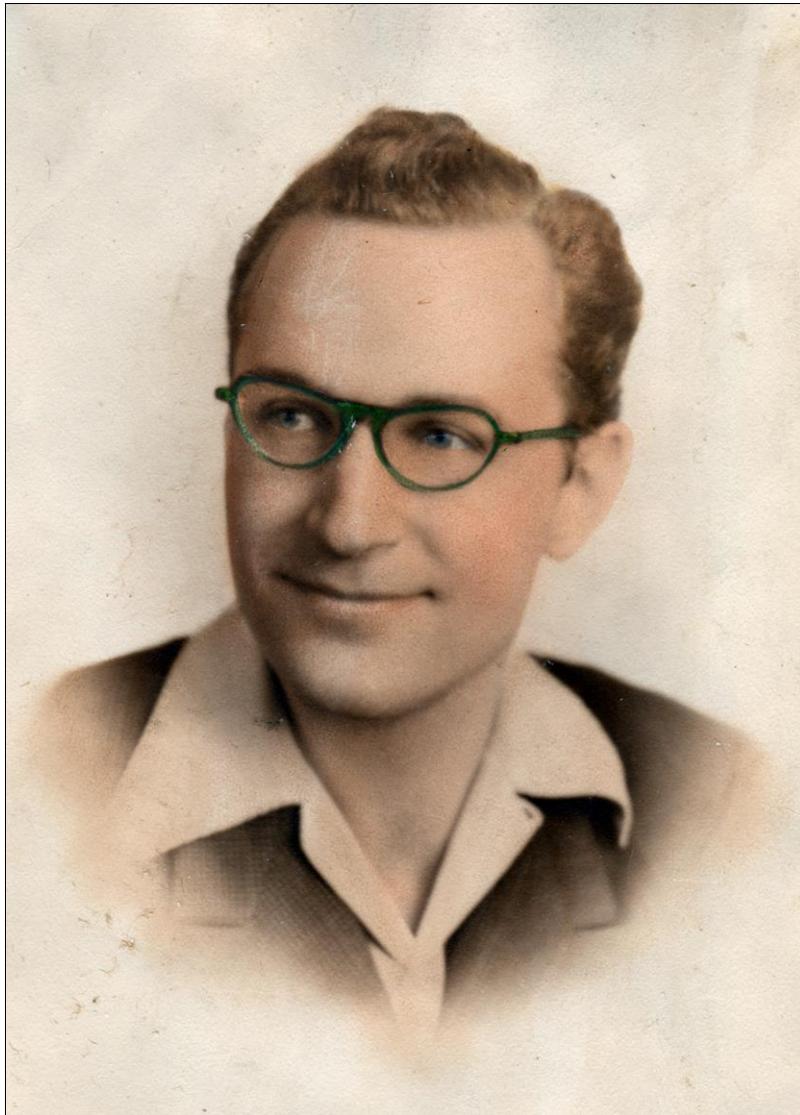


# Commemorating the Centenary Of Forrest J Ackerman



Forrest J Ackerman (circa. 1940)  
(Photograph by Morojo)

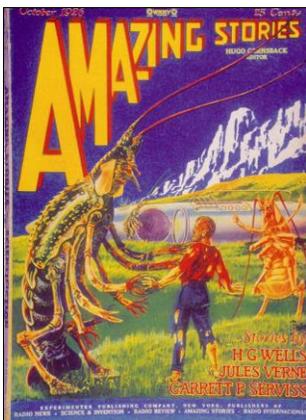
**By John L. Coker III**

## Forrest J Ackerman: Science Fiction Fan No. 1

(An Appreciation by John L. Coker III)

In the history of modern science fiction (SF), no person more than Forrest J Ackerman so fully embraced its purpose and gave so much of himself to its fans. From the earliest times, Ackerman was widely regarded as an idealist, someone who embraced an optimistic vision of the future. Forry had an unparalleled enthusiasm for everything related to SF, and became completely immersed in every aspect of the field. Over the course of a lifetime, he assembled a huge collection of artifacts that he made available to everyone. Ackerman will best be remembered for his legendary generosity, and for providing leadership and service to others.

