

A POEM ON HIMSELF by R.A. LAFFERTY

A minstrel with a busted harp

He's sharp,

But not so varry.

Aw take him back to Tulsa

Cause he's too young to marry!

CHALLENGER

SIXTEEN

Spring 2002

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Cover by Dell Harris

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This zine is made possible by the generosity of Bruce Pelz and Sheila Lightsey.

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Frolich



AT THE SLEEPY GALLUK;
A TRIBUTE TO
R. A. LAFFERTY

Raphael A. Lafferty, 87

Compiled from the Tulsa World and the Los Angeles Times

Raphael A. Lafferty, prolific writer of historical fiction and science fiction known for his short stories as well as his novels, has died. He was 87. Lafferty, who spent much of his life in Oklahoma and often wrote about Native Americans, died March 18, 2002 in Broken Arrow, Okla., of undisclosed causes.



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Lafferty

His output included 21 novels and more than 200 short stories, among them satirical tales pondering what would happen if everybody in the world owned a gun or describing the consequences of fads that lasted a single day or of a child's camera that makes things disappear. Lafferty earned the Hugo Award from the World Science Fiction Society in 1973 for his short story "Eureka's Dam", and in 1995 won the Arell Gibson Lifetime Achievement Award from the Oklahoma Department of Libraries for excellence in a body of literary work. He also received the World Fantasy Lifetime Achievement Award in 1990 and was nominated multiple times for the Hugo, Nebula, and Philip K. Dick Awards for such works as **Past Master**, **Fourth Mansions**, and "Continued on Next Rock".

Among Lafferty's historical novels was the 1972 **Okla Hannali**, set among Choctaw Indians in the 19th century. "Falsehoods and cliches about Indians and the American West die sprawling all along Lafferty's path," wrote a **Times** book reviewer, "and this noble carnage is what elevates the book, makes it more than a charmingly told family chronicle."

Lafferty, a Roman Catholic, often included theological themes in his writing as well as elements of folk tales and even dreams. In the 1971 science fiction novel **The Devil Is Dead**, a reader has trouble identifying the devil in the struggle for control of humanity between the "Demons" who are descended from aliens and the "Elder Race" of pre-humans.

As A Reader's Guide to Fantasy once noted, "Lafferty doesn't see the world in quite the same way that most people do; his logic is rigorous, but his premises are deadpan insanity."

Born November 7, 1914 in Neola, Iowa, Raphael Aloysius Lafferty moved to Perry, Okla., with his family at age 4 and later settled in Tulsa. He attended Cascia Hall High School and the University of Tulsa for one year, but was mostly self-educated. He served in the Army during World War II and worked for many years in Tulsa's Clark Electrical Supply Co. before beginning to write at 45. His first story was published in 1959 and his first novel nine years later. In 1971, he quit his job to write full time.

Lafferty's collected papers are available at the University of Tulsa's McFarlin Library in the Special Collections Department. A bachelor, he left no immediate survivors.

Haw. A lot they know ...

Yeah ... a lot they know. Dates, places, awards, facts ... as if they meant much to the Cosmic Ray. We – his survivors, immediate or not – know better. For instance ...

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The scene is Suncon, the World Science Fiction Convention, 1977, Miami Beach, Florida. The time is late, late at night. Lovely and remarkable, Linda Krawecke leads a corps of fatigued party-goers through the lobby of the Fontainebleau Hotel. R.A. Lafferty, unlovely and remarkable, notes her displeasure and inquires of the blonde beauty the reason therefor.

"My friends and I," she tells the great author, "have partied the whole night long, in hopes of frolicking upon the beach to greet the dawn. But we have inquired when the sun is to rise, and been told, two hours from now. We are weary and fear that we cannot last until then."

Ray considers for a silent moment, then asks, "What about 45 minutes? Can you last 45 minutes?"

Linda avows that they can.

"Go to the beach."

They go to the beach. And the sun comes up – in 45 minutes.

What of this Lafferty? Was he a shaman whose word alone could turn the Earth faster in its revolution? Or had he seen so many dawns that he could sense one coming through the simple vibrations of the ether?

In 1979, the Sons of the Sand, of which I was a member, hosted a Deep-SouthCon in New Orleans. There was but one possible choice as Guest of Honor, and when Ray came in for the banquet we stood and cheered the rotund old man in the skewed tie and shy smile. Who among us guessed that the speech he gave that night would roil within our brains, decades later? I reprinted that speech in *Challenger* no. 1. It appears again here. (Following the speech, a photo from his Army days. "Churce," ain't it?)

I wish I could reprint the whole of *At the Sleepy Sailor*, the chapbook I edited for the con, but bits and pieces are here: Dany Frolich's wondrous wraparound illo (name the Lafferty characters), and Fred Chappell's critical analysis of *Past Master*, and Ray's own piece on "Continued on Next Rock". Plus quotes and anecdotes and whatever-will-have-you from the glorious time we shared this ball of dirt with Raphael Aloysius Lafferty.

I hadn't seen Ray in years. He hadn't written for years before that. But though it was a comforting thing to know he was still with us, when he left us, the worlds of wisdom and sadness and lunacy and joy that were Raphael Aloysius Lafferty did *not* come to an end. The word survives. The laughter yet resounds.



Illo by Frolich

Here we segue into the first of two other series. We open our pages to a working SF professional for his or her non-fictional, personal writing ... and we hail a Mentor. Nothing is more important to a man than the models on which he bases his life. In his inimitable way Ray Lafferty was one of mine. I discovered him in -- when else? -- 1969, when his first three novels, *Space Chantey*, *The Reefs of Earth* and the indescribable *Past Master* were published. I'll never forget my reaction to Lafferty's tale of Thomas More on the golden planet Astrobe. It was as if I'd stumbled into Medjugore. "Ah," I said. "I have found My Boy."

What I meant was that I'd found a writer who -- though a rock-ribbed conservative -- spoke to a scrawny Berkeley hippy used to being generously tear-gassed every spring. I'd found a poetic spirit who invested science fiction with madness and tragedy and laughter. I'd found someone to cheer for. I'd found my Ray of Hope.

I met Ray at St. LouisCon (see elsewhere). I saw him at MidAmeriCon ('76) and Suncon ('77) and Chicon V ('91), and at most of the DeepSouthCons in between. He is always a comfort to see. But we won't be seeing him at conventions anymore -- at least, none outside of his beloved Tulsa. Hear what he has to tell us:

"The last [convention] I went to was the Worldcon in Chicago. It went fine most of the time, till I had a bad fall. After a day I was around and about again. The day after Labor Day I went to the Airport to come home and I thought I was all right. Then my legs gave out (there are some awfully long walks in O'Hare Airport), so I had to order wheelchairs the rest of the way home. Since then I don't

walk much. On a good day I can hobble around a couple of blocks with my cane. On a less than good day I never go further than the front porch.

