



# AH! SWEET LANEY!

THE WRITINGS OF A GREAT BIG MAN

SELECTED WRITINGS OF  
FRANCIS TOWNER LANEY

EDITED BY ROBERT LIGHTMAN

Introductory Notes (*by Robert Lichtman*)

A Damned Sick Man (*by Charles Burbee*)

The Acolyte (*by Robert Bloch*)

I Am A Great Big Man

Syllabus for a Fanzine

Artistry of the One-Shot Fanzine

Government Subsidies for Fanzines

Of Lares & Penates

Pacificon Diary

My Ideals of Fandom

Gutless Wonders: A Discussion of Fan Ethics

If I Had A Million Dollars

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Sound and the Common Man

Some Notes on Bomb-Dodging

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Apologize, Al Ashley!

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Life, Death and Immortality

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The Burbee Bounce: Fulfillment N3F Time

Walter J. Daugherty Called Me on the Phone  
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The Problems of the Isolated Fan

Blitzkrieg! 1947 Style

...and another thing, Chas

(*by Zeda P. Mishler*)

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Who Was Howard Davison?

Lovecraft Is 86

Dianuts and Dianetics

Little Lessons in Semantics

I'm Afraid They May Come To My House

De Mortuis (*Jack Speer*)

*Cover designs and title page by Dan Steffan*

*Interior illustrations by William Rotsler*

*Design and production by Pat Virzi*

*From the introduction by Robert Lichtman:*

"Some of the articles in this collection have been reprinted in various fanzines over the years, but for most this is their first airing since they were written in the '40s and early '50s. Since not everyone has access to the original fanzines or the reprints, they are included here for all to enjoy..."

"The articles in this collection amply demonstrate the wide range of Laney's interests and obsessions without any further editorial comment. (I can't resist noting, however, that "Apologize, Al Ashley!" is the article that got Burbee fired as editor of *Shangri-LaAffaires*.) I hope you derive as much enjoyment reading it as I did putting it together."

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**Francis Towner  
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EDITED BY ROBERT LICHTMAN

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Ah! Sweet Laney!  
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Selected Writings of Francis Towner Laney

Edited by Robert Lichtman  
Design and production by Pat Virzi  
Proofreading by Randy Byers

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## CONTENTS

Introductory Notes ( <i>by Robert Lichtman</i> ) .....	1
A Damned Sick Man ( <i>by Charles Burbee</i> ) .....	3
<i>Originally published in <u>The Stormy Petrel</u>, May 1959, edited by Terry Carr</i>	
The Acolyte ( <i>by Robert Bloch</i> ) .....	5
<i>Originally published in <u>The Stormy Petrel</u>, May 1959, edited by Terry Carr</i>	
I Am A Great Big Man .....	7
<i>Originally published in <u>Spacewarp No. 41</u>, August 1950, edited by Charles Burbee &amp; F.T. Laney</i>	
Syllabus for a Fanzine .....	13
<i>Originally published in <u>Spacewarp No. 42</u>, September 1950, edited by Charles Burbee &amp; F.T. Laney</i>	
Artistry of the One-Shot Fanzine.....	23
<i>Originally published in <u>Shangri L'Affaires No. 29</u>, April 1946, edited by Charles Burbee</i>	
Government Subsidies for Fanzines .....	27
<i>Originally published in <u>Quandry No. 20</u>, May 1952, edited by Lee Hoffman</i>	
Of Lares & Penates .....	31
<i>Originally published in <u>Fan-Dango No. 11</u>, Spring 1946</i>	
Pacificon Diary .....	33
<i>Originally published in <u>Fan-Dango 13</u>, Fall 1946</i>	
My Ideals of Fandom .....	43
<i>Originally published in <u>Shangri L'Affaires No. 15</u>, June 1944, edited by Charles Burbee</i>	
Gutless Wonders: A Discussion of Fan Ethics .....	47
<i>Originally published in <u>Fan-Dango No. 11</u>, Spring 1946</i>	
If I Had A Million Dollars .....	51
<i>Originally published in <u>Fan-Dango 23</u>, Fall 1949</i>	
Satchmo at Billy Berg's .....	55
<i>Originally published in <u>Fan-Dango 15</u>, Fall 1947</i>	
Sound and the Common Man .....	57
<i>Originally published in <u>Fan-Dango 27</u>, November 1951</i>	

