

A conversation with Alan Dean Foster transcript

Episode 120

Fred McIlvain: This time on the library channel, a conversation with Alan Dean Foster. Author Alan Dean Foster recently visited the ASU libraries to speak at the opening of the Golden Age of science fiction; an exhibit on display at the Noble Science and Engineering library at the Tempe campus for the fall 2012 semester. The exhibit is a collaboration with the center for science and the imagination and the ASU libraries. I'm your host Fred McIlvain and I had a chance to sit down with Ed Finn of the center for science and the imagination, and Alan Dean Foster to discuss the Golden Age of science fiction, the Alan Dean Foster collection at the ASU archives, and Alan's career. Alan Dean Foster is the prolific author of over 100 books. His work includes: hard science fiction, fantasy, horror, detective, western, historical, and contemporary fiction. His short fiction has appeared in all major science fiction magazines as well as numerous anthologies. Hello Alan.

Alan Dean Foster: Hi Fred.

FM: Hi Ed.

Edward Finn: Hi Fred.

FM: Ed, why don't you get us started by explaining Alan's relationship to the Golden Age exhibit.

EF: Sure, well we are very excited to welcome Alan here to ASU for a couple reasons. First of all for this new exhibit that we are hosting in the science library, the end of the Golden Age science fiction before and after the atomic bomb, and the reason why it is so wonderful to have Alan here that he is a living link to one of the most important architects of what we think of as the genre of science fiction. An editor and writer named John W. Campbell, who took over the managing role at astounding science fiction in the late 1930s, and really transformed the magazine and imposed a very powerful vision of what science fiction should be and how we should think about the future during his long career there. Alan was just telling me, and I hope that he will tell this story again, about how he broke into the business.

ADF: Well I had written a dozen short science fiction stories, all of which were rejected, and my favorite writer in the field was a British named [Eric Frank Russell](#), who people who read science fiction will know, and I thought kind of as a homage and more for fun than anything else, and there's a lesson in this for beginning writers, that I would write an Eric Frank Russell type story. I sent it to Campbell, one of the places that I had already been rejected, not realizing that Eric Frank Russell was [John W Campbell's](#) favorite science fiction writer, and I know this because I

later asked John, "Who is your favorite science fiction writer?" and he said Eric Frank Russell. So Campbell bought the story, much to my surprise, it was called "With Friends Like These" and that was my first published story.

EF: So I've been putting together this exhibit with collaborators here at the libraries and really learning about Campbell and this whole era second hand. I'd love to hear what it was like. What he was like, and what it was like to be a young science fiction writer in the early '70s?

ADF: The first science fiction convention I ever went to was the World Science Fiction Convention in Oakland in I believe 1968. I didn't know anybody, I didn't know that there was some subsidiary hotels, and I didn't get a room in the main hotel, so I would ride the shuttle bus back and forth between my subsidiary hotel to the main hotel. The first time I get on the bus I sit down to next to somebody who looks like everybody's vision of a true mad scientist. I mean he is wearing all white and like a white lab coat and this huge shock of white hair flowing back from his head, and a very intimidating tall gentleman. Later I asked one of my contemporary friends I said, "Who was that guy that I was sitting next to on the bus?" She said, "That was [Fritz Leiber](#)."

[Laughter]

ADF: Of course not knowing anybody it never occurred to me to talk to this gentleman, and we get to the hotel, and many things go on during a World Science Fiction Convention, but one of the nicest things is that there is very little ego involved with the professionals versus the fans, and if you are polite you can talk to anybody. I happened to pass by a debate that was going on between two guys my age and an older guy with a crew cut, now you didn't see many guys with crew cuts at any age at that time, and they were arguing about Vietnam, which of course was taking place at the time. I sort of sidled in and joined in on the conversation and the other two guys wondered off and this elderly gentleman and I argued and talked about Vietnam; probably a good 40 minutes. Later I walked away and one of my friends, one of the people I met came over, and said "Do you know who you were just arguing about over Vietnam for 40 minutes?" I said no, and he said, "That was John W. Campbell." So I met Campbell long before I ever submitted a story to him. So that was John W. Campbell. I later found out that he was perfectly happy to engage in a debate on any side of the question; it didn't matter which one, he just loved to debate; and this of course gives you an inside into one of the things that makes science fiction so much fun. You examine every side of an issue and that's how you find what works and what doesn't; not unlike actual science.

