
AN INTERVIEW WITH TOM JOHNSON

Conducted by Timothy Ray Dill

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"Tom Johnson is a pulp fan." I think this would be a fitting epitaph on his headstone someday. Tom and his wife Ginger have devoted an inordinate amount of their time to promoting the hobby of pulp collecting, or rather I should say pulp enjoyment. Tom has always kept in mind that the stories inside the pulps are what makes them enjoyable. He produces and edits the longest running pulp fanzine, ECHOES, as well as a pulp reprint magazine known as BEHIND THE MASK.. He has also recently started two new fiction magazines based on pulp type characters. Many pulp fans have told me that Tom Johnson started them on the road to pulp enjoyment by providing them with pulps or avenues to obtain pulps. Tom has a reputation for being honest and helpful. Maybe his epitaph should read "Tom Johnson is a friend to fellow pulp fans." In Tom's own words. "What's left to say after that?"

Tim Dill: A topic that is sometimes discussed by your customers is your background. Many of your fellow fans only know you through your publications and through correspondence. How about a little background for us?

Tom Johnson: Well, you asked for it. This question could possibly end up much longer than you anticipated. However, to make it short, I was born July 26, 1940, in Seymour, Texas. My father had served in the Cavalry Division in the U.S. Army, then switched over to the Navy. It was during his brief period in the Navy that he had a bad accident—he fell from a high spot on the ship, landing on his back on the deck. Forced out of the Navy, he returned to Seymour and gathered his family up and moved them to Wichita Falls, Texas, where he worked as a cook, and we lived in a second story apartment over a beer joint on Ohio Street (Skidrow of the day). This area became my little world for many years; I grew up on Skidrow, so to speak.

Skidrow, Ohio Street, was between 7th and 8th Streets, while the railroad tracks were a half block away in one direction, the main business district of Wichita Falls was one block away the other direction. My world consisted of the Ritz, Gem, and Tower theaters. But what wonderful entertainment they provided. They played the B westerns with all of my cowboy heroes, The Bowery Boys, and so many other great B movies, and those wonderful old serials on the Saturday Matinees. Somehow, I usually ended up with a

dime on the weekend, and could choose from one of the three theaters in my price range.

I was the youngest of three children; I have two sisters, both older than me. They both married young and moved out; my father was an alcoholic, so life wasn't always sweet at home. His priorities were beer and whiskey first, food and rent last. So we didn't have much money to spend on anything. Of course, at the time I thought everyone lived like we did, and I didn't know we were poor. I did have what is called today a Big Brother. This man was married but had no children of his own, so he sort of adopted me on weekends, and we went to the movies.

In 1948, one of the most influential things in my life happened at the Tower theater. For some reason, I chose that day to see the movie there. The serial was a new one that day, starting off with Chapter One. Superman. I was flabbergasted! I had read the Superman comics, but here he was on the movie screen. He was real. For the next 15 Saturday Matinees, I spent at the Tower theater watching the Superman serial, regardless of what the B movies were at the time. This serial remains my favorite of the serials to this day! Oh, I saw many others; Captain Video, The Black Widow, and others. But none of them came up to the Superman serial. Not for me. It was the greatest, and it made me a fan of serials even at the tender age of 8 years old.

There were other pieces of paradise in my neighborhood. A used magazine and comic shop about two blocks away, where you could buy comics or pulps, cover less, at two for a nickel. When I had some spending money, I bought

comics. The best ones: Superman, Batman, Wonder Woman, and many others, as money permitted. This was the greatest age for the comic books, and I'm glad that I was a kid in that time.

During some parts of this time period we had a radio. I would sit and listen to all of the great old radio dramas of the period, and my favorite (of course) was *The Shadow*. What better could you want for an invisible media, than a character who could turn invisible! It was our television of the day, but with the radio you had to use your brain to see the action. For long periods, we did not have a radio. Again, with my father, beer came before fixing a broken down radio or buying a new one. But we enjoyed radio drama when we could.

It was at the local drug store that I spent a lot of time, looking through the comics and pulp magazine; I loved those science fiction covers on the pulps. More on this latter.

Across the street from the drug store, and half a block away, was the train depot. I would go over and go inside when trains arrived. I remember many soldiers who were returning from overseas bases, many of them had been in the WWII. I would listen to their many stories of other countries and the war, and it sparked a fascination in me that I would like to be a soldier when I grew up.