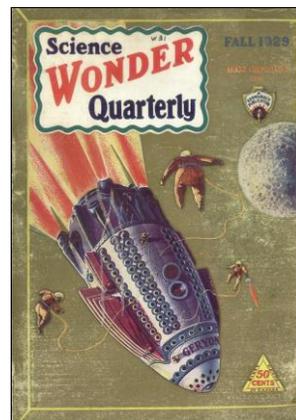
Forry was introduced to motion pictures at a young age and he became fascinated with their promise of the future. In 1922, when he was just five and a half years old, his grandparents took him to see his first “imagi-movie” (*One Glorious Day*). Four years later, he saw *Metropolis*, the film that was to become his favorite (during his lifetime he watched it over one hundred times). As a youth, Forry regularly went to the movies. He became passionate about the cinema, and eventually developed the ambition to appear in films and view every fantastic movie ever made.



**AMAZING STORIES**  
October 1926



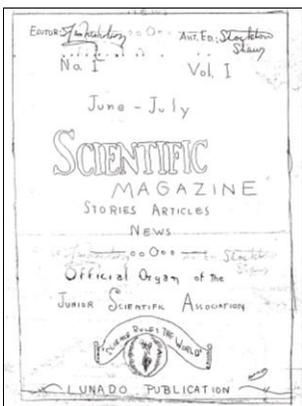
**Hugo Gernsback**  
(Provided by Forry Ackemrnan)



**Forry's First Letter**  
(Fall 1929)

In October 1926, Ackerman discovered SF in the pages of AMAZING STORIES and he was instantly hooked. Forry started buying the latest monthly issues, reading each one many times to satisfy his hunger. He began accumulating older copies of AMAZING STORIES and any other magazines that occasionally had this type of material, and added these to his growing collection. Forry saw where readers were sending letters to editor Hugo Gernsback, who would publish some of them in the magazine. Names and addresses were included to encourage the fans to make contact with each other. With unbridled enthusiasm, Forry began writing to Gernsback and anyone else who shared his

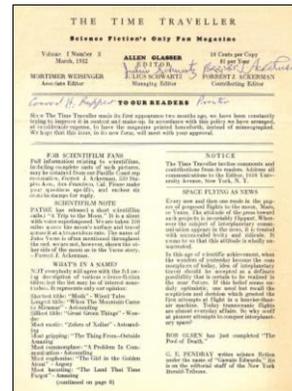
ever-increasing interest in SF. In 1929, Ackerman published his first letter in the first issue of SCIENCE WONDER QUARTERLY.



Junior Scientific Association



SUPERMAN by Joe Shuster



THE TIME TRAVELLER

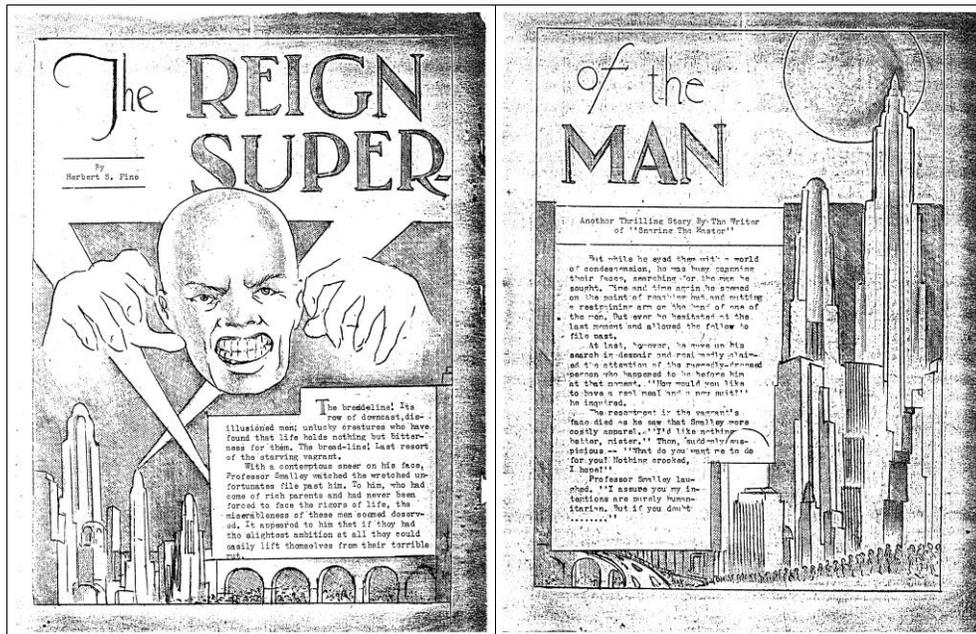
With regular mailings, Ackerman began developing long-distance relationships. In 1928 he was president of the Boy's Scientifiction Club, and in 1931 Forry was vice-president of the Junior Scientific Association. Through his written communications, he established a well-known reputation, sharing news with fans, editors, artists and authors, as well as actors, directors and heads of studios. By 1933 he was maintaining an active correspondence with more than one hundred fellow enthusiasts, and many people had come to regard him as "the" SF fan. During his lifetime, it is estimated that Ackerman corresponded with tens of thousands of people. Over the course of nine decades, he produced millions of words with his letters, magazines, books, panel discussions and interviews, and supported countless people by providing forums for their expression.