ADF: So that's how I met Campbell. Many years later after I sold, or several years later, after I sold him my first story, or the first story that I had published, I was working on my first novel, a book called [The Tar-Aiym Krang](#) and I sent it to Campbell, because he had published a story of mine, and he sent it back with about six pages of suggestions and corrections. I later found out that this is how Campbell worked with everybody he ever worked with. It didn't matter if it was a total

unknown like me or [Isaac Asimov](#) or [Robert Heinlein](#) they always got six pages of suggestions or corrections. So I made some, and some I used some I didn't, sent the manuscript back to Campbell, and got it back with another six pages of suggestions and corrections, some of which I used, some of which I didn't; sent it back to him the second time and I got a letter back. He said, "I think you got a pretty good yarn here." Everything was a yarn to Campbell apparently. "But I'm bought up on cereals for the magazine for the next two and a half years so I can't use it." He thought it was saleable. Well for a young writer this is enormously encouraging and I then sent it off to Double Day and got a type written as opposed to a printed rejection notice, and on the third submission it went to Betty Ballantine who at the time was the science fiction editor at Ballantine, now Del Rey Books and she bought it. So some of Campbell's suggestions are indeed incorporated in my first book. That was Campbell, he was delighted, he just loved what he was doing, and was delighted to work with anybody.

EF: I love what you said about how science fiction approaches all sides of an issue and really like actual science **dives** (6:42) into the complexity of some of these visions of the future. That's something that I tried to capture in this exhibit looking at one of the most powerful, technological, and social stories of the 20th century, the atomic bomb and this moment in the 1940s when the early Golden Age idealism about progress and rational thinking triumphing over a messy universe suddenly took a hit.

ADF: Well speaking of the atomic bomb of course the most famous story involving the atomic bomb in science fiction revolves around a short story that was done for Campbell for astounding in 1944 by a minor but respected author named [Cleve Cartmill](#). Mr. Cartmill, of course WWII was going on at the time, wrote a short story about a war on another planet involving atomic weapons, which to science fiction writers was nothing new. They've been engaging in this ever since Rutherford's discoveries. What made Cartmill's story interesting particularly to people outside the science fiction readership was that in the course of the story he describes rather concisely exactly how to build an atomic bomb according to the best scientific knowledge of the day. The upshot was that John Campbell in New York was shortly after visited by two gentlemen from the FBI who wanted to know how Mr. Cartmill had gotten ahold of this top secret information, and Campbell said " Well he reads Scientific American and he reads nature and you just kind of extrapolate and put these things together." There had been many stories about atomic weapons.

This is the thing about science fiction, you might get 50 stories on a subject and one of them will hit the mark. Well Mr. Cartmill's story hit the mark and the FBI guys and the government people were very concerned about of to deal with this because suddenly it's all over the place. Every newsstand in America you could buy a copy of astounding and they decided to do nothing, and fortunately the Nazi government and the Japanese imperial government didn't apparently read astounding science fiction very frequently, but this was all classified information until way after the war. That's the sort of thing science fiction can do, but you don't

realize it a lot of the times until after the fact and somebody looks back 20 or 30 or 50 years later and says, “well wait a minute, wasn’t that story in worlds of ---- fantastic?” or in an online podcast or something way back in 19... Whatever.

EF: Absolutely, I think one of the most interesting balances is between that projection into the future and exploring new technologies and the way that society might evolve but also the fact that these stories are also written in the present. They are dealing with contemporary issues, social and political issues, and I would be curious to hear how you approached that as a writer. If that’s something that you believe or that you feel is part of your work or not.

ADF: You mean being predictive?

EF: No, I mean science fiction as social commentary.

ADF: Well that’s the thing that science fiction usually seems to get wrong. Science fiction writers seem to be much better with the technical aspects of futurism than with the social aspects. There is a very famous early American science fiction novel called [Looking Backward](#). It was written by a gentleman named [Edward Bellamy](#) in I believe 1889, I’m going to take a shit at that date, and it was about life in America in the year 2000. He had people traveling between cities via airships, dirigible like airships, because nobody knew anything about powered flight, and many other modern inventions, but he got all of the social stuff wrong. For example women didn’t have the right to vote, which they didn’t in 1889, and we usually get the social stuff wrong. That doesn’t keep us from exploring it; it’s still very important to do that but it’s much harder to predict what human beings are going to do in regards to each other than in regards to science or the environment.