When I did grow up, I did join the U.S. Army, and one of my first duties was Korea, where my unit patrolled the DMZ. The actual Conflict was over, but we were still under fire, and I almost became a casualty while in Korea. Ten years later I was in Vietnam for a tour, and two years after that, I was sent back over to the area in support of the final bombing missions over Vietnam. I made a career in the military. Ginger and I married in January 1961. I wasn't quite 21 years old, and Ginger was only 15 years old; Ginger's full name was Virginia Elaine Martin.

In 1970, after returning from Vietnam, I met a guy who had subscribed to a fanzine called *BRONZE SHADOWS*. I had never seen a fanzine before, and was fascinated by the publication. I had began reading at an early age, possibly due to Joe having all the classics, like *CALL OF THE WILD*, *TOM SAWYER*, *HEIDI*, *HUCKLEBERRY FINN*, and the like. I was thrilled by the adventures. Later on, I found science fiction: my first sf was a story by A.E. Van Gogt, *WORLDS OF NUL A*, or *PAWNS OF NUL A*, I can't remember for sure. In the mid 1950s I became a fan of detective stories, especially of Mike

Hammer. I remained a detective fan until the early 1960s at which time I found Robert E. Howard, Edgar Rice Burroughs, H. Rider Haggard, Doc Savage and *The Shadow*..

I guess, as they say, the rest is history. Ginger and I wanted to start our own fan magazine. We asked several of our friends to title the planned magazine. Bob Sampson suggested *ECHOES*, and that's what we went with.

I told you this could be long!

Tim Dill: What was your first exposure to pulp magazines?

Tom Johnson: Actually, I was aware of pulp magazines in the 1940s, as I found them on the book racks of the drug store and the used magazine store in my neighborhood. But I wasn't aware of the greats, like *The Shadow*, *Doc Savage*, *The Spider*, etc. What interested me most were the SF covers that attracted me to the racks. I found one in the drug store that I wanted so badly I went and got my mother to come and buy it for me. She tagged along and looked at the cover, and immediately said, "No!"; to this day, I think it was a *THRILLING WONDER* story. It featured a man and woman on the cover flying through space! I think I finally bought that issue many years later, but I'm not sure.

In the early 1970s I found a used book store in Dallas, Texas, with an attic full of pulps; all of the lesser heroes were there, *Phantom Detective*, *The Ghost*, *The Black Hood*, *Operator 5*, *Secret Agent X*, and many others. But they had piles and piles of *Phantom Detective*! These were only \$2.00 each, and I bought a large stack of 'em! Later on, we drove into Los Angeles, to Hollywood & Vine, and checked out every book store in the area. Found one that had nothing but aviation titles, wall to wall of them! In another, I found a couple handfuls of *The Shadow & Doc Savage* pulps. Paid about \$6.00 each for these. That was in 1972, or thereabouts.

Tim Dill: I've seen your name mentioned in the acknowledgments of "pulp history" books dating back to at least the mid-seventies. What was the first "pulp-history" book that you were involved?

Tom Johnson: Somehow, I must have obtained a complete run of Secret Agent X at first, and I enjoyed the character. I could see there were different authors writing the stories, and started researching the stories; my main research did not attempt to identify the authors, but to discuss the plots, characters, and other notes. I was deep in this research by 1974, and several people knew that I was doing this. Some how, Will Murray got this news, and since he was working on some of the authorship at the same time, we decided to pool our notes, and this time I got into the job of identifying the authors, as well. Our research was put into book form in 1980.

Though I had written a small column for a brand new newspaper starting out in North Dakota, my first magazine article, FIGHTING MEN EXTRAORDINARY, about the techniques our heroes used in fighting, appeared around 1974 or '75 in XENOPHILE. Since then, I've written a lot of booklets and articles dealing with pulp series. THE GREEN GHOST, THE BLACK BAT, THE HISTORY OF THE PURPLE WARS, FROM SHADOW TO SUPERMAN, THE ORIGINAL MASKED MARVEL (Phantom Detective), and DAN FOWLER: ACE OF THE G-MEN. I've been published in at least five compilations: MONTHLY MURDERS, MYSTERY, DETECTIVE AND ESPIONAGE MAGAZINES: PULP HEROES OF THE THIRTIES; PULPMASTERS; UNMASKED HEROES (Greek paperback in Greece). I may be forgetting something, but maybe not.

