

ALMOST HALF A CENTURY

Jerry Page

Tuesday morning April 6, 2004, some time between 10 and 11 A.M., fate and the uncertainties of heart disease combined to rob Jerry Burge and me the pleasure of celebrating fifty years of friendship. In 1954, I learned about the old Atlanta Science Fiction Organization, the city's first major fan group, founded in 1950 by Jerry, Ian MacCauley, Hank Reinhardt, Carson jacks and Walt Guthrie. I got in touch with Ian and was invited to a meeting. It was on December 10, 1954 that I first met all of those gentlemen, excluding only Hank Reinhardt who was not present for two good reasons: (a) he had discovered girls and found he preferred their company to that of fans (most of whom in the 1950s were male); and (b) Uncle Sam had discovered him and drafted him into the Army. For the record, Jerry Burge introduced Hank and me some time in 1959.

Jerry Burge was an amazing man whose achievements in fandom are of some importance yet all but unknown. In 1954 he and Carson Jones created the first science fiction small press publishing operation in the Southeast, calling it ASFO Press and issuing in hard cover Sam Moscovitz's history of science fiction fandom, *The Immortal Storm*. *The Immortal Storm* had run as a serialized feature in A. Langley Searles' fanzine *Fantasy Commentator*, and been issued by fellow ASFO member Henry Burwell in a mimeographed edition, but Jerry and Carson issued a revised edition of the book with an index and photos and a dust wrapper drawn by legendary SF illustrator Frank R. Paul. They planned a second book, a complete edition of the round-robin science fiction novel of the thirties, *Cosmos*, but it never saw print.

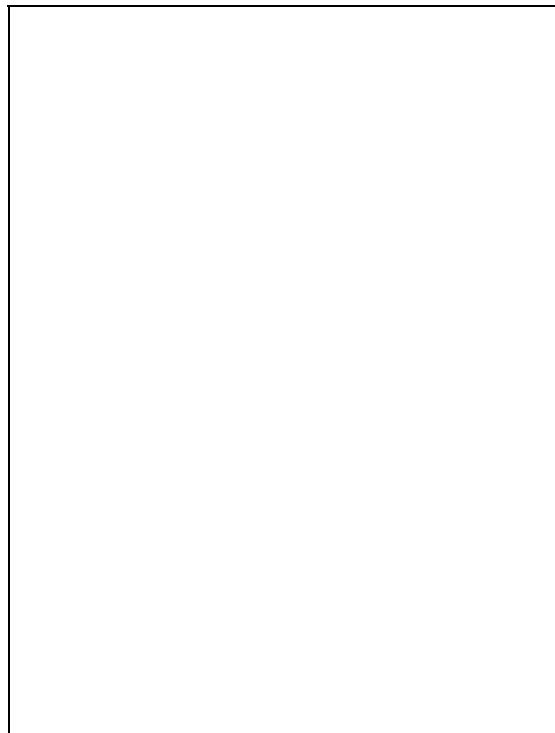
Jerry also took over and published a few issues of the general fanzine *Asfo*, during the waning years of the SF club. In 1959 he and I published a genzine called *Si-Fan*. Later on we collaborated on the science fiction collector's fanzine *Lore* (the title was Jerry's idea), and more recently were doing a fan journal for pulp collectors, *Flashback*. It was Jerry also who instigated the idea of a Southern fan group, after a suggestion by Georgia fan J.T. Oliver (who immediately announced he was dropping out of fandom when Jerry replied to his suggestion.) Jerry started a round robin letter among several of the best-known Southern fans to discuss details of the project. It was prematurely announced by another fan who took credit for the idea, robbing Jerry Burge and J.T. Oliver of their place in Southern fan history, though I don't think either was especially

bothered by the fact because they never got any of the blame, either. Jerry and I drafted a constitution for the group and we also helped set up the Southern Fandom Press Alliance.