EF: I couldn’t agree more, and that’s something that I’ve been thinking about a lot as we put together this new center for science and the imagination which is really about trying to foster a broad public engagement with the future and getting people to think more ambitiously and more creatively about the world that we want to have and a lot of that is about the social issues, the future is already here, as many people like to point out. We have these incredible technologies and for the most part we just don’t know what we are doing with them yet.

ADF: people can still get I wrong even science fiction and people that are involved in the field sometimes. One of the favorite quotes in the field is from [Arthur C. Clarke](#) who said, “Any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable for magic.” A lot of times even people who work in science fiction forget that. I wrote a story that came out in 1983 called village of the chosen and the conceit behind it was that the way that we solve poverty, in Africa particularly, is that we genetically engineer human cells to produce chlorophyll so that people can stand out in the sun for an hour or two each day and through the process of photosynthesis get all of the energy they need; and it was rejected by a very well know editor who said, “This is scientifically impossible,” and I’m thinking to myself wait a minute you are editing a science fiction magazine. The story was bought on the second submission by

another editor, who oddly enough worked for the same publishing company. What makes it particularly relevant right now is there was a big article in BBC science last week about the idea of genetically engineering human cells to allow them to produce photosynthesis. So I'm about 30 years late with that, but you just kind of have to smile when you see that. There is nothing that is impossible it just hasn't been invented yet.

EF: So your mention of chlorophyll made me think about plants which made me think about jungles which made me think about all of the interesting descriptions of traveling that you have on your website and what seems to be quite an extensive itinerary of destinations that you have been to all across the world. Could you talk a little bit about what you like about traveling and why you do it?

ADF: Well that's the reason why I started reading science fiction. I love to travel, I wanted to be [Sir Richard Francis Burton](#) but it's the wrong century for that sort of thing. There are not a lot of plank places left on the map, but one place I was able to travel to those plank places was in my imagination. That's why I started reading science fiction and that's why, when I started writing, I started writing science fiction. If I could I would spend six months out of the year traveling and I would be delighted to go as quickly as possible to another world. Mars would be the obvious place, even though it looks just like Yuma.

[Laughter]

ADF: I mean its just striking if you live in Arizona to see pictures come back from Mars and it's like you know, " that's right off I-10, I know where that spot is." So I travel in my imagination but when I started writing science fiction and I was able to travel it occurred to me that there was no way I was going to be able to properly describe particularly other cultures, alien cultures, without experiencing as many different cultures as I could on this planet. It amazed me when I started to go to science fiction conventions and meet the writers that I admired to find out that most of them, not all of them, most of them never went anywhere. I mean they did their research through national geographic and scientific American and they didn't really travel.

To me it was like how could you write about other landscapes and other ecologies and other cultures without experiencing as many of them as you possibly can right here. So I've been doing that ever since; some of it's available in a book of mine that came out from open world media last year called *Predators I have known*, which is basically about encounters I have had with dangerous animals around the world. But if you read that book it reads very much like my science fiction. The only difference is that the cultures and animals described in the stories are real instead of imaginary. There's very little difference between the writing and between the approach to it.

EF: Yeah that's fascinating and I couldn't agree more. I think the more you travel the more you realize how complicated the world is. How exciting and challenging it is to

try and draw these lines and differences between different places and different cultures but also how profoundly alien some landscapes can be right here on planet Earth.

ADF: I'll give a couple of examples I've used. I've always been struck by Japan and the fact that they have among the world's most violent motion pictures, literature, and pornography, if you will, and yet it is an enormously safe place and the idea that occurred to me was that Japanese men particularly sublimate these feelings of violence and whatever in their art. So they read it, I mean if you travel on a train in rush hour in Tokyo you will see rank upon rank of salaried men reading the most extraordinary, you know right there in the open, manga particularly, Japanese comics, and nobody bats an eye; and then they don't go home and beat their wives and attack the neighbors kid. I use that in a book called [quozl? \(15:36\)](#). I made that the bases for my alien species.