I've written for XENOPHILE, THE PULP COLLECTOR, THE PULPSTER, AGE OF THE UNICORN, ECHOES, THE DOC SAVAGE QUARTERLY (and the many title changes to it), THE BRONZE GAZETTE, probably others. I figured out that I have something like 500 pages of articles that have appeared in magazines and newspapers. Unfortunately, I don't have any of this listed anywhere.

Tim Dill: You've been involved in innumerable pulp history ventures. What is your favorite?

Tom Johnson: Pulp history adventures? I guess ECHOES would have to be my favorite. ECHOES is now in the 90's if you consider the numbering system, so we've been around for a while. We've published the best of the writers and researchers. I couldn't name all of the writers and

artists who have appeared in ECHOES. But a few come quickly to mind: Nick Carr, Robert Sampson, Steve Mitchell, Shawn Danowski, Burt Leake, William Thom, Rick Lai. I could go on, but I would leave someone out, even if I continued for another page.

Though our health is deteriorating, we plan on continuing with ECHOES as long as we can. If it gets to the point where Ginger and I can't continue with ECHOES, we hope that somebody else will take it over and continue well past issue #100. ECHOES, by the way, has not missed an issue deadline since we started the publication in 1982; 14 years and a little more.

Our other adventures have been, and are fun. We've been publishing a fiction magazine, CLASSIC PULP FICTION STORIES since around June 1995, and have recently started a second fiction magazine, WEIRD STORIES about five months ago. These are published monthly, and we continue to get great fiction stories in from new writers.

I also enjoyed working with Will Murray on the Secret Agent X book.

Tim Dill: You've written a history of the pulp hero, Secret Agent X. Is X your favorite character from the pulps?

Tom Johnson: No. Although I like the character and stories: I've written one short story featuring the character, HORROR'S MONSTER; my favorite pulp character has always been The Shadow. From first encountering The Shadow in 1964, RETURN OF THE SHADOW, by Walter B. Gibson, I have remained totally devoted to the character. Unfortunately, I have read all 325 stories, as well as Gibson's two short stories, and the Belmont Books series in the mid 1960s.

Doc Savage is a close second, as are many others. But these others I list as my second choices. Some times, I think I am the only fan of the Phantom Detective or Dan Fowler, as I never hear from other fans of these characters. Doc Savage, The Spider, G-8, and Operator 5 draw many fans. But there seems to be only a few fans of the STANDARD line of magazine heroes.

But the question was about my favorite pulp character, wasn't it? That would be The Shadow.

Tim Dill: Echoes is the longest running pulp fanzine. Why did you start publishing it?

Tom Johnson: Again, I would have to refer back to the first fanzine I ever ran across, BRONZE SHADOWS. Ginger and I were so enthused by this fanzine that we wanted to do something like it ourselves. Fred Cook, who published this magazine, did a great service to the pulp community. I was honored to meet Fred Cook at the first PulpCon I attended, and it was a thrill. When Ginger and I decided on publishing ECHOES, we wanted to keep the ambiance (is that the word?) of Fred's BRONZE SHADOWS. We actually wanted an amateur fan publication. Some times, I think that some publishers try too hard for a more professional magazine, and what we get is a magazine that comes out once every two to five years. With ECHOES, you get an issue every two months, and it is full of great material. Don't get me wrong, I think all of the pulp publications are great for pulp fandom, and certainly serve the community. Like my favorite music radio today, they say "We play the best songs around. All the other stations play what's left over!" (That's a joke, of course.) But ECHOES does print the best material around.

Tim Dill: What is the biggest hurdle in producing an on-going pulp fanzine?

Tom Johnson: The money!!! Most of the time we have to print the next magazine before subscriptions come in. We have to use money from our own account until we get money through subscriptions. We try to ask our subscribers to renew their subs on time, but only a few do. Most will wait for two months and then rush their checks to us. In the mean time, we've had to come up with the money to print the magazine.

And lack of ads is another problem. Where are all the advertisers who advertised in AGE OF THE UNICORN, or XENOPHILE? Ads would help us tremendously, but we've never gotten them. In many cases we often get "letters" from fans who ask that we run information in our letter department that they are trying to sell something. This way, they get their ad free. We do it some times, but hint to them that they should buy an ad space to sell their material.

