

# EDITORIAL

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## PHILADELPHIA STORIES

For years, my dad and I spent father/daughter weekends at Philcon, Philadelphia's regional SF convention. The wait for the hotel elevators was often interminable. On one occasion during my early thirties, my intrepid father suggested we use the freight elevator. Alas, it turned out the elevator had been keyed to land in the basement. Once we got there, no amount of cajoling would make it budge. Completely lost, we headed for a broad hallway. I was mortified when we passed in full view of the packed employee cafeteria while trying to find a way out. My father cheered me up by saying, "Just think how much more embarrassed you'd be if you were still a teenager. By the time you're my age an experience like this won't bother you at all." That's one of my Philadelphia stories. Having attended numerous Philcons, plus a Worldcon and a Philadelphia Nebula Awards weekend, been a guest of PSFS, the local science fiction society, and taken a number of personal visits there, I've had time to accumulate plenty. But there are many other science fiction related stories in the City of Brotherly Love. Here are some of them.

Philadelphia has been a nexus for science fiction writers for decades. As many SF readers know, Robert Heinlein, L. Sprague de Camp, and Isaac Asimov all worked at the Philadelphia Navy Yard during the Second World War. While living in Philadelphia, Isaac wrote some of his early *I, Robot* stories as well as "The Wedge" and "The Big and the Little"—two tales that would eventually constitute part of *Foundation*, the first book of his Foundation Trilogy. "Green Fire" a 1998 novella by Eileen Gunn, Andy Duncan, Pat Murphy, and Michael Swanwick, speculates that Robert Heinlein and Isaac Asimov were somehow mixed up in the mysterious Philadelphia Experiment. My rational mind knows that reports of a teleporting destroyer escort in the Philadelphia shipyard were a hoax. Yet, the fiction editor portion acknowledges that to have two of the greatest SF writers of all time present in that same shipyard during the same era is a remarkable coincidence.

Michael Swanwick set his first novel, *In the Drift*, in Philadelphia. The 1997 book was an Ace Special that took place on the edge of a fallout zone. This alternate future is still reeling from the 1979 meltdown at Three-Mile Island that contaminated much of the eastern seaboard. There are mutants and boneseekers, and the Mummies—who currently put on Philly's surreal New Year's Day parade—now govern the city. Gregory Frost's novel *A Pure Cold Light* is set in a dystopic alternate Philadelphia. Tom Purdom's story "A Stranger from a Foreign Ship" borrows heavily from Philadelphia locales for its tale of a traveler mind-hopping via some unsavory characters. This story appeared in our August 2013 issue.

Philadelphia has also exerted its influence on genre films. The aforementioned enigmatic experiment contained enough material for two movies—1984's *The Philadelphia Experiment* and its 1993 sequel *Philadelphia Experiment II*. The post-apocalyptic/time travel movie *12 Monkeys* sets much of its action in a Philadelphia power station and Philly's Eastern State Penitentiary. Philadelphia almost becomes a character in M. Night Shyamalan's spooky film, *The Sixth Sense*. The camera focuses on the city's distinctive red brick throughout the movie and Philadelphia row houses, shops, schools, and churches are all part of the tale.

Philadelphia's sway extends far beyond fiction writers and moviemakers, however. The city has provided a home for some prominent SF editors. George Scithers,

*Asimov's* founding editor, lived in Philadelphia while working on the magazine. My predecessor, the multiple Hugo-award-winning editor Gardner Dozois, also resides there. In the early years, a number of *Asimov's* editorial assistants also lived in Philly. One of them, Darrell Schweitzer, has become a prolific author of short stories and poetry. His 2006 poem "Remembering the Future" was the winner of our annual Readers' Award poll.

In addition to these editors, Philadelphia continues to act like a sun pulling writers into its gravitational field. Tom Purdom must be the science fiction author with the longest current tenure. Although he grew up as a navy brat, Tom put down stakes in Philly about sixty years ago. Michael Swanwick has lived in Philadelphia since the seventies, while Gregory Frost arrived in the eighties. Greg now lives in a nearby suburb, but he continues to participate in Philadelphia's active literary scene. Fran Wilde is a more recent addition to that scene. Her second story for *Asimov's* is appearing in this issue and she has a fantasy trilogy coming out from Tor Books. Other local Philly authors include Susan Casper and E.C. Myers.

I was delighted when I realized that stories by four Philadelphia authors—Michael, Greg, Tom, and Fran—had been drawn into the vortex of *Asimov's* April/May 2015 issue. Much like the arrival of a comet in ancient times, this confluence had to portend a great happening. And so, it appears, it will. This issue goes on sale on newsstands on March 17, 2015. On Saturday, March 28, we'll be holding an event at Philadelphia's Downtown Barnes & Noble. The bookstore is located in Rittenhouse Square at 1805 Walnut Street. The event will start at one P.M. I'll be there along with all four of these authors. We hope that many of you will come to the event as well. Perhaps our time together at B&N will generate some new Philadelphia stories.