There is another book I did called [Drowning World](#), which takes place on a world where it rains essentially eleven out of the twelve months of the year and you have two cultures there. You have the native culture, which is completely adapted to their environment, but is not particularly prolific; and then you have an imported alien species, which works hard and does the best it can to cope with the local environment, but is much more prolific and you have an inevitable conflict between the two. Well that's Fiji, that's exactly the situation that exist on Fiji between the native Fijians and the native Indian Fijians, who were imported by the British to work in the sugar cane fields, because the native Fijians wouldn't do it. So that became the bases for the culture on that world. So this is how you can take real world situations, if you visit them particularly, and just don't read about them, and put them into fiction and make something else out of them.

EF: Fascinating, so what are you working on now Alan?

ADF: I can't tell you what I'm working on right now.

[Laughter]

EF: Fair enough.

ADF: Because the official announcement, which is supposed to come out this month, hasn't come out yet, but it's science fiction. I have a long running series of books called tales of commonwealth, within which there are several other series, with the most prominent of which involves a young man named Philip Lynx "Flinx" and his pet flying snake, although it is not a snake it's an alien creature, called Pip and we're working on a contract with Del Rey right now to do another one of those and a collection of stories all set in the commonwealth. Then I have a couple of original novels, two fantasy and one science fiction, which are being read at various places right now. One is called *Reliquary*; it's about the last human being in the galaxy. There is a fantasy called [Madranga? \(17:15\)](#) about a young man who is not what he seems and he is not what you even think he seems. It's the only fantasy I know which has a scene that takes place in Pittsburgh General Hospital...

[Laughter]

ADF: And then there is a fantasy called ocean earth, which is basically a high fantasy except it all takes place under water.

EF: Fabulous, well I can't wait to read some of them.

FM: Well let me start in here and ask you a little bit about your collection, which you are sharing with ASU libraries. How did that come about?

ADF: If you live long enough you become history. It's nothing anybody plans but that's the way it works. A number of years ago, let me back up a minute. When I was in college I started collecting first edition science fiction. Not particularly collected or being a collector but because those were books that I wanted to read, and the only format they were available in were first editions of early science fiction. As I became a collector, as well as a writer, I became aware that people would pay money for things like original manuscripts by authors, but I never really wanted to sell my original manuscripts. I didn't really know what to do with them, and it never occurred to me really at the time, it doesn't when you are doing these things at the time, that these things might be worth something to somebody else; and I had accumulated well over a decades worth of papers. Almost two decades I guess, things like original manuscripts and the rough drafts and having taught as well, I taught at Los Angeles City College and UCLA for a little while.

I was aware of how interesting it was to people to compare an outline with an extended outline and then a rough draft and then maybe a second draft and then the final draft, and you see the process of change in the writing process through all of these different stages. I thought it might be useful having been able to see it from a teaching standpoint to somebody else to have some of these things. Particularly since I had been involved with things like *Star Wars* and *Star Trek* and the first three *Alien* films, but I didn't know what to do with them. Then I found out about the special collections at the Hayden Library here, and I thought that maybe they would like to have these things. I didn't really need to sell them for the money, and I didn't really want to sell them for the money; so I offered them to the library and the library graciously accepted and they have been getting all of my papers ever since.

FM: You have done so many different types of writing. Screenplays...

ADF: Yes.

FM: Novelizations...

ADF: Yes

FM: Now I'm interested in novelizations, how is it for you as the writer? Since you have kind of a guide.

ADF: Well it was nothing that I planned. What happened was that Del Rey, somebody, at Ballantine then, books had bought the rights to a really terrible

fantasy film called *Lawana*, which is not worth seeing even if you get a free ticket. They asked me if I could make a book out of it, this was back in 1972. Novelizations were still kind of in the beginning stage at the point, and nobody really realized you could make money off of these things. So I ended up doing it. Just kind of acquired a name for it over the years. To answer your question it's much easier than writing an original novel, there is no getting around that. Everything is there for you, the story is there, and the characters are there you just kind of have to flesh it all out. The fun thing for me about doing novelizations is I get to be the kid who's 14 years old sitting in the back of the theater with his friends loudly criticizing the crappy special effects and the bad acting and you know the scenes that don't work together, the only difference is I actually get to do it in print. I get to make my own personal directors cut of the film. If it's a good screenplay, something like *Alien* let's say, it's very easy to do.

FM: Well, but now I understand that *Alien* was pretty hard for you to write.