Some Notes on Bomb-Dodging .....	61
<i>Originally published in <u>Fan-Dango No. 14</u>, Summer 1947</i>	
The Heels of If .....	67
<i>Originally published in <u>Shangri LAffaires No. 25</u>, April 1945, edited by Charles Burbee</i>	
Apologize, Al Ashley! .....	71
<i>Originally published in <u>Shangri LAffaires No. 36</u>, June 1947, edited by Charles Burbee</i>	
A Random Conversation With Al Ashley on Life, Death and Immortality .....	73
<i>Originally published in <u>Fan-Dango No. 16</u>, Winter 1948</i>	
A Fabulous Burbee-Like Character .....	75
<i>Originally published in from <u>Burblings No. 6</u>, May 1951, edited by Charles Burbee</i>	
The Burbee Bounce: Fulfillment N3F Time .....	77
<i>Originally published in <u>Fan-Dango No. 18</u>, Summer 1948</i>	
Walter J. Daugherty Called Me on the Phone Last Night .....	79
<i>Originally published in <u>Burblings combined with Fantasy Amateur 1</u>, January 1949</i>	
Shangri-La the Red Feather Fanzine .....	83
<i>Originally published in <u>Quandry No. 17</u>, January/February 1952, edited by Lee Hoffman</i>	
The Problems of the Isolated Fan .....	87
<i>Originally published in <u>Fan-Dango 20</u>, Winter 1949</i>	
Blitzkrieg! 1947 Style .....	89
<i>Originally published in <u>Fan-Dango No. 15</u>, Fall 1947</i>	
...and another thing, Chas ( <i>by Zeda P. Mishler</i> ).....	91
This Conversation Really Happened .....	93
<i>Originally published in <u>Burblings combined with Fan-Dango #1</u>, November 1948, edited by Charles Burbee &amp; F.T. Laney</i>	
F.I.A. ....	95
<i>Originally published in <u>Wild Hair No. 1</u>, December 1947, edited by Charles Burbee, F.T. Laney, &amp; others</i>	
Insurgentism and the NFFF .....	97
<i>Originally published in <u>Fan-Dango 25</u>, May 1950</i>	
Who Was Howard Davison? .....	99
<i>Originally published in <u>Spacewarp No. 42</u>, September 1950, edited by Charles Burbee &amp; F.T. Laney</i>	
Lovecraft Is 86 .....	103
<i>Originally published in <u>Sky Hook #8</u>, Autumn 1948, edited by Redd Boggs</i>	
Dianuts and Dianetics .....	105
<i>Originally published in <u>The Unspeakable Thing No. 5</u>, April 1952, edited by Burton Crane &amp; Helen Wesson</i>	
Little Lessons in Semantics .....	115
<i>Originally published in <u>Fan-Dango 23</u>, Fall 1949</i>	
I'm Afraid They May Come To My House .....	119
<i>Originally published in <u>Fan-Dango No. 27</u>, November 1951</i>	
De Mortuis ( <i>Jack Speer</i> ) .....	123
<i>Originally published in <u>The Stormy Petrel</u>, May 1959, edited by Terry Carr</i>	

# My IDEALS OF FANDOM



FANTASY AND SCIENCE-FICTION FANDOM, comprising as it does one of my chief hobby interests, has naturally been the subject of a great deal of more or less constructive thought on my part. In the course of my association with the field, I have formulated a fairly complete system of *mores* dealing with it; and, while I have no intention of offering them as an iron-clad series of laws by which all other fans should be governed, I do feel that they are worthy of some consideration.