"But I've had my share of good conventions ... And as a child I was in a traveling family, and we saw everything in the United States that was worth seeing. And in WWII I saw everything in the South Pacific that was worth seeing, and all of it was worth seeing. And I've loved every mile I ever traveled. And except for my non-good legs I'm in good health for a man coming into his 80th year.

"Luck and love to everybody in New Orleans, or who has ever been there, or is ever going to be there."

Anecdote time: One time when I was at Berkeley a girl I knew -- petite, blonde, pretty, 150% L.A., and if I'm not being redundant, thoroughly charming and adorable -- came up to me in the hallways of our co-op dorm. In tears. Her new roommate had erected a literal and figurative screen between them and that was more than a sweet and naive and very vulnerable little lady could take. The poor kid sobbed, hurt to the quick of her being by the incomprehensible coldness of the world. What could I do for her? I could introduce her to Lafferty.

I sat her down and I showed her a photo of Ray with our great mutual friend, Joe Green. Then I read her the last pages of *Past Master*. Her eyes grew bright again, and a smile of wonderment grew across her lovely face, and she looked at the photograph as she heard his words: "Be quiet. We hope."

She heard him then. You hear him now, in his speech from the 1979 DeepSouthCon here in New Orleans.

Wa-wa-wa-stringay, Patrick of Tulsa.

THE DAY AFTER THE WORLD ENDED

by R.A. LAFFERTY

Notes for a speech
given at the DeepSouthCon
New Orleans, July 21, 1979

Previously published in Philosophical Speculations in Science Fiction and Fantasy, September 2001, No. 2, P.O. Box 178, Kemblesville PA 19347

I'm going to talk about the peculiar science-fictionish circumstance and condition in which we are living. It is, unfortunately, an overworked theme and situation that has been used hundreds of times and has never been well-handled even once. It is the 'Day After the World Ended' situation, subtitled "Grubbing in the Rubble". It is the business of making out, a little bit, after a total catastrophe has hit. There are possibilities for several good stories in this situation, and I was puzzled for a long time as to why no good ones had ever been written. I myself tried and failed to write some good ones based on this set-up. And only recently have I discovered why plausible fiction cannot be based on this situation.

The reason is that fact precludes fiction. Being inside the situation, we are a little too close to it to see it clearly. Science Fiction has long been babbling about cosmic destructions and the ending of either physical or civilized worlds, but it has all been displaced babble. SF has been carrying on about near-future or far-future destructions, and its mind-set will not allow it to realize that the destruction of our world has already happened in the quite recent past, that today is "The Day After the World Ended". Science Fiction is not alone in failing to understand what has happened. There is an almost impenetrable amnesia that obstructs the examination of the actual catastrophe.

I am speaking literally about a real happening, the end of the world in which we lived till fairly recent years. The destruction of unstructuring of that world, which is still sometimes referred to as "Western Civilization" or "Modern Civilization", happened suddenly, some time in the half century between 1912 and 1962. That world, which was "The World" for a few centuries, is gone. Though it ended quite recently, the amnesia concerning its ending is general. Several historiographers have given the opinion that these amnesias are features common to all "ends of worlds". Nobody now remembers our late world

very clearly, and nobody will remember it clearly in the natural order of things. It can't be recollected because recollection is one of the things it took with it when it went.

Plato once said or wrote "Man is declared to be that creature who is constantly in search of himself. He is a being in search of meaning." But Platonic Declarations don't seem to apply on "The Day After the World Ended". Man is *not* now a being in search of meaning. He does not recollect and he does not reflect. All the looking-glasses were broken in the catastrophe that ended the world.

There is a vague memory that this late world had a large and intricate superstructure on it, and that this came crashing down. There is some dispute as to whether we gained by the sweeping away of a trashy construction or whether we lost a true and valid dimension in the unstructuring of our Old World, and whether we do not now live in Flatland. There is no way to settle this dispute since the old structure cannot be recaptured or analyzed.

There is even some evidence that "Flatlands" are the more usual conditions, and that the worlds with heights and structures are the exceptions. Even if we could go back there, a Time-Machine from Flatland and eyes from Flatland would not be able to see a dimension not contained in Flatland.

* * *

Now we come to the phenomenon or consensus named "Science Fiction". When trying to identify an object, the first question used to be "What is it good for?" But that is a value question, and values are banned under the present condition of things. Other questions that might be asked in trying to determine the function of Science Fiction are "How does it work?" and "What does it do?" An answer to "What does it do?" might be "Sometimes it designs new Worlds". This trait of SF may

be timely because our previous world is destroyed and there is presently a vacuum that can only be filled by a new world.

"Science Fiction" is an awkward survivor in the present environment because there is no "fiction" possible in this present environment, and that shoots half of it. The curious thing known as "prose fiction" was one of the things completely lost in the shipwreck of the old world.

Sometimes we hear about a contractor building a house on a wrong lot. Sometimes we hear about a man plowing a wrong field. Both of these things are hard to un-do. How do you un-plow a field? But we ourselves have been trying to plow a field that isn't there any more, and hasn't been there for between two and seven decades.



rose fiction was a narrow thing. As a valid force it was found only in Structured Western Civilization (Europe and the Levant, and the Americas and other colonies), and for only about three hundred years: from Don Quixote in 1605 to the various "last novels" of the twentieth century. The last British novel may be Arnold Bennett's *Old Wives' Tale* in 1908 or Maugham's *Of Human Bondage* in 1915. Both of them already have strong post-fictional elements mixed in. The last Russian novel was probably Gorki's *The Bystander* in the 1920's, and the last Irish novel may have been O'Flaherty's *The Informer* about the same time. In Germany, Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front*, published in 1929, was plainly a post-novel in a post-fictional form. The structured world did not end everywhere at quite the same time. In the United States there was a brilliant "last hurrah" of novels for several decades after the fictional form had disappeared in Europe: and Cozzens' *By Love Possessed*, published in 1957, might still be considered as a valid fictional work.

That special form of fiction, the

Short Story, was of even shorter duration, beginning with Hoffman in Germany and Washington Irvin in the United States both writing real short stories from about 1819, and continuing to the *Last Tales* of Isaac Dinesen in 1955.

There are apparent exceptions to all this, but they are only apparent.

The thesis is that prose fiction was a structured form and that it became impossible in a society that had become unstructured, that prose fiction was a reflection of an intricate construct and that it ceased when it no longer had anything to reflect. A shadow simply can't last long after the object that has cast it has disappeared.

Well, if a thing is clearly dead, and yet it seems to walk about, what is it? Maybe it's a Zombie. And we do presently have quite a bit of stuff that might be called zombie-fiction. This is the personal posing and peacock posturing, this is the pornography and gadgetry, this is charades and set-scene formalities. There are pretty good things in the "new journalism" and in the "non-fictional novels". There is plain truculence. But there isn't any fiction any more. There is the lingering smell of fiction in some of the branches of nostalgia. But fiction itself is gone.

