the bodies."

O'Nale and his wife paid for their cremation in April, but the planning may have begun much earlier than that. In October 2001, a notice posted on the Internet announced that Cheap Street Press was looking for a library to take its archives. "At this time," the notice said, "the proprietors of Cheap Street are retiring the Press (and themselves as well)."

The evening of May 27, George and Jan O'Nale mailed a stack of letters from the New Castle post office, then went home and killed themselves with a device they'd

fashioned from plastic bags, rubber tubing and tanks of gas meant to inflate party balloons. The instructions came from "Final Exit," a book published by the Hemlock Society. According to the book, it would take the O'Nales about five minutes to die as they lay in their bed, looking at the colorful lights on their bedroom wall. McPherson found a copy of the book and a companion videotape in the box on the O'Nales' kitchen counter. "I destroyed those things because I didn't want anybody to get any crazy ideas," McPherson said. "I shredded the book and I tore the tape up."

The box also held copies of the O'Nales' last letters and documents that explained what they wanted to happen to their possessions and their bodies. Their possessions are being distributed. The O'Nales had no children. Most of what they own will be sold, with the proceeds divided between Thomas Travers, George O'Nale's friend since childhood, and Joel Landau, Jan O'Nale's brother. Her parents, both in their 80s, are not mentioned in her will. The O'Nales' bodies have been cremated, their ashes scattered in a location they wanted to keep secret.

"They were just very passionate people who put themselves wholeheartedly into what they believed in," Annette Klause said. "This time, apparently, they believed it was time to go."

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