A definition of fandom is necessary before we can discuss ideals in connection with it. Perhaps I am unnecessarily conservative, but to me science-fiction and fantasy fandom is precisely what its name implies: a group of persons interested in a certain form of written expression. This interest is always indicated through reading (and usually collecting) fantastic fiction; it may also be legitimately expressed through the publication of amateur magazines dealing with various aspects of fantasy, and through the writing, professionally or otherwise, of fantastic fiction, verse, and essays, or by the drawing, professionally or otherwise, of fantastic pictures. *That* covers fandom, my friends; any other interests or functions tacked onto fandom

are wholly extraneous, and furthermore, are completely half-baked, insofar as they may be considered "fan" activity.

This perhaps extraordinary statement should be amplified. I most certainly do not wish to give the impression that I feel fans should be interested in nothing except their fantasy; on the contrary, it should be patent to anyone of moderate intelligence that no one phase of life and letters should be worthy of devoting one's entire life to. The point I wish to make is that fandom is being prostituted by certain of its more introverted members, who find it impossible to adjust to the world in general, but instead try to find in fandom a substitute microcosmos. Through the efforts of such persons, subjects such as music, sociology, the future world, religion, politics, nudes, and dozens of other unrelated topics are drawn into a hobby which should remain purist. As a matter of fact, so-called "organized" fandom has little or nothing to offer to the genuine and sincere fan; except for an occasional book review or a stray article that gets in by mistake, the literature of the fan field is arrant balderdash—sometimes interesting or amusing, it is true, but still balderdash.

As a matter of cold fact, fandom should be nothing more than a passing stage for most of its followers. There are a few persons (Russell, Farsaci, Baldwin, Rimel, and others of that stamp) who actually contract a life-long love for fantasy, much in the same manner that other people become golf addicts or collectors of postage stamps. The usual fan, however, becomes enthusiastic over pulp fantasy, perhaps graduates to book fantasy. More often than not, he never hears of fandom at all, and as his reading interests mature, he finds himself covering all literature, neither seeking out nor avoiding items of a fantastic nature. If he hears of our little fandom, he may become active in it for a time, but as a rule loses interest in fandom about the time he loses interest in fantasy. To my mind, this indicates normalcy. Any growing person is bound to pass in and out of several interests before becoming mature, though of course there are a limited few whose maintenance of their interest in actual fantasy can scarcely be called arrested development.

If, however, this “usual fan” happens to be of a psychologically unwholesome makeup, he will not fare so well in his passage through fandom. In the first place, his contacts with fans and his appearances in fanzines will probably give him the first real companionship and the first real chance for self-expression that his frustrated life has ever permitted him to have. Since companionship and an opportunity for self-expression are two of the prime needs of any person, this individual can scarcely be blamed for embracing fandom with a devout fervor. Nor, except inasmuch as his caperings cause annoyance and distress to the rest of us, can we do more than pity him when he clings frantically to fandom long after he has lost any real interest therein. His failure to make adjustment to the world is a matter for psychiatric treatment rather than acrimonious articles in some fanzine.

However, people like this, who cling to the husks of a hobby that they have outgrown, drag this hobby into disrepute in direct ratio to how many of them there may be. While of course in some cases they cannot help themselves, I feel that they should make a supreme effort to over-

come their introversion, and get out of fandom altogether.

Referring back to my second paragraph, it will be seen that very few fans or fanzines would really be considered such under my definition. This point should be kept in mind as I outline a few ideals. If one is to examine almost any leading fanzine for its fantasy-weird-stf content, he will find very little of it. In the same way, a surprising percentage of so-called top fans make no bones of the fact that they no longer collect or even read the literature which theoretically is the basis of their hobby.