--- except misnamed Science Fiction, the exception that proves only the exception. And SF was never a properly-fashioned fiction. It didn't reflect the world it lived in. It has always been more of a pre-world or a post-world campfire story than a defined fiction. But it still walks a little, and it isn't a Zombie in the regular sense.

The ghost of some other fiction might say in truth to Science Fiction, "You're not very good, are you?" But Science Fiction can answer "Maybe not, but I'm alive and you're dead."

* * *

We are now in an unstructured era of post-musical music, post-artistic art, post-fictional fiction, and post-experiential

experience. We are, partly at least, in a post-conscious world. Most of the people seem to prefer to live in this world that has lost a dimension. I don't know whether the condition is permanent or transitory.

We really are marooned. The world really has been chopped off behind us. Just how the old world ended isn't clear. There is a group amnesia that blocks us from the details. It *didn't* end in Armageddon. The two world wars were only minor side-lights to a powerful main catastrophe. The so-called revolutionary movements did not bring anything to an end. The world had already ended. Those things were only the grubbiest of brainless grubblings in the ruins.

There is nothing analogous or allegorical about what I'm saying. I'm talking about the real conditions that prevail in the real present. At the worst, we've lost our last world. At the best, we're between worlds. We're living in Flatland, and we're not even curious about the paradoxes to be found here. Life here in Flatland is like life in a photographic negative. Or it is life in the cellar of a world that has blown away. It is life in a limbo that has taken the irrational form of a Collective Unconscious. And we do not even know whether there is to be found somewhere the clear picture in whose negative we are living, or whether the negative is all there is.

But, for technical reasons, we can't stay here. Somebody has better be remembering fragments of either a past or a future. We can't stay here because the ground we are standing on is sinking.



Well then, does Science Fiction have any place in this post-world world? It seems to be a semi-secret society so confused that it can't even remember its own passwords. And yet it does have cryptic memories and elements that extend back through several worlds. It is a club of antiquarians and it contains a lot of old lore in buried form. It is a pleasant and non-restrictive club to belong to. It provides varied entertainment for its

members. It offers real fun now and then, and fun in the post-world period seems to be more scarce than it was when we still had a world.

With the rest of the marooned persons-and-things, Science Fiction today is trapped in a dismal science-fictionish situation. It is right in the middle of the "Day After the World Ended" plot. But SF turns this into the dullest of themes, and never applies it to the present time when it is really happening. Someday people might want to travel back to this era by some device to see just what it was like between worlds, to see what it was really like in a "dark age". We do not have detailed eyewitness accounts of life in any other of the dark ages. Doubt has even been thrown on the existence of dark ages in the past. And we ourselves today do not consider the present hiatus (or the present death if it proves to be that) as worthy of the attention of Science Fiction.

"Science fiction as Survivor" does carry, in a few sealed ritual jars, some sparks that may kindle fires again, but it is unsure that it is carrying any such things. There is some amnesia or taboo that prevents SF (and the rest of the post-world also) from looking at the present state of things generally.

And the present state of things generally is that we are in the condition of creatures who have just made a traumatic passage out of an old life form, out of a tadpole state, out of a chrysalis stage. Such creatures are dopey. They are half asleep and less than half conscious.

Well, what does happen after the death of a world or a civilization? The historian Toynbee in grubbing into the deaths of twenty-four separate civilizations or worlds that he studied, kept running into the "Phoenix Syndrome", into the "Fire in the Ashes Phenomenon". So far, the Phoenix, the fire-bird that is born out of its own ashes, has been a bigger bird after each rebirth, but maybe not a better one. It may have been as big as it could get during its latest manifestation; and there's a dim

memory that it crashed at the end of that life because it had become so large and unwieldy that it could flop only and could no longer fly.

If the world is reborn Phoenix-like (and it isn't certain or automatic that it will be reborn at all), what form will it take next? No dead form is ever revived. But something entirely unexpected has, so far, been born on each site of an old world after a decent interval of time. Some of these intervals have been several centuries. But others have been only a few decades, and they have been getting shorter. There are no long-lived vacuums in this areas of happenings, but there has never been as wide and deep a vacuum as there is right now.



If one thing is plenty: there is almost total freedom for anyone to do whatever he wishes. There is almost complete liberty of both action and thought. We live in a wide-open "People's Republic" to end all "People's Republics", and it probably will. But at the same time we are living in rubble and remnant. We are living in a series of cluttered non-governments, but the clutter isn't attached to anything. It is easily moved out of the way.

By every definition, this is Utopia. Of course some of us have always regarded Utopia as a calamity, but most of you have not. In its flexibility and in its wide-open opportunities, our situation offers total Utopia. Anything that you can conceive of, you can do in this non-world. Nothing can stop you except a total bankruptcy of creativity. The seedbed is waiting. All the circumstances stand ready. The fructifying minerals are literally jumping out of the ground.

And nothing grows. And nothing grows. And nothing grows. Well, why doesn't it?

Back to Science Fiction. The "If only" premise is at the beginning of every Science Fiction flight of fancy. But in

actuality we are all at the "If only" nexus right now. All the conditions have come together. All the "If onlies" are more than possible now; they are wide open. They are fulfilled. There are no manacles on anybody or anything; or else they are as easily broken as pieces of thread. But people still hobble about as if they were fettered in hand and foot and mind.

There has never been a place swept as clear of accumulation and super-structure as ours. There's an opportunity here that doesn't come every century, for not every century has the room to be creative. There is the room and the opportunity, but nothing is moving at all.

I'm not proposing right choices or wrong choices. I'm not even pushing transcendence over gosh-awful secularism. I'm saying that we do have choices and opportunities to the extent that nobody has ever had them before. There are fine building stones all around us, whatever ruins they are from. But nobody is building.

The question to be asked of everyone is "If you are not right now making a world, why aren't you?" Group ingenuity, on an unconscious level at first perhaps, and then on a conscious level, *can* bring it about. It can be done by a small elite of only a few million geniuses. Declare yourself to be one of them! You can now set up your own rules for being a genius, and then you can be one. You can set up your own rules for being anything at all.

There *will* be, happily, a new world, a new civilization-culture to follow on the recent termination of the Structured Western World. All it's waiting for is ideas to germinate and a few sparks to kindle. Several of the survivor-groups of the old world-shipwreck have sparking machines, but they may not realize what they are.

But if we can't somehow bring about the sparking, the reanimation trick, then we're really dead.

"Forget the reanimation," some of you say. "What's the matter with the way it is now?"

"Nobody's driving the contraption. That's one thing that's the matter with it."

"That's all right too," some say. "It isn't going anywhere. It doesn't need a driver. We've even taken the wheels off it. We like it that way."