ADF: Well it was only hard because I didn't have any time; this is a big problem with a lot of novelizations. Before everybody jumps out and blames the writers, and there are some very bad novelizations, keep in mind that studios and publishers have different time frames. Publishers like to have a lead-time of lets say 10-12 months between the time they get the manuscript and the time you actually see the book in the bookstores or on your iPad or whatever. Movie studios don't care. They'll say "well the movie's coming out in six months and we would like the novelization to come out at the same time." This is before the publishers even been able to assign a writer, never mind have a manuscript in hand. So a lot of these things have to be written like yesterday. I did *Alien* in three weeks, I had a little more time than that, but I've always been a fast writer and that's just how it turned out. So the difficulty came from the time frame. The other big problem with *Alien*, which I'm sure is what you are thinking about, is that 20th Century Fox wouldn't show me any pictures of the Alien.

EF: Right.

ADF: So if you read the novelization of *Alien*, there is no description of the Alien in it. That was very difficult to cope with.

FM: What do you think is your best novelization?

ADF: I can't say and it doesn't really depend on me. The most difficult one was the 2nd one I ever did actually. It was called *Dark Star*. This was [John Carpenter](#) and [Dan O'Bannon](#) first film. John Carpenter everybody knows, a great director. Dan O'Bannon a fine screenwriter, no longer with us anymore, who did the screen play for *Alien* along with [Ronald Shusett](#) and *Blue Thunder* and many other films. This was there USC student film project. For those of you who are film students this shows what can happen if you just perceive, and they ended up getting a theatrical release out of it. The film is basically about three guys sitting around on a spaceship talking about how board they are.

EF: Right.

ADF: It's very existential. That's fine in a film, but in a book how do you get a 65,000-word novel out of three guys talking about how bored they are. That was extremely difficult to do, so in that sense I consider that my best novelization simply because it was the hardest one. As to which one made the best book a lot of it again depends on how good the film is. If it's a good film, and the writer applies themselves, you are going to get a good novelization out of it. Alien again, I'm particularly proud of because I had to do the whole book without having a clue what the alien looked like. I mean nobody even knew the Swiss artist [H. R. Giger](#) was involved at that point, so I couldn't even go and research his general artwork. It just had to be made up out of **whole clothes?** (23:27) it was very difficult to do.

FM: The second and third ones must have been easier.

ADF: Much easier.

[Laughter]

ADF: I was allowed some pre production photos for *Aliens*, the second one, as well as the screenplay. At least I had an idea what the actors looked like. I mean it's terrible if you describe one of the actors as being 6ft 4, blonde, and Arian when he is actually a 5ft 3 gal. You don't want to make that mistake and you plead with the studio "please at least give me some publicity shots of the actors, preferably in costume." It can be a real problem.

FM: I think the first novelization of yours I read was Star Wars, so of course I read [Splinter of the Mind's Eye](#) after that. How did that all come about?

ADF: My agent called me and said "look there is a guy named Tom Pollock, he is [George Lucas](#)'s lawyer." I knew the name George Lucas from *THX 1138* and more particularly from *American Graffiti*, which were the two films that George had done up to that point, and my agent said "they are doing this science fiction film and they need somebody and want somebody to do a novelization in a sequel of books, an original sequel novel." The story I got was that somebody had read a book of mine called [Icerigger](#), which was the third novel I've ever done, which interestingly enough it and its two sequels will be released by open road medias eBooks this month.

FM: Cool.

ADF: So good stuff I hope that never goes away. That's one of the benefits of eBooks. They would like you to come down to Mr. Pollock's office, which at that time was near Hollywood Boulevard, meet with him and see how things go. So I did that and Pollock and I got along fine, and then he said, "we think your book *Icerigger* is in the same spirit as this film we are making. Would you go out to a place called Industrial Light and Magic?" Which at that time was a rented warehouse on Kester Avenue, in the San Fernando Valley, actually about 10 minutes from where I grew up, so I knew

the area quite well; and I said sure. So I went out there, and this was a hive, and while I was waiting to meet George there was this fellow, who I later found out was the director of photography, [John Dykstra](#), he said “come here I want to show you something.” He said, “see this,” it was this very complicated piece of technology. He said “this is the first computer controlled camera in the history of motion pictures;” and he’s explaining to me how this thing works. Eventually George comes out and we chat for a little bit and he shows me around, and he shows me the death star, which is this grey plastic looking thing about the size of a beach ball.