Money, money, money. Nothing is free today, and the price of printing and postage continues to go up. Without money, we couldn't continue.

Tim Dill: A criticism that I've heard about Echoes is that the printing quality and layout is unprofessional, but the content is excellent. Any thoughts about upgrading the quality?

Tom Johnson: We are constantly trying to upgrade the quality of ECHOES. Remember, we jumped into this with little or no experience, then we shot for an amateur fan publication, not for a pro or semi pro publication. We felt that an amateur look would give us the "family and friends" look, and help us (in truth) make many new friends. Publishing every two months does cause us to rush at times, and the quality suffers badly. And one thing that we learned years ago, was that you would never find your own mistakes when editing what you had typed. We could type a whole issue out, and Ginger and I would then proofread the stuff, and correct any mistakes that we found, then send the issue off to the printers. The very second the issue comes back, and we open the magazine to the contents page, a mistake will jump out at us. Never, never, never edit your own material. You just flat miss most typos.

Add to that, the printing quality is not always up to par. Again, the professional look just isn't there. Some printers, in the past, sent us the pages back with blank pages in places, and when the blank pages were on the odd page number, we missed them. When we collate the magazine, the even numbered pages are up, and this is the page we see. If the odd page number is blank, we don't catch it until an angry subscriber writes in demanding the missing page.

I could name several other areas where the quality is bad, and the reason for it. But to put the blame where it belongs most, is in the money situation. We just don't have the money to produce the professional or semi professional publication.

Tim Dill: You've worked on articles about Dan Fowler, The Black Hood, and other pulp characters for Echoes. What projects are currently under consideration?

Tom Johnson: Right now, I am not working on anything special for ECHOES. I'm about burned out on trying to identify authors. Though some times it's fun, most of the time it will give

you a headache. So, instead of researching for articles, lately I've been writing fiction, some new Black Bat stories, more Phantom Detective stories, some of my own new creations, such as The Masked Avenger, The Black Ghost, and others.

And I'm trying to catch up on some reading. I have a shelf full of Lone Eagle pulps, a few G-8's not read yet, plus I want to re-read a few Black Bat stories. If I was much, much younger, I would want to re-read the Doc Savage series, the Shadow series, Edgar Rice Burroughs, and many other great series. Unfortunately, I'll never be able to do that, so I can just be happy that I have read them all already.

We are planning a second edition of the PULP CHARACTER REPRINT LIST by William Thom. Thom gave us the first edition to publish in ECHOES back in issue #60. That issue has long since sold out, and since then, many new reprints have been added to Thom's list, so it's time for an update. This time, it will be in magazine form, 11 x 17, folded and stapled in the center, and, if all goes well, the wrap-around cover will be in color! This will list as completely as possible, all of the hero stories that have been reprinted, and in what publication. A must all for collectors.

Tim Dill: "Ghost Breaking" pulp house-names and determining true authorship seems to be popular in Echoes. I was impressed with John Edwards' series on the Phantom Detective. You've done some research into Dan Fowler as well as others. Who do you consider the experts in this area and why?

Tom Johnson: Good question. There aren't too many of us trying to identify authors of the series. Thankfully, Robert Weinberg and Joel Freeman located the records of POPULAR PUBLICATIONS, and many authors were identified for that pulp house. As for me, as a researcher, trying to identify an author by certain clues in their writing style, I can only make guesses on anything. Will Murray got me started in this author identification thing, and right now, I believe that Will and I are the only ones attempting this to any great degree. Virgil Utter has identified Henry Kuttner's stories under house names, and a few others have found some interesting possibilities.

As most readers know, I am John Edwards; my full name is Thomas Edward Johnson, and I often use variations of this name to create my own pen names. Eddy Thomas, for instance, is another pen name I use a lot.

As for who are the experts? Well, Will Murray is pretty darn good when it comes to discovering who wrote what. But most of the time, I think that we are crawling around a tree stump and thinking we are in the high branches of that tree. Heck, the only true way to identify an author is from records, either from the publishing house, or the author's own records. Identifying the authors is only guess work. Some times we are lucky, some times we're on the ground instead of the tree branches.

Tim Dill: The late Robert Sampson is considered one of the best "pulp history" writers. I've enjoyed his articles over the years and especially his analysis of the Spider in his book entitled Spider. Will you share with me some of your memories of Mr. Sampson?