In 1930, with the release of *Just Imagine* -- the prophetic film about fifty years in the future and a rocket trip to Mars -- Forry was the first fan to start collecting stills from the motion pictures, and press books and lobby cards and posters. In 1932, Carl Laemmle -- the president of Universal Studios -- had a regular feature in a monthly movie magazine talking about its films and forthcoming movies. He invited anybody who had seen a Universal picture to write a note and tell him how he liked it. Eventually, Mr. Laemmle exchanged more than sixty letters with Forry, and he finally wrote an official instruction to the studios to "give that kid anything he wants."

In 1931, several fans (including Mort Weisinger and Julius Schwartz) decided to publish the first SF fan magazine, THE TIME TRAVELLER. Forry was an associate editor, the "Hollywood connection" and he wrote the very first article on the front page, listing all thirty-four of the "scientifilms" that had been made up to that time. This pioneering fan magazine appeared in January 1932 and ran for nine issues. It was a source of news for fans that were starving for SF.

It helped promote interest in the professionals who were writing and illustrating, and they in turn granted interviews and contributed stories or artwork. Fans around the country had a reliable source of information about the field and a sense of being connected.

And, it directly inspired others, including two young fans in Cleveland -- Jerome Siegel and Joseph Shuster -- to start their own fan magazines. In 1933, by the time he was just seventeen years old, Ackerman was already so-well known in the field that he had a cameo appearance as the hero in the lead story in the third issue of Siegel and Shuster's fan magazine SCIENCE FICTION, battling a villain named Superman.



Throughout his life, Forry kindly contributed articles for innumerable fan magazines around the world and provided money and material assistance to help start many fledgling fan publications. In 1934, Wilson Tucker wrote a report about an imaginary convention that took place in a spaceship circling the solar system. As a well-known fan of the day, Forry Ackerman was named in the story. Tucker hoped this would be his first professional sale, and he sent it to Charles D. Hornig, the editor of WONDER STORIES. Once there, it was converted from a story into a letter and published in the back of the magazine, so Tucker never received payment for it.

Forry's need for SF was like a man dying of thirst. He had an irrepressible passion for its promise of a brighter future for the human race. He wanted the whole world to know about it, and his greatest desire was to glimpse the future. In 1935, Ackerman first heard about Esperanto. He quickly learned the language of the future and then began offering classes in his home. In July 1939, dressed in his costume as a time traveler, the normally shy "4SJ"

Ackerman visited the New York World's Fair, where he addressed the crowd in this language. Fifty years later, he attended the one-hundredth anniversary of the creation of Esperanto in Warsaw, Poland.



**On the balcony at the First Worldcon (1939)**



**Visitor from the Future  
(Photo by Conrad H. Ruppert)**



**Robert W. Lowndes and 4SJ  
(Photo by Conrad H. Ruppert)**

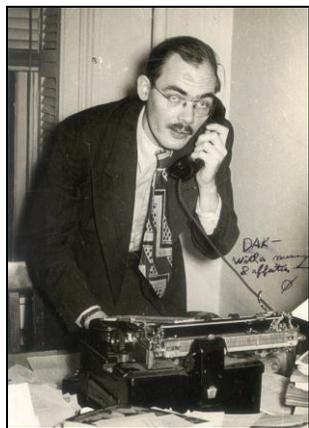
After years of planning by several different groups, the World Science Fiction Convention (Nycon) was held in New York City (July 2-4, 1939) in conjunction with the World's Fair. It was the biggest event in the brief history of modern SF fandom, and for many fans it represented a watershed moment. For a small donation, the Convention committee offered supporters a chance to have their names printed in the souvenir journal as "scientifictionists." Forry paid to have fifteen different names listed, including those of a number of family members and several pseudonyms. The Convention provided an opportunity for the East Coast-based fans and professionals to finally get to meet SF Fan No. 1, who had traveled all the way from California by train to New York City.