"But even the ruins we are grubbing in are sinking into a slough. We'll be drowned in foul muck if we don't start to move. It's up to our mouths now, and that is why we are babbling and bubbling. Soon it will be over our noses, and we can only hold our breaths for so long."

"That's all right," some still say. "We like the way it tickles our noses. Leave it the way it is."

Well, that's one choice, but it isn't the only one.



ossibly, if we don't drown in the present muck, there will be a new world. As a condition to its coming into being, it will have its new arts, new ideas, new categories of thought, new happinesses. It may even have successors to old musics and fictions and peak experiences and immediacies. It isn't easy to predict what it will be, but it may be no more difficult to build it than to predict it.

When was the last time we had a world? What, judging from its bones and stones lying around, was it like? No, we can't reconstruct it the way it was. All we have is a wide-open opportunity to make something new. A couple of hundred people here, a couple of billion there, working with uneasy brilliance, may come up with a stunning and unpredicted creation. The best way to be in on a new movement or a new world is to be one of the inventors of it.

Here is the condition that prevails in our non-world now. We are all of us characters in a Science Fiction Story named "The Day After the World Ended". Well, more likely it is an animated story or comic strip in which we find ourselves to be the characters. The continuity has now arrived

a "crux point", the make-or-break place where brilliant strokes are called for. Somehow the characters have been given the opportunity of determining what happens next, an opportunity that is absolutely unprecedented,



eanwhile the calendar is stuck. It comes up "The Day After the World Ended" day after day, year after year. These should be the Green Years.

But, unless you use an inflated way of appraising things, these last few decades have *not* been at all creative. And if nothing grows in the Green Years, what will grow in the dry?

Peoples much less gifted than ourselves have invented worlds in the past and have set them to run for their five or fifteen centuries. But *we* do not make a move yet. There is a large silence occupying the present time. Is it the silence just before a great stirring and banging? Or is a terminal silence?

Well, what does happen now?

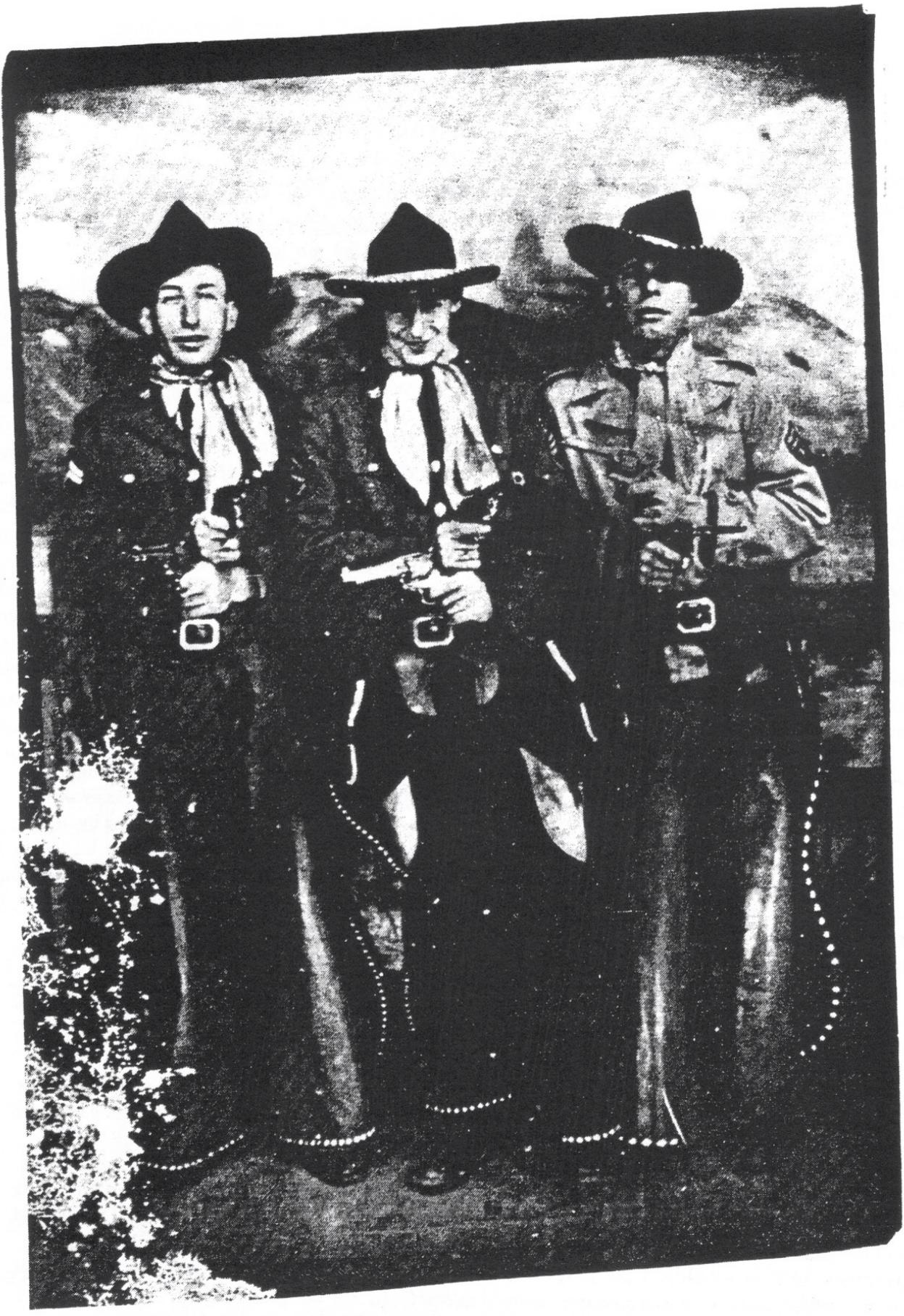
Can't any of us characters in this "do-it-yourself" Science Fiction Story come up with any sort of next episode? Would it help to change the name of the story from "The Day After the World Ended" to "The First Day on a New Planet"?

Any character may take any liberty he wishes with this post-world story. It is a game without rules. But apparently he will not be able to climb clear out of the story.

I refrain from saying "The End" to this piece.

It must not end. ■

Special thanks to Chris Drumm, P.O. Box 445, Polk City IA 50226, (515)984-6749, who originally reprinted this piece. Book collectors are advised to write for Chris' catalog and be prepared to spend money. He doesn't ask for postage but send him a buck or so anyway.



R. A. Leffert

The passage looked to be about three meters across. I couldn't imagine leaping that gap from the slate-dark roofs. And at night, too. "All that distance?" I asked. My voice echoed in the fog.

"Yes," he said.

"Anybody ever miss?"

"Yes."

"Injured?"

"Yes."

"Killed?"

His eyes twinkled and he gave us a broad smile. "Yes." These Cambridge sorts have the real stuff, all right.