We had a really nice time and we chatted a little bit and I’m trying to make conversation with this guy, who I knew from his work but had never met before, and I said, “well George, what if this film, which was called *The Star Wars* at the time, what if this film is a flop what are you going to do?” He said, “well I think I’ve got enough money I think from American graffiti, I’ll be alright.” I said, “Well what are you going to do if it’s a big hit?” He said, “I’d like to make small experimental films.”

[Laughter]

ADF: So George got kind of distracted in the intervening years. He made big experimental films, but interestingly enough he did an interview I saw last year I think it was on 60 minutes, one of the new showings. He said, “I’d like to make small experimental films now, I’m tired of all this big stuff.” So he hasn’t changed in that regard anyway. So I got the contract and I ended up doing the novelization, even though it has Georges name on it, that’s fine, I have no problem with that; and the sequel book *Splinter of the Mind’s Eye*.

FM: and you didn’t know what was coming from the films when you wrote that.

ADF: Nobody knew. George didn’t know, the producer [Gary Kurtz](#), nobody knew, nobody can predict something like that. I’ll tell you though my wife and I, the first time we saw the film, we were living in Los Angeles at the time and they had a cast and crew screening. They rented a theater on Hollywood Boulevard and it was the first time many of the people, any of the people, had seen the completed film with all of the elements combined. The music, special effects, the color balancing, everything; and we go into the theater and we sit down and my wife Joan, who is from a town of 300 in West Texas, nudges me and says, “look behind you.” So I look behind me and there’s this skinny kid with long stringy black hair, very non-descriptive. I turn back to my wife and say “Yeah so,” and she says, “don’t you know who that is?” I said no and she says, “That’s [Alice Cooper](#).” So I, who grew up on classical music, didn’t get into rock until much later said, “who’s Alice Cooper?”

So she proceeded to explain to me and she said to me, “say something to him.” So I said, “what a I going to say to him, you talk to him,” and she goes “I can’t, I can’t.” Well what am I going to say to this guy? Well before the film opened I had been talking to the producer Gary Kurtz, and we were both animation buffs, and I said “wouldn’t it be cool if you guys opened this up and showed *Duck Dodgers and the 24th and a Half Century* before the film started, that’s a very famous Chuck Jones

science fiction cartoon. So we yack back and forth, so now I'm back in my seat again, and I'm looking at this guy behind me and what am I going to say to him, and I say, "Wouldn't it be neat if they showed Duck Dodgers and the 24th and a Half Century before they started the film?" Mr. Cooper looks at me and he says, "Oh you like old Warner Brothers Cartoons too." So we spent 10 minutes talking about Warner Brothers cartoons Chuck Jones, Bob Clampett, and Friz Freleng. Turn back the curtains open, the theater actually had curtains that opened, and what do you think comes up on the screen?

FM: Duck Dodgers

ADF: Duck Dodgers and the 24th and a Half Century, it was George and Gary's way of relaxing all of these people who worked on the film and who were all terribly nervous about the result, relaxing them before the film came up. So we saw that then we saw the film and everybody said it was a great film and that the film was going to do really well; and we walk out of the theater and as we walk out of the theater my wife jams her elbow in my ribs and I go, "well what was that for?" She said, "you spent 10 minutes talking to Alice Cooper and all you can talk about was a bunch of old cartoons."

[Laughter]

ADF: "Well you should have said something about it." Subsequent to that I made sure to get myself in the back of the theater at Grauman's Chinese Theater on the first showing, first commercial showing, the first day just to see the audiences' reaction. I had no money in the film or anything; I had just done the work for hire with the novelization and the sequel novel. I was curious, I wanted to see the film again and I was curious to see the audience reaction and it's the only time to this day that I have ever seen a film where the film stars and the audience not only cheers but stands up and cheers. Of course that is the opening shot with the star destroyer coming over. At that point I thought I'd probably ought to go out and buy some stock...

[Laughter]

ADF: ... *in ? Company (29:43)* and I didn't, I didn't have any money for that at the time, but that was the point when I knew it was going to be a phenomenon and not just a successful film because you don't just see that sort of thing.

FM: It was, well for me at my age, it was the start of standing in front of a theater for all night to get tickets for a show.

ADF: Yeah, it was a group cultural thing.

EF: Yeah.