Among those fans was a young Frederik Pohl, a New York-based aspiring author, editor and Futurian. Later, Fred described to me his encounter with Ackerman in the following manner:

"In 1939, I was in a Manhattan automat busily eating my lunch with a group of fannish friends when, without warning, a creature in a homemade Buck Rogers suit appeared in the restaurant, waving a rocket pistol at the busboys, and demanding bean sprouts and tofu to go in his cheese sandwich. It was, of course, Forry Ackerman. The altercation that ensued would probably have come to nothing if it had not been for the fact that a party of General Motors executives were lunching in the same restaurant. When they saw Forry's futuristic costume, they mistakenly supposed he was a robot escaped from their World of the Future exhibit at the nearby 1939 World's Fair. They

immediately called the police, demanding that their property be returned. The matter might have been quickly resolved, except for Forry's insistence in talking to the New York police in Esperanto, the language of the future. They took him away on the charge of being an illegal alien, but after several of the New York fans came to his rescue, he was released with a warning when it was established that he was only from California."

Ackerman embraced a personal point of view about a world of the future where all people were connected. In the 1930s, he had labels made for applying to envelopes for his correspondence, which stated "Wings Over the World with Esperanto." Decades later, after Apollo 11 made its famous landing, he again asked the question from the science fiction classic film *Things to Come*: "With the moon in our pocket and stars in our eyes, there is only one answer to Oswald Cabal's question: "All the Universe or nothing?" It's "All the Universe!"



Fred Pohl



Wings Over the World



The Science Fiction League

Forry was committed to popularizing SF as a worthwhile endeavor. Through decades of effort he promoted these ideals to the mundane world and it was with him that many people outside of the genre first came to relate SF. He wanted SF to be recognized as being "legitimate." Forry was so closely identified as being its number one fan that many aspiring SF organizations sought further legitimacy just by having an association with Ackerman.

In 1934, Forry was a founding member of the Los Angeles Chapter of the Science Fiction League, and in the ensuing years he attended over 1,500 of their meetings. Gernsback named him Honorary Member No. 1 of the Science Fiction League and appointed him to their board of directors. In 1947, Forry established the Science Fiction Literary Agency, which came to represent over 200 professionals. Two years later at the Worldcon in Cincinnati, Forry was a member of the distinguished panel that first discussed SF on a "live" television broadcast. In 1959, when First Fandom was organized, Ackerman was the natural choice to hold in trust a bottle of liquor that the last surviving member would use to toast his departed colleagues. In 1965, Forry was a charter

member of the Science Fiction Writers of America. In 2004, Ackerman became a board member of the Science Fiction Museum and Hall of Fame.



**Forry, Wendayne Tetsu Yano  
Worldcon (Philadelphia, 1953)  
(Photo by Charles Harris)**



**L-R: Charles D. Hornig, Bradbury, Forry  
(Los Angeles, 1940)**

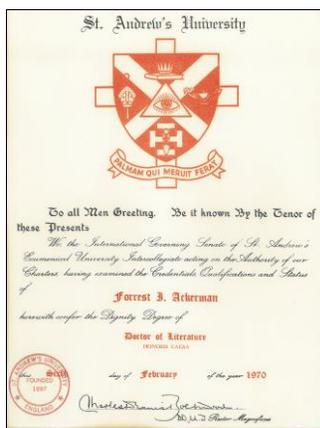


**4SJ and Morojo  
(Nycon, 1939)**

Forry was one of the first fans to expand the scope of SF outside of the United States. In 1951, Ackerman was the guest of honor at Festivention, the First International Science Fiction Convention. Two years later, he was the first person to import a fan (Tetsu Yano, the godfather of SF in Japan) to America. In 1957, Forry was guest of honor at the First Pan-Germanic Science Fiction Convention. That same year, Ackerman was among the first to sign-up for a round-trip flight to London to attend the Worldcon. David A. Kyle (who was newly married to Ruth Landis) had made arrangements for the airplane ride as part of his honeymoon. The fans flew on KLM Airlines, which Forry promptly nicknamed the “Kyle-Landis Marriage.”