In the cool night Stephen recalled some of his favorite science fiction stories. He rarely read any fiction other than science fiction past the age of 12, he said. "It's really the only fiction that is realistic about our true position in the universe as a whole."

And how much stranger the universe was turning out than even those writers had imagined. Even when they discussed the next billion years, they could not guess the odd theories that would spring up within the next generation of physicists. Now there are speculations that our universe might have 11 dimensions, all told, all but three of space and one of time rolled up to tiny sizes. Will this change cosmology? So far, nobody knows. But the ideas are fun in and of themselves.

A week after my evening at Cambridge, I got from Stephen's secretary a transcript of all his remarks. I have used it here to reproduce his style of conversation. Printed out on his wheelchair computer, his sole link with us, the lines seem to come from a great distance. Across an abyss.

Portraying the flinty faces of science — daunting complexity twinned with numbing wonder — demands both craft and art. Some of us paint with fiction. Stephen paints with his impressionistic views of vast, cool mathematical landscapes. To knit together our fraying times, to span the cultural abyss, demands all these approaches — and more, if we can but invent them.

Stephen has faced daunting physical constrictions with a renewed attack on the large issues, on great sweeps of space and time. Daily he struggles without much fuss against the narrowing that is perhaps the worst element of infirmity. I recalled him rapt with Marilyn, still deeply engaged with life, holding firmly against tides of entropy.

I had learned a good deal from those few days, I realized, and most of it was not at all about cosmology.



From an interview with R.A. Lafferty by Robert Whitaker-Sirignano

*I'm told that you wrote yourself into **Fourth Mansions**. Which character are you?*

Yes, I've been accused of writing myself into **Fourth Mansions**, and I always say it's a lie. I've been accused of being Bertigrew Bagley, the Patrick of Tulsa. Well, maybe I looked like him about then, but I've since taken off fifty pound to a skinny two hundred. I've got a good-looking set of artificial teeth. I've sweetened up my disposition. And we were never really the same person.

Bagley is thus described in **Fourth Mansions**: "fat and ungainly, grown old ungracefully, balded and shaggy at the same time, rheumy of eyes and with his mouth full of rotten teeth, discredited, violent and vulgar; an earthen pot, and a cracked one at that."

Editor's outraged note: Who could say such things about the Cosmic Ray?

to be run by his family members in the Deep South, rather than out West where he laid his claim to immortality.

There's one that *should* make the list, but probably never will, and that's THE BRITISH MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY. They have everything it takes to make the Top Ten – except intelligence. I went there in 1984 to examine the tusks of the Kilimanjaro Elephant, prior to writing *Ivory*. They were not on public display, and I had to write ahead to make arrangements to see them. When I got there I spent two hours looking around the museum, and I found that its African fauna collection, which I'd looked forward to seeing, was much less interesting than I'd anticipated. Then I met the official who was to escort me to the tusks. We went down to the basement, and suddenly I was surrounded by literally hundreds of the most impressive African trophies I'd ever seen. I asked why they weren't on display. Same reason as the ivory. They weren't shot on license; therefore they were poached, and the Politically Correct museum refused to display anything that was poached. Makes sense -- *except* that this entire collection was shot and donated by F. C. Selous, generally considered to be the greatest African hunter of all time (my own choice would be W.D.M. "Karamojo" Bell, but that has nothing to do with this story), and Selous, who died fighting the Germans in Tanganyika in 1917, brought back the vast majority of his trophies before there *were* hunting licenses. Go figure.

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* * * Without going into raptures, I suppose I might as well rank the zoos, too: 1. San Diego Zoo 2. Cincinnati Zoo 3. Brookfield Zoo (Chicago) 4. New Orleans Zoo 5. Bronx Zoo 6. Lincoln Park Zoo (Chicago) 7. San Diego Zoo Park 8. St. Louis Zoo 9. Miami Zoo 10. Calgary Zoo # -- and the aquariums: 1. Tampa Aquarium 2. Shedd Aquarium (Chicago) 3. Newport/Cincinnati Aquarium # And, finally, the African game parks: 1. Ngorongoro Crater (Tanzania) 2. Hwange (Zimbabwe; at least, it ranked here before President Robert Mugabe went crazy two years ago; we won't be going back while he's alive or ZANU, his political party, is in power.) 3. Chobe (Botswana) 4. Samburu/Buffalo Springs (Kenya) 5. Aberdares (Kenya) 6. Maasai Mara (Kenya) 7. Serengeti (Tanzania) 8. Etosha (Namibia) 9. Mana Pools (Zimbabwe; see above note) 10. Queen Elizabeth II (Uganda) 11. South Luangwa Valley (Zambia) 12. Moremi Reserve (Botswana) 13. Amboseli (Kenya) 14. Tsavo (Kenya) 15. Meru (Kenya)

Mike, we wanna hear all about those, too. – Editor

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Sad News

John Guidry

I was lucky enough to meet Ray Lafferty back in 1968. Every time he would see me he would say "Guidry, Guidry, Guidry." And then he would point his finger at me and say "Bang Bang!" This went on for a number of years and at last I ran into him sober and then at last I saw the genius that was Ray Lafferty. From then on I knew the best time to talk to him was early in the morning. He had no liver and one drink and it was back to "Bang Bang!"

I saw him (two different years) take one drink and then he was out of it. At a party in New Orleans (back in 1969 or thereabout) everyone had to leave and we (a number of local New Orleans fans) had to pry Ray from the walls, doors and anything else that he could grab onto to put him into Norman Elfer's car (it was raining like crazy) and then when we got him to the hotel of course he would not get out of the car ... all the while singing a song. We got him to his room and saw him to bed. We later found out he had left the hotel to hit the bars in the French Quarter.

A few years later we had a DeepSouthCon and Ray was the Guest of Honor. He did not take a drink for the entire con as he wanted to be on panels and give his speech. Wow what a con.

Dan Galouye became a very close friend of his and in later years every time I would see Ray he always told me how much he missed Dan. The world is a sadder place without him. R.I.P. Ray.

*At the worldcon in San Francisco in 1993 Ray Lafferty won a Seiun Award for "Continued on Next Rock". Out in the audience I whooped and leapt and cheered like a fool. The guy behind me tapped my shoulder once I settled down – it was Dan Knight, and he was giving me a copy of his *Boomer Flats Gazette*, a zine devoted to the Cosmic Ray. A contact after Lafferty's passing brought back copies, which you'll find reviewed elsewhere, a letter which is quoted in that same place, and that which follows.*

HUMAN

Dan Knight

Upon reading a scholarly essay Ray once quipped to me, "This Lafferty guy is a pretty sharp character. I'd like to meet him one day." As those who knew him will attest, he wrote as he thought and (thankfully) thought as he wrote. The unique voice that so many celebrate was not an affectation. Neither was it a carefully crafted persona fashioned to cunningly go over the wall during that literary jailbreak that was SF in the mid-sixties. The man was just being himself.