It is my personal belief that scientifiction is less likely than fantasy or weird fiction to remain of interest to the individual as he matures. Scientifiction, basically speaking, is engaged largely in depicting the future world in its scientific, sociological, and technological aspects. The maturer individual is likely to lose his taste for a fictional treatment of these topics, and turn to serious books. In fact, I am not so sure but what a failure to make this advance in reading standards might be termed arrested development. Fantasy and weird fiction, on the other hand, are far more likely to have an artistic treatment, are far less likely to lead one into a serious consideration of any topic. Such literature is meant primarily to be enjoyed by those sensitive enough to enjoy it; its collection and reading is quite likely to develop into a life-time mania. (I might interpolate that the scientifiction which does remain of interest, other than to while away a very occasional idle hour, is of such nature that it might almost be termed fantasy; cf. *Starmaker*.)

The ideal fan, then, will collect intensively, will read critically, and will probably try his hand at some form of fannish self-expression—letter-writing, writing, drawing, or perhaps publishing. But this definition must be qualified; the ideal fan will also have many other cultural interests, and in addition will be well enough adjusted to the world and to people that he is able to live a completely normal, heterosexual life. Fandom to him will be an enjoyable hobby, probably one of several enjoyable hobbies. And to him, fandom will have as a primary basis nothing more nor less than stf-fantasy-weird.



There is only one non-fantasy-weird-stf interest growing out of fandom which I consider might be legitimately taken as part of the field. Amateur publishing, a well-known hobby in its own right, is a fascinating spare-time activity, and generally speaking is wholly lacking in fantastic content. (Fanzines are an extremely late and insignificant arrival in a field which dates back for considerably over a century.) The fan or former fan who is bitten with the publishing bug is quite likely to remain more or less in the fan field, even though his magazine may have absolutely no relationship to real fandom, and will probably be limited to circulation in FAPA. By strict definition of fandom, FAPA is not a fan organization at all (which is probably the main reason it has been the only successful national organization growing out of fandom) but is instead one of the best of the amateur journalism organizations. (Rival groups include *National Amateur Press Association*, *United Amateur Press Association*, and *American Amateur Press Association*.)

Inasmuch as FAPA is not a fan organization in the strict sense of the word, any type of subject matter is legitimate therein. In non-FAPA fanzines, the subject matter should be limited to stf-fantasy-weird. Organizational gossip, fan personalities, and humor are also legitimate for a general fanzine; but they should not be allowed to take up more than a small part of the pages. Fans interested in seeing what I consider to be an ideal fanzine might glance at a file of *The Fantasy Fan*. It contains a large amount of really good fiction and poetry, considerable choice humor, a good deal of gossip, information for collectors, book reviews and magazine reviews. The only defects are its lack of illustrations, and the preoccupation with pulp fantasy. Pulp fantasy is as a rule the poorest available, and in consequence should be given much less space than more literate material. One of the chief functions of a

fanzine should be to feature fiction and verse of a non-commercial cast. In the first place, beginning writers need a medium in which to publish their better work; secondly, much of the very best fantasy available today is not written simply because it cannot be published in the pulps, yet has no other outlet. A fanzine should also contain as much collecting information as possible, and as many critical reviews as can be gotten. A literate approach is the only worthwhile one.

Insofar as fan organizations are concerned, it is my personal belief that the only worthwhile ones are local in nature. It is difficult to see the object of national organizations of the NFFF-Cosmic Circle variety; there is no possible function that they can perform one whit better—if as well—as unorganized fans or local clubs. A national fan organization comes under the heading of “wholly extraneous interests and functions tacked onto fandom”; it merely serves as a medium for wasting the time and boosting the egos of its participants. A local group, on the other hand, has considerably more to recommend it. Its primary function, I believe, should be social; the meetings between persons of like tastes, and the friendships thus brought about are in themselves enough to justify the club’s existence. When in addition the club is able to bring about augmented publishing, intensify the interests of the members, and lead them into other fields of related endeavor; the local group is of real value. If, on the other hand, the club degenerates into a vendetta between a bunch of screeching introverts and nit-wits, it is time to call a halt to the whole stupid mess.