Tom Johnson: Now this is another area in which you are asking for a book to be written. Robert Sampson? I've probably got a hundred anecdotes about Bob, and it would take days to write down. However, I'll see if I can condense it for you. First, I made contact with three individuals in the early 1970s: Lester Belcher, Earl Kussman, and Robert Sampson. Bob's letters were fun to read, and he was well versed in pulp fandom at that time. Bob and I became great friends, and we always enjoyed his letters.

When I was researching the Phantom Detective, I needed to borrow several from Bob's collection, one of which was DEATH ON SWIFT WINGS. I guess that Bob kept some of his pulps in his attic at the time, and the Phantom Detective pulps were up there. It seems that he had crawled into his attic to retrieve some of those pulps, and when he found DEATH ON SWIFT WINGS, that magazine jumped out of his hand and went sailing down the empty space between the outside wall and the inside wall. Bob went back down stairs thinking he was going to have to tear out the inner wall of sheetrock in order to get to that pulp magazine. But he was lucky in that there was about an inch of space along the floor where the sheetrock did not meet the floor, and there was DEATH ON SWIFT WINGS waiting for him to pull

out of the hole. Considering the title of the story, DEATH ON SWIFT WINGS, and Bob's imagination, I've never known how much of this was true, and how much his weird sense of humor. But it made a good story.

Another incident was when I got the best of him. At the 1991 PulpCon in Dayton, there was a back side door to the dorm that automatically locked when it closed. The front of the dorm was about a mile (it seemed) from the back door. To many attendees' surprise, when they were unloading their pulps and stuff at the back door from their cars, several of them accidentally let go of the door, and it closed, locking, and requiring them to make the trip around to the front again to re-open the door.

Well, I was helping Bob load his stuff in his car as the convention was breaking up. We used that back door. We carried all of his stuff to the door, then opened it in order to carry the stuff to his car parked near the door. Bob told me not to let the door close. Well, Bob did not see a door stop that somebody had placed there for the purpose of holding the door open for the loading of baggage.

I did. While Bob carried the first of his stuff from the door to the car, I picked up the door stop and placed it between the door and frame so the door would not close, then I picked up some of Bob's stuff and carried it to the car. Bob saw me standing next to him and turned green as he thought that I had let the door go closed. He actually jumped towards the door as he saw it closing, only to stop when he saw the door come to a stop without closing completely. Bob never said anything, but I bet he was cussing me out royally in his thoughts until he saw that I had arranged for the door not to close. That was the last time I would ever see Bob. He died some time later.

While at the convention in 1991, Bob and I had a period in which it was just the two of us. We discussed several things as we talked about things that were on our mind. We discussed religion. We also discussed the proper way to saddle a horse, and what it took to be real cowboys. Both the religion and cowboy conversation was brought out because of the western pulps and *The Spider*. Followers of the *Spider* will remember many stories that involved mad preachers in the plot. And it seems that pulp cowboys never really saddled their horses properly.

Bob was a large jolly man, and could keep you laughing. As most know, he started out as an English teacher in the school system, but eventually got a job with NASA in their publishing department, editing material. At least that was my understanding. Bob was good with words, and had a very large vocabulary, as well as a distinctive writing style.

Tim Dill: Have you ever met any of the original pulp masters such as Walter B. Gibson or Hugh B. Cave?

Tom Johnson: I'll probably forget some one, I usually do. But yes, I have met many of the people who were involved in the pulps one way or another; from author to publisher to editor, etc. Some I met are Walter Gibson—I once asked Walter if he had intended a romance between the airline stewardess and *The Shadow* in that novel where the plane crashes, and *The Shadow* saved the stewardess, though they have to trek out of the desert where they crashed. Walter said no, but I still feel that there had been an attempt at romance in that story. Harry Steeger was another that I met, as well as Norman Saunders, the great artists who drew covers for the pulps, as well as the TOPPS MARS ATTACKS trading cards back in the 1950's. Leigh Brackett was another that comes to mind. I've met many of the editors of the pulps at a number of the conventions. Which ones I can't name right off my head. I would have to look them up, and then I'd probably still forget someone. Though I've corresponded with Hugh B. Cave, and love his letters, I've never met him. The same for Norman Daniels, one of my favorite writers from the pulp field. I corresponded with Cylvia Kleinman Margulies, the wife of Leo, head editor for the Standard group, after Leo died. I also corresponded with Norma Dent, wife of Lester Dent, Rose Wynn, wife of A.A. Wynn, publisher of the ACE GROUP. Rose, by the way, was listed as the editor of *Secret Agent X*. After reading a couple of Hugh B. Cave's stories recently, I wrote to him and told him that he and the other pulp greats were fantastic writers. Hugh, in his late 80's I believe, is as talented today as he was fifty or sixty years ago! And my statement was true, those pulp authors could sure write!