If you, gentle reader, have something unique to express you will probably be the last one to know it. Ray was the last one to know it. I'm not saying he couldn't tell his good from his bad. He was an astute writer and sharp enough to know which of his novels, or more often short stories, were cream and which were just good old wholesome milk. What I am saying is that the ghost who mussed my hair, slapped me on the back and ended up living in my pocket like a talisman – the essential and personal anima of Ray's stories – was not known to him. It was him. There are folks who spend years plotting out story arcs, experimenting with Voice to achieve just that particular shade of nuance. Ray wrote. Ray wrote Ray. He might have been capable of artificially recreating the style of somebody else but I doubt it. Take a look at the stories in **The Early Lafferty** chapbook (our first publishing adventure). He thought he was doing a **Saturday Evening Post** pastiche on one of them. Don't bother trying to guess which. They're all Lafferty stories. Even in 1960 they could be mistaken for nothing else.

Genius, someone said, isn't about being the smartest buffalo in the herd, but in seeing the world from a different perspective. To – in the lingo of the last decade – see outside of the box. Ray came from outside the box. We (and you know who you are) got him because we embraced him as one of our own.

It wasn't a sure thing. His first and still unpublished novel **Manta** was murder mystery. Read **Okla Hannali** (a novel my buddy Terry Bisson believes is the Great and as yet Uncelebrated American book – kin to Melville's **Moby Dick**) or **The Fall of Rome** (reprinted under its original title **Alaric** recently). These and the very good unpublished **Esteban** are historical fiction at its most entertaining. All of you aging hippies who tripped out on **Arrive at Easterwine** and **Past Master** give yourselves a pat on the back. Thank you, SF and not those other guys got the lion's share of his work.

Here's another good quote. "Effectual people live life. Ineffectual people write about it." There's a revealing statement. I don't care if you believe it or not. Ray did. These are not the words of a man with high thoughts of himself. This is a very human person with feelings of inadequacy like most of us. Some of you may recall one of his stories ["Eurema's Dam", Ray's

Hugo winner] in which a little boy is forced to invent the most amazing devices not because he was so intelligent but because he believed himself dumber than dirt. He even created a mechanical simulacrum to deal with girls because he was too tongue-tied to do his own courting. There was a lot of Ray in there.

There will be, I expect, quite a bit of memorializing over the next little while. People will say many grand and beautiful things (you can almost see Ray's ears go red in embarrassment). It's proper to celebrate a good man's life. It is proper to overcome loss with fond remembrance or to acknowledge professional or personal debts. Beware though. It would be easy to recreate him in retrospect a Giant and therefore untouchable and ultimately unknowable. That would be tragic because who he was, in truth, was a funny, intelligent, self-critical, kind, opinionated, God-fearing, loving and sometimes cranky guy, just like the best and the rest of us. Or, in a word, human. Not distant like some piece of classical Greek statuary but close. He was the Old Man who threw your ball back over the fence with a smile. Who collected comic books and baseball cards, bad jokes and new friends. Remember him. Remember him fondly with a grin and a wink. And, in the phrase he most often closed his letters with –

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"Have fun!"



It was at this moment a thought came to me. I couldn't let this kind, thoughtful gentleman run risks on my behalf. Quick as a flash, I swapped the jam jars around.

Ramasjudder turned back, now wearing the tattered dressing-gown, picked up his jam jar and said, "Let us now drink to the Great Spirits that we may be enriched by their aid." He downed his potion and I did likewise. He made a motion over the crystal ball and commanded me, almost as if he was brushing away dust, "Look into the all-seeing globe and tell me what you can see." I looked and was amazed. I had always thought it twaddle that anyone could see anything in a crystal ball, but I had been wrong. I could clearly see a large hole in the dirty tablecloth. I told him so.

Mr. Ramasjudder had a little difficulty swallowing, but recovered and suggested I try again. He re-dusted the crystal and said slowly, "Look deep in the glass. Do you feel sleepy? You are feeling drowsy ... you are falling asl-ee-eep ..." Mr. Ramasjudder fell across the table and began to snore.

I was afraid for his soul, at first, but then I saw he was merely sleeping soundly. I lifted him onto the bed and was about to leave when I noticed a pile of pound notes sticking out from beneath his pillow. Clearly, some enemy, knowing his avoidance of money, had put them there to bring evil upon his head. Ramasjudder had risked his life for me, probably only my switching the powdered nectar had saved him. The least I could do was to help him now. I slipped the money into my wallet and tiptoed out.

I never saw Mr. Ramasjudder again, but a few weeks later I was accosted by another bloke wearing a turban. He said his name was Shiva Skuldujeri the Mystic Acrostic. As I said, I'm not a sucker. He drank beer, so he couldn't have been a Great Pachyderm. I bet Mr. Ramasjudder could have taught him a thing or two.

ARE WE HERE NOW YET?

Robert Whitaker Sirignano

I've wracked my brains about what to say about Ray Lafferty's passing. Felt he was "gone" a few years ago, when his strokes left him unable to write and to care for himself. I knew his physical presence was still available, but the essence that was his writing and mind was no longer in contact (or passed on to those who cared).

The few last letters I received from him were over questions I asked about the essence of God. We knotted down to the differences between experience and belief. I've had a handful of religious awakenings, glimpses of a vast otherness bathed in white light and blue fire. Ray wrote back to say that he'd never experienced such a thing, no real dark nights of the soul and that his experience was based on a life-long faith and that he found it comforting and as profound as a spiritual awakening. There were some, he knew of, that faith should prompt such glimpses as I had touched upon. But one should not upstage the other (spiritual one-ups-man-ship does exist: we did not play that hand of cards).

A week or two after that discussion, he mailed me a small book of *Selections from Thomas Aquinas*, with a note that he felt I was one of the few who could comprehend the larger essence of the Saint's work.

I wrote back that I had read large samples of his writing when I spent time roaming the University of Delaware's library. He was a Saint illuminated by faith; you could feel it in his writing, across the translations.

That was a while ago. I miss "something new" from Lafferty. But there is a lot of his work I should tap into again. Maybe the difference a decade makes (what with some added maturity and respect) might seem fresh and new.

R.I.P., Ray, there will be no others like you.

“WHO? RAY!”

LAFFERTY SNAPSHOTS (some literal)

1969 ... During St. Louiscon I spot Clifford Simak in the lobby, talking with a French film artist who wants to make movies of his books. It's the only time I will ever see him, and I want him to autograph **Way Station**. While I'm waiting, up walks ... well, you know who. Simak did. “Don't you know who this is?” he asks the pesky *auteur*. “This is the great Lafferty!”

At that same convention, when

Ray meets Anne McCaffrey, he grabs her in a voracious bear hug. “Dragon lady!” he shouts.