An ideal local fan club would have a minimum of organization, and a maximum of casual friendships. It should sponsor and maintain a local clubroom, centrally located for the convenience of its members, and should have an occasional formal meeting at which some truly

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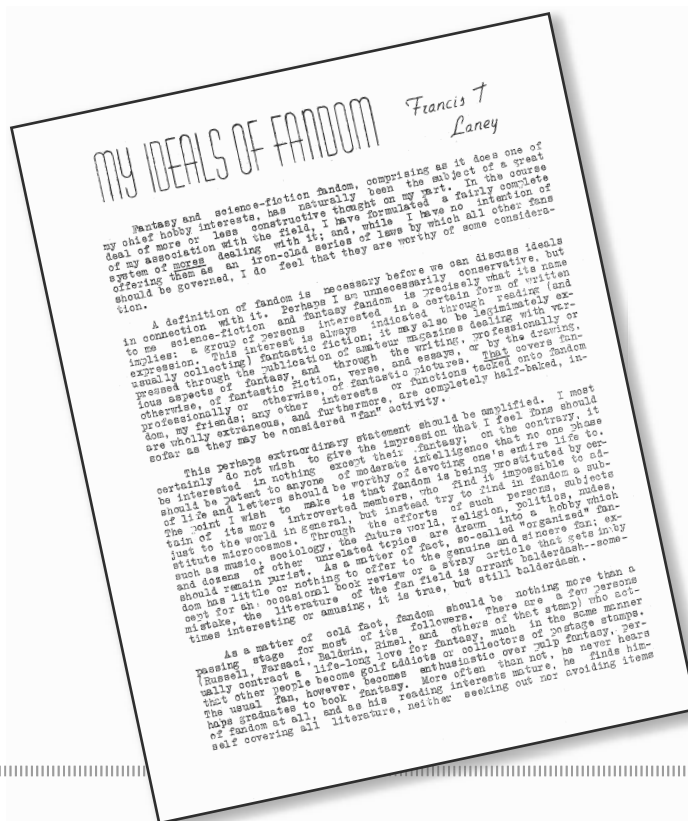
worthwhile program was presented. Otherwise, its activity should consist of the unorganized activity of the individual members. The club-room should be used for any activities of the members; there should be no restrictions on any of their actions except insofar as they might be illegal or otherwise likely to bring the club into disrepute. In other words, there should be drinking, dancing, smoking, dirty joke sessions, rosebud-promotion, or anything else; regardless of its lack of fantastic content provided it is (1) kept under control and (2) not allowed to usurp the underlying purpose of the organization. To my mind, the only sin in the activities mentioned in the preceding sentence would be a lack of moderation, and it seems to me that this same lack of moderation would be almost equally harmful if it were applied to actual, legitimate fantasy topics.

The ethical questions arising in dealings between one fan and another could easily be expanded into a large book, since these would be the same ethics that would apply between any two people. A few of the more common ethical breaches in fandom might be worth jotting down: Acceptance of money without either refund or value rendered, a favorite stunt of even top-ranking fan publishers. Ignoring letters from

other fans, a trick that I must confess myself at times guilty of perpetrating. Lack of tolerance of other fans' viewpoints (though obviously hypertolerance can be as unethical as hypotolerance). Putting statements into the mouths of the opposition, a practice which, regrettably, is not limited to fan feuds or discussions. Plagiarism. Breach of hospitality. — There are of course many other items that might be named, but these occur to me at the moment.

\*\*\*\*\*

[VEN AFTER a great deal of re-writing and revision, I still have a horrible feeling that I have merely been rambling along, playing tag with my topic of discussion. I believe, however, that even with its manifest ineptness, this article does give a rather complete picture of my own ideals. It is quite possible that I have spent too much time splitting hairs over questions of definition, but it seems to me highly important that we approach our hobbies with the proper attitude; and the prevalent tendency to tack everything and anything onto fandom simply because of a preoccupation with a microcosmos to the exclusion of the macrocosmos is the most significant symptom of fandom's failure to come of age.



*the preceding was a sample article from*

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