Again, I'm leaving many names out. Sorry.

Tim Dill: Your pulp reprint publication, BEHIND THE MASK, generally contains stories about lesser known characters. Is this a sad fact of economics or an attempt to expose people to stories that are extremely rare?

Tom Johnson: Actually, BEHIND THE MASK reprints what is available. I could run full-length novels in the magazine, such as the Phantom Detective, Masked Detective, The Ghost, etc. But I would rather have more of the novelettes, such as Crimson Mask, Candid Camera Kid, Mr. Death, and stories like that. Unfortunately, I don't have any more (that I haven't already printed) in my own collection, and I've had trouble finding the missing stories. Several people have been a big help in locating the early turn of the century short story heroes for me. Andrew Pepoy has loaned us dozens of neat stories featuring such characters as The Griffin, The Gray Phantom/Gray Ghost, The Mongoose, The Purple Clown, The Spider (a villain from early pulps), and many others. These stories will undoubtedly never see reprint status except in fan publications like BEHIND THE MASK. So I think we are serving the readers by reprinting these stories. I mean, how many out there have read a Gray Phantom story? Or The Griffin? When is the last time you've seen one of these stories in the original pulp?

Tim Dill: Within the last year you started a new publication entitled CLASSIC PULP FICTION STORIES which prints new pulp fan fiction. What led you to start this venture?

Tom Johnson: Well, I guess my reasons were personal at first. I had some ideas for some short stories, and especially wanted to write some Phantom Detective short stories, Black Bat, Secret Agent X, and The Lone Eagle. I mentioned to a few friends that I wanted to start CLASSIC PULP FICTION STORIES, and was surprised at the response I got. Several advised me that they were writing fiction and would love to write stories for us. CLASSIC PULP FICTION STORIES was considered to be a one of a kind publication for us, but we were swamped with new fiction pieces from many of our friends. Not too long afterwards, we had to create a second fiction magazine to handle the load of material that was coming in.

We started WEIRD STORIES about five months ago, and there is no let up in new fiction.

I think that all of us have stories in our head that we would love to put on paper. There are no longer the pulp magazines to sell to, and only a few professional magazines exist, and they can only publish a few of the stories they get. The writers out there do not have a large choice in the matter of publishing their stories. Small press magazines like CPFS and WS are working as an outlet

I think the readers would be surprised at the quality of stories we are printing. Oh we publish some stories that probably would never be published in a professional magazine, but many of the stories are certainly good enough to be called professional.

So, I guess it would be honest to say that I started CPFS so that I could print some of my own stories. But very quickly, we learned that there were some pretty darn good writers out there that was just like us, they wanted to write fiction. So CPFS has continued into its second year while WS is getting a good foot hold on its first year.

Tim Dill: ECHOES and BEHIND THE MASK have "rival" publications such as The Secret Sanctum and High Adventure. What type of relationships do the various pulp-fan publishers have amongst themselves?

Tom Johnson: I think that we all have a good relationship with each other. Gee, I've known John Gunnison, Doug Ellis, Rich Harvey, and some of the others for years. Unfortunately, they are busy, we are busy, and we don't correspond as much as before. We're all doing our own thing, I think. About a year ago, I sent Robert Weinberg a note saying hello. Bob once published PULP, as you know. But over the years my only contact with Bob has been with selling him ECHOES at discount, and never a note just to say hello. I felt that I was becoming lost in the "pulp jungle" so to speak. Bob responded with a note as well. It was something I had to do, I think, just to remember that we should write to good friends once in a while. But in the mean time, all of us who publish these fan magazines are kept busy. We put out a lot of material over a year's time.

Tim Dill: Over the years you must have had some bad experiences with pulp fans. Could you elaborate on some of them?