**Forry and Morojo (ca. 1940)**



**Forry's Honorary Doctorate**



**Metropolis**

Forrest J Ackerman was generally thought of as a wonderful person, a real enthusiast whose positive behaviors helped define the best qualities of a trufan. Through personal interactions he nurtured the efforts of thousands of people around the world. Forry's accomplishments brought positive attention to SF and he provided a steady influence that helped fandom through difficult times.

He spent a lifetime collecting, preserving and displaying everything that was related to SF so that it would be available for the enjoyment of everyone.

Because of his devotion to SF and his benevolent service to others, Forry was seen as a pioneer, someone who was a natural leader, especially for the younger fans. At Nycon, Ackerman introduced some of the out-of-town visitors to the editors of several famous magazines. They met Farnsworth Wright in his editorial office at WEIRD TALES as well as A. Merritt during their visit to the offices of THE AMERICAN WEEKLY. The following year, Forry cheerfully led a group of two dozen costumed fans to the newspaper office in Chicago to get their photograph made so that it could appear in the next day's edition.

During his service with the U.S. Army, there were nearly two thousand wartime newspapers, and the one that Sgt. Ack-Ack co-edited was voted second most popular. He even issued a fanzine printed on a dog tag. As a member of the Fourth Worldcon committee, Ackerman tried to arrange for the first all-female guest line-up. In 1975, Forry went to the first World Fantasy Convention in Providence, Rhode Island where he escorted a group of devotees to a late-night memorial at H.P. Lovecraft's gravesite.



**Forrest J Ackerman, U.S. Army (3yrs4mos29days)**

From the time that he first discovered SF, Forry developed ever-increasing areas of interest and he maintained genuine enthusiasm for all of them throughout his life. Each activity led to another, and he soon became fully engrossed in these pursuits. Ackerman always seemed to be at the forefront of activity, embodying the founding principles and serving as an example. In the mid-1930s, the editor of WONDER STORIES offered their readers a test consisting of one hundred difficult questions, and if they were able to do well enough on it these fans could become an ace (earning a bachelor's degree in science fiction). Naturally, Forry made a perfect score. At the 1941 Worldcon, Forry received a medal acknowledging him as "Science Fiction Fan Number One." In 1949 he was referred to as "Mr. Science Fiction" in a newspaper article written by Willy Ley.

In 1953, Ackerman received the first Hugo Award due to votes by the fans naming him "Science Fiction's Number One Fan Personality." In 1964 he was Fan GoH at the Worldcon. Over the ensuing years Forry was presented with many lifetime achievement awards and inducted into numerous halls of fame. Hugo Gernsback was often fond of saying "Forrest J Ackerman is the Son of Science Fiction." Forry's best friend--Walter J. Daugherty--offered the following summation: "Forrest J Ackerman is Science Fiction Fan No.1 and always has been. They won't possibly be able to forget him."



4E loved SF so much that he gave himself to the service of its fans. Who else so graciously opened his home each week for more than fifty years to strangers from all over the world, so that they could enjoy looking at his unique collection of SF and movie memorabilia? Starting in 1951, more than fifty thousand fans enjoyed Forry's personally guided tours through several Ackermansions.



L-R: E.E. Evans, Forry, Daugherty



Los Angeles (ca. 1941)



Forry's Ring from Bela Lugosi

In 1959, in the spirit of recognizing generosity, Forry and Walter J. Daugherty created the Big Heart Award, which is presented each year at the worldcon to honor people who have unselfishly given their time and energy to SF fandom. For years, Uncle Forry hosted his birthday party at home, but eventually had to rent a banquet hall so that he could accommodate the hundreds of friends that wanted to help celebrate the popular annual event.