I am working for Quinn Yarbro in the press room. A reporter wants to interview a science fiction writer. “Who should I get?” I ask. “I don't care!” Quinn says. “Just get someone who looks like a writer!” I look to my left. Harlan Ellison, in his best Hollywood gear, stands there, declaiming. I look to my right. Ray Lafferty stands there, looking like a happy bum. I catch the eye of Pat Adkins, who has heard all, and say “*Ohhhhhh-kay!*” Pat collapses in laughter.

Ray's awesome **Past Master** loses the Hugo to **Stand on Zanzibar**. He sits at the New Orleans party, depressed. I voted for the brilliant Lafferty novel, but had, to my disgrace, listened to west coast fannish gossip and bet against it with two NOSFA members. The two bucks I won are burning my hand. I run downstairs to the Art Show, where Vaughan Bode is doing sketches for ten bucks a throw. I offer him the two dollars to draw a Hugo for Ray.

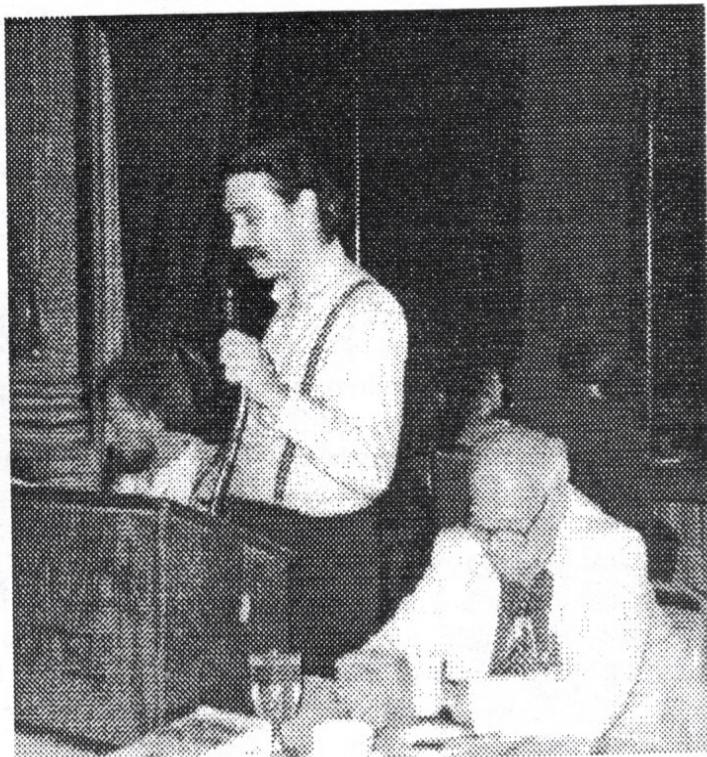
He has his own (and only, as it turns out) Hugo before him, and uses it to do his sketch. On his own he throws in **Roadstrum** from **Space Chantey**. He refuses the money. “Can you buy him a drink?” he asks, handing me the art. I give the drawing to Ray upstairs. I'm sure he hates it, but at least he knows how we feel. He kept it, anyway. That's it inside my back cover.

Some time later we NOSFAns are watching a theatrical re-release of **Fantasia**. We are properly silent until Bacchus appears. “Here comes Ray!” someone says.

1973 Lafferty's **Fourth Mansions** comes out. Beth Beavers, who would later become my first wife, is depressed. I grab the book. She has discovered the word “ear,” which she pronounces “eeeer,” and I find the right passage, and read it to her.

“Foley made the giant effort, and then the people in the streets no longer had peculiar ears. Or rather, they no longer had the archaic ears of the reappearing folks. They still had peculiar ears; Fred hadn't noticed ears much before; he saw now the thing that many people never see, that ears themselves are forever peculiar.”

Her gloom disappears like mist in the sun.



DSC '79 chair Justin Winston flanked by Jerry Page & Ray.

From that same book, when the hero is railroaded into an asylum, the psychiatrist describes various psychotic conspiracy groups:

"Then there was the group that believed that all red-headed women were creatures from outer space sent here to intermingle with mankind to cause trouble and destruction."

"I could give you instances which would seem to prove them right," Freddy said.

"So could I, Smith," said the doctor."

(So could I, but I'm a married man, now. To a brunette. Enough said.)

1976 In 1974 I work for DC Comics in New York City. While researching a piece about Julie Schwartz for their fan magazine, **The Amazing World of DC Comics**, I interview Alfred Bester. It is one of the great conversations of my life – someday I'll write about it here.

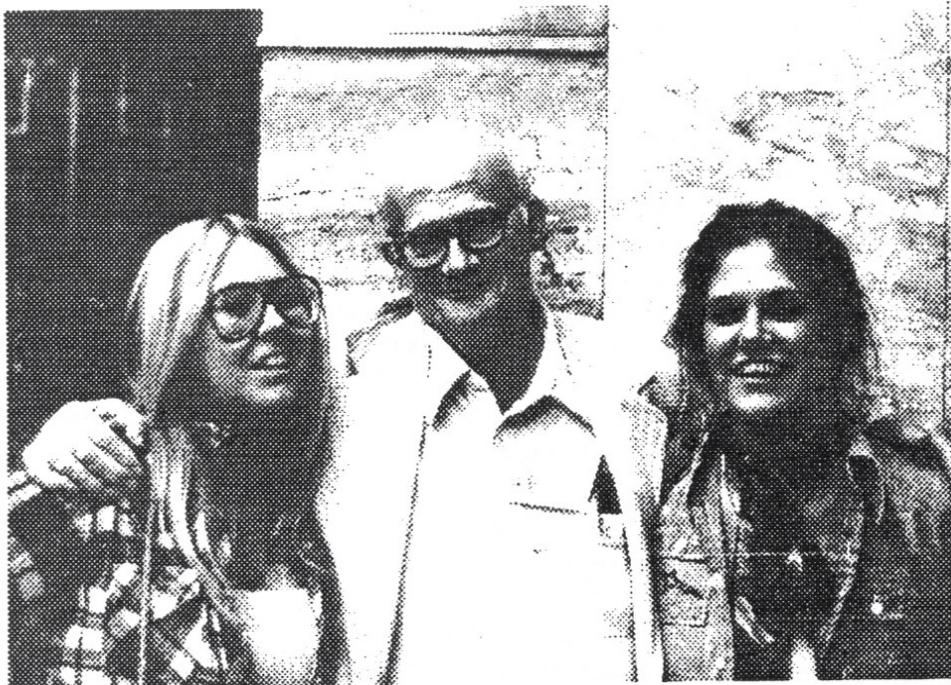
When Bester comes to MidAmeriCon, the Worldcon in Kansas City, Liz Schwarzin (now Copeland) and I buttonhole him in the lobby, just bugging the natty, moccasin-clad master in the way fans do. Ray wanders by. I call him over. "Mr. Bester," I say, "this is R.A. Lafferty."