Tom Johnson: Again, another book could be involved here! Actually, we've had a lot of problems over the years; hot checks, angry people because of something we printed, etc. When I entered the pulp fandom, people like Bob Sampson, Les Belcher, and Earl Kussman helped me a lot. In fact, Earl loaned me over 100 of his Shadow pulps to read. I wanted to do the same for others, but quickly learned you had to be careful about this. I loaned out a lot of my pulps, only to have people keep them for a year or more. One guy I loaned ten Shadows to, wrote and said the first ten were in the mail back to me, and would I please send more. Sure I would. Well, this went on until the guy had thirty of my Shadows, and none were coming back in the mail. Thankfully, I had a friend in the same town who drove over to the guy's house and got my pulps back for me!

One guy was a great friend as long as I was making copies of stuff for him, and anything he wanted, he expected me to do it for him. I finally said no to one of his requests, and he wrote me calling me everything except a white man. He's never written since, which is OK by me.

A couple of others who I disagreed with on one instance, tried to kill ECHOES, as well as writing a bunch of nasty letters to other subscribers detailing what a terrible person I was. A truly good friend got tangled up in this nonsense (I think), and decided that the art we were printing was not the kind of stuff we should be printing. After all, if we kept so and so as our artist, and not use these others, we would be doing the pulp community a service. Little complaints like that.

There are still a lot of people out there who do their best to shoot down ECHOES, just because of some disagreement in the past. We have honestly made several enemies out there. I don't guess it is hard to do.

I was approached by a foreign dealer in England who wanted to carry ECHOES over there. He ordered issues for several months, paying on time for everything. Then he decided he wanted a very big shipment, and ordered x-amount of issues, and promised to pay for the order just as quick as he could. He took us for about \$300.00 in material. He never answered any of my inquiries concerning payment.

Oh, I could go on, with incident after incident. But needless to say, there are people of poor character even in the pulp community, so you have to be on guard about suspicious letters. Such simple things as one guy who wrote asking for a sample copy one year (no money, just send him a sample copy and bill him and he would pay right away. I didn't hear from him again for several years, but wouldn't you know it, a few years after the first incident, he again wrote asking for a free sample issue! One guy either moved a lot, or had a number of friends' addresses he used. He would write saying he had ordered a sample issue (paying for it he said), several months previously, and since it hadn't arrived, would I please send him another copy. Three years in a row, this same guy did this. I finally got wise, and checked my bank deposits for this guy—he'd never ordered a thing!

So much for Doc's creed.

Tim Dill: The Lamont award is presented for outstanding effort in keeping alive the memory and spirit of the pulp magazine era. You and your wife Ginger received the award at Pulpcon a few years ago. Tell me your opinions of the award and Pulpcon in general. What experiences have you had at Pulpcon?

Tom Johnson: As far as the PulpCon goes, we've had nothing but the greatest of memories of the cons and the many friends we've met there. Every PulpCon is a treat. The only problems are in the meals and billeting. The convention itself is great. Poor food and poor room accommodations can be expected much of the time. Something as minor as no air conditioning can spoil a good time, or doors that won't open for you!

The LAMONT Award is another matter. Only a few special cases has the award been given out to some one who was not in attendance. Usually, you have to be there to receive the award. If you are not, they must pick some one else who is there. Many people who are big contributors to pulp fandom will never receive the LAMONT because they cannot attend. This is not saying that the ones who do receive the award are not deserving. They are. It's just that in many cases, I think some of the folks who are more active in pulp fandom should be considered for the award, even if they are not present. I can understand Rusty's position on this; after all, it is part of the gathering, to call out the latest award winner

during the ceremony, and it is much better if the person is there to receive it. However, as already mentioned, some may never be able to attend, so would never be considered for the LAMONT. A shame, as in many cases, some of these people are highly active in fandom and deserve the award.

The best experiences at PulpCon are the gathering of many friends and fellow sufferers of the heat, the poor food, and the bad billeting. You don't see these people except at PulpCon, and you write them year after year, so once you arrive you get to see your friends face to face, and it is a wonderful feeling. And, of course, there's always the special guests of honor that are brought in for each pulp gathering. Names you've seen in those pulp magazines you have on your shelves, but never expected to meet face to face, like Walter Gibson, Norman Saunders, Harry Steeger, and so many others.

Rubbing elbows with the likes of Nick Carr, Will Murray, Ted Baglin, John DeWalt, Rich Harvey, and so many others. You can't describe the feeling, you have to experience it. The same goes for PulpCon, you have to experience it.