ADF: You know suddenly you found yourself; it was sort of a mobile science fiction convention. If you went and stood in line to watch *Star Wars* or *Alien* when it came

out, you were with a group of people who enjoyed exactly the same things you as you did. You didn't even have to see the film. You could spend the night there talking to people and having a good time and debating and then go home in the morning having spent the evening, you know using your time well.

FM: I was looking through some of your scrapbooks yesterday, now I understand those were particular by your mom.

ADF: My mother, as mothers are or want to do, she passed away just about a year and a half ago. When I was young started collecting anything that related to me and my writing and she put these scrapbooks together and I didn't care about any of this stuff, you know pictures in the paper, program appearances, or best seller list, or anything like that. She ended up with a very sizeable document of my entire professional life anyway, and since the library here already had my manuscripts it seemed like the logical place for the corollary material to go. People can look at the manuscripts and then they can look at the scrapbook and they can see what happened when and there are lots of interesting quotes in there that you wouldn't even think about at this time, relating to things like *Star Wars* when it came out, or *Alien* when it came out, or *Clash of the Titans* when it came out, things like that. So again it was the logical place to put those.

FM: They are very interesting, I had forgotten Locus Magazine and there is a lot of stuff from there.

ADF: and Locus is still around of course.

FM: Yes it is. Lets talk about your involvement with the whole *Star Trek* phenomenon, because you have had quite a lot of involvement with that right?

ADF: I had been doing a couple of novelizations as I mentioned for, what became Del Rey books, it was originally Ballantine Books, and when a very remarkable woman named [Judy-Lynn del Rey](#) took over the editorship there she and her husband [Lester del Rey](#) edited the fantasy line and Judy-Lynn edited the science fiction. Judy-Lynn was an extraordinary woman, and she found a loophole in I believe it was the contract between Paramount and Bantam books. Bantam Books has sowed up the rights to do print versions of *Star Trek* throughout the universe forever, but apparently they had neglected to include animated films in the contract. This is as I remember it anyway. Well Judy-Lynn found that and she jumped on it and she bought the rights; because there was an animated version of *Star Trek* done by a studio in Los Angeles called film nation, and they did two years of the show, with the original voices, the original cast voices. Some of the scripts were quite good, done by real science fiction novels, like David Jerald and Larry Niven and Judy-Lynn asked if I would novelize them.

So I'm looking at these 20 minutes cartoon scripts and thinking to myself I can't get a full novel out of one of these things. So I had the idea of doing three novellas per book and putting in a little linking material to try and at least make the stories flow from one to another. Judy-Lynn was fine with that until we got to book 7, at which

point the books had been selling so well that she said, "look you have got to get a full novel out of each one these." I said, "I've only got four of these scripts and if I could have done that in the first place I would have done that in the first place." So Judy-Lynn says, "No you got to." Judy-Lynn was very persuasive. So what I ended up doing was the first third of each of the last four books was essentially the novelization of the animated episode and then it was all original material by me. That's how I got involved with *Star Trek*. Subsequent to that Gene Roddenberry, who had been going back and forth with Paramount for years and years trying to get either the TV series revived or a full-length motion picture done, got word again from Paramount that they were going to consider doing the TV series again. This was in the 70s, in the late 70s, and he started bringing in writers to submit ideas, submit treatments for possible 1-hour TV shows.

Because of my involvement with the *Star Trek* logs, as they were called, the novelizations of the animated show, it was apparent to Gene and others that I was familiar with the *Star Trek* universe and the *Star Trek* characters and writing them. So I was one of the people who were brought in to submit story ideas, I actually ended up submitting three at the time. One of which Roddenberry had given me a two page outline called "Robots Return." He said, "see if you can make anything out of this." So I developed a treatment around it, which I then called "In the Image" and turned it back in. What then happened is kind of [an? \(34:35\) story](#). Charles Bluhdorn who was the chairman of Gulf and Western, which was the conglomerate that owned Paramount, his young daughter came up to him after having seen *Star Wars* and said, "Daddy why can't we have a *Star Trek* movie?" This is how things often get done in Hollywood, which is why it's not always a good place for entirely sane people to try and work, whether that's true or not I don't know.