In the mid-1990s David A. Kyle and I were guests at I-Con (a writer's conference at Stonybrook University, Long Island, NY) and we learned that Forry was appearing in New Jersey that same weekend for a horror convention. Ackerman suggested that we meet in New York City at a small theater to attend the last performance of Brother Theodore. Afterwards, Forry invited two-dozen people that were in attendance at the performance to go to a nearby Chinese restaurant, where he paid for everyone's meal. Forry told me that during his trip to China, he signed more than six thousand autographs for his fans.



L-R: Schwartz, Moskowitz, Ackerman, Kyle, Ruppert  
(I-Con, 1995 - Photograph by John L. Coker III)



Forry with Children of Monster Legends  
(Crystal City, VA – Memorial Day 1993)

In 1993 I attended a convention that commemorated the 35th Anniversary of FAMOUS MONSTERS OF FILMLAND. Forry brought together many of the legends for that special time: Ray Bradbury and Ray Harryhausen; directors Roger Corman, John Landis and Joe Dante; make-up master Rick Baker; many authors, including Robert Bloch, Curt Siodmak and Richard Matheson; Julius Schwartz; Frank Kelly Freas; stars from TV and film; and children of horror legends (Sara Karloff, Bela Lugosi, Jr., Dwight Frye, Jr. and Ron Chaney).



When I arrived, Forry asked me to join a group of two-dozen people who were eating all of their meals together. These were some of Forry's friends, ordinary fans who had been invited from all over the world. He had provided all of the necessary arrangements to have each of them come to the convention: airfare,

hotel, food, 3-day membership and spending money, all on the one condition that they tell no one of his generosity. For me, the best part of that weekend was not meeting celebrities, or buying souvenirs. It was watching Forry as he interacted with thousands of fans and friends, helping to create an international enclave that honored the past and promoted the possible future.



St. Fantony at the Worldcon (Forry in white shirt)



Got the License to Prove It

In 2006, I published a biography of David A. Kyle, entitled *A LIFE OF SCIENCE FICTION IDEAS AND DREAMS*. In discussing Ackerman, **Dave Kyle** stated:

“Forry was three years older than me and had been involved in the field since the late-1920s. He wrote in green ink, and had a green typewriter ribbon. So I got purple ink, the most important dye in hectograph. When Forry arrived from California at the World Science Fiction Convention, I was particularly thrilled because this man was responsible for me being in active fandom. I saw my mentor, really, a fellow that said that there was a world out there, people all over the country, not just in the magazines.

Years later, in 1970, I was traveling with a group of European SF fans, and we were in a local bar. I looked up at the television set and was startled to see Forry appearing on the screen in a movie. Many people think of Forry as a wonderful man who aged so well from a teen-ager right up unto his nineties. There is no doubt that Forrest J Ackerman will always be remembered in SF fannish history.”

In an article for *TALES OF THE TIME TRAVELERS* (2009), **Robert Silverberg** wrote:

“Forry was a mythical figure out of fandom's early days when I first came into the science-fiction world. There never has been a time in the memory of anyone now alive when Forrest J Ackerman was not a vital part of the scene. We will all have to start getting used to his absence now.”

Several members of First Fandom have jokingly told me that in the mid-1930s there were really only a hundred or so active SF fans, and Forry Ackerman was five of them.



Proclamation from L.A. Mayor



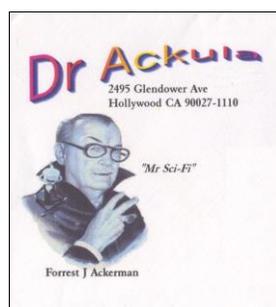
Sam Moskowitz visits Forry



Ackerman's Monstrous Collection

Ackerman will be remembered for the many genre-related terms that he coined, his original humor and bad puns, the tens of thousands of letters and articles he contributed to fan publications around the world, the many rare items from his personal collection that he gave to friends, the volume of material he donated to numerous archives, as well as his many interviews on radio and television and the cameo appearances he made in more than one hundred films.

Because of his tireless enthusiasm and life-long commitment, Forrest J Ackerman was regarded around the world as the ambassador of SF. It can honestly be said that Forry was a living legend.



Without the many unique, first-time and lasting contributions made by Forrest J Ackerman, it is quite reasonable to say that SF fandom (and SF in general) would never have flourished to reach their present states.

I will state in Esperanto what many fans must have told Forry during his lifetime: 4E, mi amas vin. (Forry, I love you.)