Tim Dill: Reading through the letters column of Echoes, I see some pretty big names in pulp terms such as Hugh Cave, Mike Avallone, Will Murray, Jim Steranko, Bruce Cassiday, and others. It seems that Echoes is a pipeline to some of the greats. Have you been able to use this connection to shape projects?

Tom Johnson: Not really, I don't think. Oh, I've talked people into doing some things, but nothing that they wouldn't have done themselves a little later. Maybe a clue to Will Murray to turn his investigation in a certain way to uncover a hidden author, which paid off later in an article from Will. Or getting Hugh B. Cave to write letters to the letter department. Just small things, but things that mean something to the readers.

Mike Avallone is a tremendous guy, who would probably do anything in the world for anyone. It's just getting him to do it, I guess. Unfortunately, Mike doesn't like publishers and editors very well (ha). And, too, most of these guys are very busy, so getting them to do very much is not an easy task. Gosh, we'd love to have a cover done by Jim Steranko, but I don't

think we ever will. Jim is a very busy man, and his artwork brings a pretty high price.

Anyway, we do what we can. Unfortunately, we don't see ECHOES shaping anything, anywhere. Maybe we can't see the forest for the trees? I don't know.

Tim Dill: You've read all 325 issues of The Shadow magazine. Not only reading them is a Herculean task but also just finding them. How long did this process take, and what, if any, fan projects were the result?

Tom Johnson: As already mentioned, Earl Kussman loaned me 100 (or more) of his Shadow collection way back in the 1970s, plus there were the paperbacks, and I was starting to buy my own pulps by that time. It didn't really take me that long to read those 325 stories. Listen, when I was younger, I could read two stories a day! Some of the stories took a little while to locate, and my Shadow collection is still missing 40 or so stories, even those I've read the missing issues. So much has been written about The Shadow, except for my book, FROM SHADOW TO SUPERMAN, and a number of articles in other publication, I've not covered The Shadow too extensively in my own writing. I've also read all Spider stories, all Doc Savage stories, all Black Bat stories, all Phantom Detective stories, all Dan Fowler stories, all Operator 5 stories, and I could go on. I'm missing about 40% of the G-8's and the same for The Lone Eagle. Other than that, I've read most of the nonwestern heroes. (I'm not a big western fan.)

Tim Dill: Will Murray has used you as the basis for minor characters in his Destroyer novels. What can you tell us about Murray?

Tom Johnson: Will Murray is a tall, slender, quiet person for the most part. We've been friends for many years. We've had our problems, but we remain friends and worked out what problems we have had. I guess everybody has a falling out every now and then. I think that Will is only now starting to get some recognition for his writing ability. I enjoy his stories, and I'm glad to see that he is busy turning out Destroyer novels. I wish he was writing more Doc's, and they were being published. But Bantam is not publishing Doc's right now. So I read his Destroyer novels. Recently read his MARS ATTACK novel and

thought it was a great epic in the Mongolian tradition. The MARS ATTACKS seemed to be merely a side line to a great adventure by a Mongolian warrior. Believe me, it's better than it sounds.

Gosh, I don't know what else to say about Will. He's a good friend. What's left to say after that?

Tim Dill: Why do you think pulp fiction has survived and is increasing in popularity?

Tom Johnson: I will fall back on a statement I made earlier in this interview; those guys could sure write! Anyone who says those authors were hacks or crude writers at best, I can only say, they're not reading the stories, just listening to what others have said in the past. The authors were greatly talented, the editors and publishers knew what they were doing, and though the magazines may have been poorly packaged, what was in them was of the highest grade of fiction. They cared about what they wrote, and they cared about what they published. The characters they created were so powerful, they had to be carried into the future, even after the magazines themselves died. Characters like Doc Savage, The Shadow, The Spider, the Phantom Detective, G-8, they will always be around in some form or another, be it paperbacks, hardbacks, under-ground, or internet. Like Sherlock Holmes and Tarzan, they'll never die, not as long as we have memory of them.

In my personal opinion, I think the majority of the fiction being printed today will never survive, while The Shadow will live on forever. I think that anyone who writes to Hugh B. Cave, and the others who were a part of the pulp scene, should tell them all how great their writing was. Hey, it's the truth. They could all write!

THE END



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