Anyway the word came down from on high we were going to do a movie, not a TV series. Now having been through this change of mind, which is very frequently what happens with films in Hollywood, everybody at Norway Productions, which was Roddenberry's production company, started running around looking for something to throw at the powers of the beast so they could get a budget and get started actually doing something. My story had been selected to open the proposed new TV series. They asked me to redo the treatment so that it would carry a two-hour time frame instead of a one-hour time frame. So here is this treatment of mine, [in \(35:29\)? Image](#), which is designed as a two-hour story. Somebody said, I presume somebody said, "lets show them, tell them we already have the treatment for the movie, they did, and apparently the then head of the studio said, "this is or movie," and that's how that became the basis of the first *Star Trek* film.

At which point I became an instant non-person at Norway Productions on the Paramount lot, because I had no pull and no influence, even though I was perfectly willing to make suggestions and help out for free, which was probably the wrong approach that no doubt made everybody suspicious, I just ceased to exist. Which is why I didn't get a chance to work on the final screenplay, which would have been

different if I had more of an involvement. The first people always ask me is what of my original treatment is preserved in the final film.

EF: Yeah.

ADF: Well there are bits and pieces all through it, but the first 5 minutes is all mine. That's exactly how it was written. The encounter with the Klingons and with Vedra and all of that. So all least I can point to that and say there is my five-minute movie, and then the rest of it all gets changed around; but I do take credit for making Kirk an Admiral. I mean he waited for a long time, and he deserved a big promotion at that point...

[Laughter]

ADF: That's why he's Admiral Kirk.

EF: He certainly thought he did.

ADF: Yeah well...

[Laughter]

ADF: That's why he is Admiral Kirk in the film, and then subsequent to that many years went by, as you know the series has been rebooted with an entirely new cast and an entirely new time frame, and I was asked, very thoughtfully I thought, to do the novelization of the new film, which I did and it was fun to revisit the characters and everything else. People say, "well how do you feel about the reboot and new characters, and a different time frame?" I say, "well look they had to do something." I thought when I saw the film for the first time, which I was actually able to do at Paramount, before I wrote the book. The only time that has ever happened in my career of doing novelizations. I thought to myself, "this is going to be a successful film, not because it's an excellent reboot of the *Star Trek* universe, not because it will be popular with science fiction fans, but B, because it's just a good movie.

EF: Absolutely

ADF: You know I looked at it and I said, "this is a film that people who know nothing about science fiction or *Star Trek* will be able to go to and enjoy because it's just a good movie." So it's been an interesting ride with *Star Trek* for me.

[Laughter]

FM: When I was going through the list of types of material that you've given to the library, radio scripts?

ADF: When I was working in Los Angeles still there was an outfit in Oregon, which was doing radio, little radio plays, 10 to 12 minutes long on scenes from American history. It was a public radio station in Oregon, and I ended up doing about 20 of these short radio scripts on scenes of American history; one on the [Monitor and the](#)

[Merrimac](#), that sort of subject matter. They were done with sound effects, you know like a proper radio station, and I'm very proud of them. The tapes of those, people remember I think still what tape is, are here in the library and they are also, along with the papers I donated, and they are available for people to access that sort of ancient technology, to listen to them.

FM: That's beginning to become one of our problems is preserving the original materials because you can't show it and you can't play it anymore.

ADF: Yeah, here is all of my history on a five and a quarter inch floppy disk.

[Laughter]

ADF: Try and find something to play five, I mean you need to go to a museum to find the drive to play that and then hope you have a computer with sufficiently ancient or adaptive software to read the dang things and it is becoming a huge problem. It is becoming a huge problem for the library of congress to.

FM: Yeah it is. Well gentlemen thank you very much; this was a lot of fun.

ADF: Pleasure.

EF: Thank you.

FM: and I'm looking forward to the exhibit opening today.

EF: So am I, I'm really excited to see what you think Alan. Hopefully I got at least most of it right.

[Laughter]

ADF: Oh I'm not shy I'll let you know.

EF: Well that's good.

[Laughter]

FM: Well thank you again.

ADF: Pleasure.

FM: The Golden Age of science fiction will be on display at the Noble Science and Engineering Library on the Tempe campus during the fall 2012 semester. You can see Alan Dean Foster's manuscripts, correspondents, annotated scripts, stories, and memorabilia by visiting the ASU library's special collections on the 4th floor of the Hayden Library on the Tempe campus. The library channel is produced by Jennifer Duvernay, and directed and edited by Matthew Harp. I'm your host Fred McIlvain; we will catch you next time.