In 1967 Jerry and I came into contact with William L. Crawford, who had had a number of small press operations since the thirties. Among Bill's accomplishments was the publishing of H.P. Lovecraft's *The Shadow Over Innsmouth*, the only one of Lovecraft's books published during his lifetime; the book publishing operation Fantasy Publishing Co., Inc. (FPCI); and the magazine *Fantasy Book* which published the first fiction in the field by Cordwainer Smith and Andre Norton (though it was published as by Andrew North). In 1934, Bill issued the first hardback book ever published by a science fiction and fantasy specialty publisher, Eugene Keys' *Mars Mountain*. In 1967, Crawford has just revived his other SF magazine, *Spaceway*, which wasn't working out, and had learned he could assume at little or no cost the publication of the horror fiction magazine *Coven 13*, which would give him a distribution contract. He talked Jerry Burge and me into becoming partners with FPCI in the project and we published a few issues with Burge as art editor and me as editor. We retitled it *Witchcraft and Sorcery* and referred to it among ourselves as *Sorcery*.

The magazine did not last very many issues. But it did achieve some successes, especially in the art field. Among them were the first professional publication in a fantasy magazine of artwork by Stephen Fabian, the first regular appearance in a fantasy magazine of artwork by Tim Kirk (he had appeared previously in an issue of *If*, I think, but only in one issue), and the first professional appearance of illustrator Bob Maurus. Jeff Jones was also a regular contributor and in one of the last issues, when he was pressed for time to do the illustrations for my story "Thirst", penciled the drawings and called in his pal Berni Wrightson to ink them.

Sorcery actually sold well, somewhere at or above 20,000 copies an issue, I gathered from Bill, which meant we never lost any money but somehow we never managed to make any, either. Jerry and I never got our investments back. It was this feeling that we weren't really going anywhere that killed the magazine since we could have published more issues if there had been anything coming in for us. But Jerry got married and had to concentrate on supporting a wife and daughter, and I was writing more and more, and also working as an editor for *TV Guide* magazine. In 1975 I began editing anthologies, first *Nameless Places* for Arkham House, and then *The Year's Best Horror Stories* for DAW. Bill Crawford began running an annual *Witchcraft & Sorcery* convention in Los Angeles.



For years Jerry Burge worked at Georgia Tech as a technical illustrator on the Saturn Project. During that time he did very little illustration not related to his job.

In recent years he began both to draw and write again. His writing was always very good and a lot of what I learned about the craft I learned from him, either through direct advice or by reading authors he recommended. His taste in reading, as in art, was superb.

But as he grew older, health problems began to hound him, first an eye problem that forced him to give up drawing for several more years, and then the heart problems that eventually killed him. The eye problems were corrected but by then it had been so long since he had drawn that he found himself having to relearn a lot of what had once been virtually instinctive to him. Then the heart problems began to grow and he found himself without the energy to do a lot of what he wanted to do.

But he did finish a story, an article, and a couple of pieces of art for *Flashback*, and he and I were at work on a collaborative short story that I still hope to finish – though it will be much harder to write, now.

Jerry Burge left hundreds of small drawings. He filled sketchbooks and small stenographer's pads with them. He drew on miscellaneous pieces of paper. I found drawings on the backs of waste sheets from his fifties fanzine *Asfo*. I found drawings on the backs of extra copies of the dust wrapper from *The Immortal Storm*. Some were practice pieces, some were copies from some book or magazine photograph, some were apparently done to find out the potential of a new pen-nib or brush. Many were studies for illustrations or paintings he did or planned. Some were damaged in the fire at his home in 1991, and show water stains or scorches around the edges. They show a surprising range of styles and techniques despite the fact that Jerry probably did not regard many of them as actually finished.

Yet I have found over 300 pieces that to one degree or another are publishable. They show Jerry's ability to create graceful poses and compositions, his mastery of anatomy, especially of the female form, his sense of humor, and his love for old science fiction illustrators and Golden Age comic book artists. I intend to make a good many of them available for fanzine.

December 10, 2004 will be on a Friday. At some level or another I've known how I would acknowledge the date for some time. Jerry and I, over the years, kept in touch with a good many marathon phone conversations, many of them late at night, that were apt to cover any subject we felt like, but which thoroughly covered the subjects of science fiction, fantasy, pulp magazines, old movies, politics, science, the older comic books and comic strips, baseball, SF fandom and any truly oddball subject we felt like raising. It was my intention to call Jerry up and try to reminisce. I say "try to" because there is, of course, no telling what will be going on in the world at that time to give us much more to talk about.

Now, sadly, there will be no conversation. But I'll still mark the occasion, of course. And I'll certainly reminisce.

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