There couldn't be a greater contrast, genius urbane and genius uncouth, but Bester's face lights up like a flare has gone off inside. "Oh! Oh!" he exults. "I've always wanted to meet you! Can I buy you a drink?"

"Well," Ray replies, shaking his head, "I've been trying to cut down. *But!* there seems to be a bar over this way..." And off they go. In wonder I say to Liz, and to myself, "I introduced R.A. Lafferty to Alfred Bester." I've said that a lot in the years since.

1986 In the majestic open-air con suite of Confederation's Marriott Marquis, Ray watches as Jack Williamson goes by. "Take care of him," he shouts at his companions. "If he dies, I'm the oldest!"

The morning after New Orleans won the rights to the '88 worldcon, I stumble into the Nolacon II party suite. It is nearly empty for the first time in days. Where before there had been throngs of victory-mad fans, now there are only three: Don Walsh, Cliff Amos, exulting over our win, and Ray. He's a mess, but he's there.



Himself at MidAmeriCon with its conquerors, Linda Krawecke and Anne Winston

1991 Chicon V is plodding along, rather lifelessly, when through a corridor comes Ray Lafferty, escorted by a smiling lady. Ray looks awful, but hey ... he's there! "Yes!" I exclaim. I never saw him after that, but you can read the letter he sent me after that convention, and I remember what he said in closing: "Luck and love to everybody in New Orleans, or who has ever been there, or is ever going to be there."

Rose-Marie and I had just returned from a visit to the Symphony Book Fair and a voracious feast at a local seafood restaurant. Checked my e-mail, and found one from John Lorentz. *Congratulations from the ConJose Hugo Committee.*

I'd been weary, glum because of taxes, guilt-struck because I didn't like inflicting such a mood on Rose-Marie. But now I called her over in a sudden tizzy, and keyed on the e-letter.

It began, "Alison, Mike & Steve, I've just finished counting this year's 627 Hugo and John W. Campbell Award nominating ballots and I am very pleased to tell you that **Plokta** is one of the 2002 Hugo nominees in the Fanzine category."

Well, you *should* be pleased, I thought. **Plokta** is terrific. But – why was *I* reading this? Ahh, umm, err, what about **Challenger**? I dialed Lorentz's phone number. I read him the e-mail. He laughed with warm embarrassment. "I just hope I didn't send them *yours*," he mused. For indeed, he told me, **Challenger** is a nominee for the ConJose Hugo. Huzzah! *Huzzay!*

The story above is recounted with John's kind permission. I close with an observation from the Winter Olympics. Surely the high moment of the Games was the delightful victory of 16-year-old Sarah Hughes in the figure skating competition. In 4th place as the evening began, competing against older, more famous skaters, Sarah took the ice without much chance ... or much worry. No one expected her to beat Michelle Kwan and the others, so why not, she figured, let'er *rip* ... have *fun*? Kwan and the others were so uptight they practically sank into the ice. Sarah flew across it like a fairy out of **Fantasia**. While I loved seeing that Aussie speedskater win gold by simply being the last man standing, and that Czech skier win for daring a hitherto impossible flip, hers was the Games' magic. And resonance.

Let those of us who compete for our own trinkets take a lesson from the young. *Skate for joy.* Let the medals take care of themselves. So, for the sake of joy, not Hugos, thanks to all the **Chall** pals who made this happen, and more than thanks to the lady whose faith and caring have taught me that I am worth loving, and that this is a world worth living in. I forgot that for so long, Rose. I'll never forget it again.

And speaking of joy, conciliation, and joy once more...

After St. Louiscon, in 1969, I sent a fan letter to the most remarkable of the many remarkable people I met there. Here's what I got in return. May he, and all the friends we've lost this season, laugh forever in Paradise.

Tulsa, Okla.
Nov. 22, 1969

Guy Lillian
Barrington Hall
Berkeley, Calif.

Dear Guy:

I was glad to hear from you but a little puzzled at the letter coming from Berkeley, or maybe I hadn't been paying attention. Are you an upstanding New Orleans boy caught by circumstances in black-hearted Berkeley, or are you a citizen of golden Berkeley who once ran athwart a bunch of New Orleans Pirates?

It may be that you will like **Fourth Mansions** and you may find yourself a little bit like Freddy Foley in it, in youth and openness at least. It was for his openness that a number of amazing worlds happened to him and can happen to you. I have picked out four human aspects or movements in this, out of many, which are deformities and monstrosities in isolation, but which should be strengths when

integrated in the person and group personality. At least that is what I have tried to do. Even the Patricks must have their place in the integrated personality and they must have their place in you.

Don't take too simplistic a view of King's men, Programmed Killers, and Programmed Persons. The King's Men are not automatically on the other side, they are on all sides always in a fragmented society; and most of the persons on all sides are Programmed Persons. Whenever you find yourself talking or thinking in other person's catch-words, look out! Most of the of the several sides are straight from the Crocodile's mouth!

Poul Anderson out there is an example of a comparative conservative who is not stuffy or usual. And I can think off hand of a million liberals (or those who say that they are) who are completely stuffy and usual. But I seldom use the terms left or right, or liberal and conservative: in both cases they are the two sides of the same coin and it is a counterfeit coin. I see it as the Center and the Eccentrics, and all the eccentrics resemble each other in their shallowness. Or as the Well and the Shallows in Chesterton's phrase, and the truth is often at the bottom of the well. It isn't a question of compromise or ambivalence at the real center: there is depth there, and there isn't any on the fringes. In the Center is the hurricane's eye, the only place of serenity anywhere, dynamic serenity, hey, that's a good phrase.

I'm interested that you're writing a story. From the title it will be an angry one, which is fine. Don't make it all of one tone, though, or it will be monotonous, whatever the tone. Use a little something else for contrast, even if for ironic contrast. If you have discovered Yeats then discover or rediscover a short and early poem of his, when he was about your age, "The Valley of the Black Pig" which title providentially combines the two elements of your own title: the line especially "Master of the still stars and of the flaming door"; there's got to be the flaming door, of course, but don't neglect other elements. And don't mind a few rejections if you send the story around. A first story almost always has to be very good to break in; it's only the rated writers who can get away with second-rate stories, which doesn't seem quite fair. There's nothing special about writing, though: any intelligent person can do it well: in fact, any intelligent person can learn to do anything well. It will soon be the case, I believe, where every open person will acquire proficiency and expression, private, or amateur, or professional, in one of the musics, as the

Greeks called them, that is in one of the lively arts or the lively sciences; and there shouldn't really be any division between the lively arts and the lively sciences.

Actually I was a disaster in St. Louis, but I'm a fairly interesting fellow when I'm not so deep in the drink. I'll see you again at one of the things, Boston or New Orleans (even Dallas if it falls that way). Keep your eyes open and may a variety of worlds happen to you.

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R.A. Lafferty