

The (Nearly) Definitive History of SWILL

James William Neilson

The History

The origins of SWILL lie in a surreal, last minute, idle prank. It was October of 1980 and I was attending York University in Toronto. My old high school friend, Lester Rainsford, was also at York. Another friend of ours from secondary school, Andrew Hoyt, was studying at the University of Ottawa. So, since I had been to Maplecon in Ottawa the year before -- some other friends and I had entered the masquerade as droogs from A Clockwork Orange and won best group costume -- and had a good time; I thought that Lester and Andrew might enjoy attending the convention. Both were science fiction readers, but had never attended a convention nor had shown any interest in fandom.

When Lester found out that this was going to be a science fiction and comic book convention, he initially had cold feet about attending. He said that we should do something about the comic book fans. We bounced around some ideas, but none of them stuck. Then, I showed Lester a "Boycott Chicago in '82" flyer, and he said that we should distribute a boycott flyer at Maplecon III. I told him that that would be pointless, since anybody who would read the flyer would already be attending the convention. His reply was, "Exactly." And thus, days before the convention, Lester and I bashed out the boycott flyer on my aging manual typewriter. The flyer was offensive, outrageously politically incorrect by present standards, with intentional poor grammar, typos, misspellings, and strikeouts. We printed 500 copies and headed off to Ottawa.

At the convention, Andrew and Lester quickly became bored. They found the panels to be dull or stupid, the dealers' room to be overpriced and a waste of time, and the art show to be laughable. By Saturday morning they were pretending to be sociology graduate students from the University of Toronto

gathering initial research on deviant subcultures -- comic book fandom being highly deviant and science fiction fandom simply deviant. Then Andrew noticed that the boycott flyer was creating a stir.

Initially, we were putting out the flyers in piles of twenty. These disappeared quickly, so we started putting them out in piles of ten. These vanished even faster. Andrew and Lester noticed that every time some of the boycott flyers were set out, someone wearing a special coloured badge -- I forget the colour, but it was the colour that indicated that the person was part of the convention committee -- would spirit away the entire pile. And so began a game of cat and mouse.

We started putting out flyers in piles of five, then one. The convention committee eventually stationed somebody to watch the table. Tape was borrowed from the front desk and the flyers were put up in several places on the convention floor and in some of the panel rooms. Now there was some poor sod patrolling the entire convention floor searching for our boycott flyers. We split the remaining flyers and distributed them in various places; underneath other flyers, on the hotel literature and tourist info table, in two locations within the hotel bar, and at various room parties.

When Lester and I got back to Toronto, we discussed putting together a one-shot fanzine for the Worldcon next year in Denver that would be a whole zine of material like the Maplecon Slandersheet. This one-shot was given the provisional title of Up Fandom. November and December came and went as did the semester. Up Fandom sat on the back burner as September 1981 was still far far away. I toyed with the idea of putting out a perzine and Lester perfected his score on Missile Command. After Christmas, we both returned to uni and I attended the monthly Toronto fan gathering/party in January.

It was at this event that I learned that the local powers that be -- the Big Name Fans of Toronto -- were looking for who was responsible for the boycott flyer. It appeared that the Ottawa fan organisation that hosted Maplecon was very upset about the flyer and that they held OSFiC responsible (well, we did sign the flyer as "The Ontario Science Fiction Club, the motherfuckers"). The Ottawa Science Fiction Society was up in arms, they had threatened (or so it had been rumoured) to sue OSFiC for damages, and other crazy stuff. The Toronto BNFs

who hosted this monthly gathering took all of this very seriously. At the January gathering the BNFs were interrogating anyone who had attended Maplecon III in an attempt to find out who did this. Of course, I claimed that I saw nothing, knew nothing, etc. and my old droogs -- who attended the con as Nostromo crew (I think) -- who knew that I was responsible, said nothing.

The next day when I reported this to Lester; who found it to be hilarious. It was insane that OSFS could actually believe that OSFiC actually wrote the Maplecon Slandersheet and even more ridiculous that, even if OSFiC did write it, that OSFS would believe that OSFiC would be stupid enough to sign their name to the flyer. And so, the germ of SWILL was born.

Our first thought was to ramp up the timeframe for Up Fandom so that an ish would be ready in time for the February gathering. But then, I decided that this was just going to be a one-shot to out ourselves for the Maplecon Slandersheet and to give a big one-finger salute to the Toronto BNFs; why waste the zine name Up Fandom?¹ And so, we named it SWILL. It was eight pages in length (okay, six pages if you don't include the front and back covers) and we printed off maybe 20 copies of the zine (the first print run was on photocopier which was a tad expensive) and 30 copies of the slandersheet, which I brought to the February fan gathering.

Where, the shit hit the fan, so to speak. All the BNFs were very, very angry with me. But they didn't actually say anything to me -- that was how they displayed their displeasure, by no longer speaking to me. Whatever I heard was second or third hand at best. In part, the BNFs of Toronto were relieved to some extent. I wasn't not in the centre of the Toronto fan community and certainly not a traditional fan -- the only fanzines I had pubbed contained mostly original amateur fiction (and one even contained some Trek fan fiction) -- and I also associated with known reprobates (such as the droogs) who were card-carrying mediafen (my droogs did actually also read SF literature, but were very interested in media SF - two of them did end up working in the industry). Nevertheless, the faanish members of the Toronto community now declared me an "evil one" -- they were angry, they disapproved, they would no longer talk to me,

¹ As it would turn out, there never was an Up Fandom zine.

but they didn't ban me from attending future monthly gatherings.

So, I enlisted the facilities of a friend in Guelph who had an electrostenciler and a mimeograph to print a second run of issue #1 and the remaining Ontario issues of SWILL; mimeograph was cheaper and gave SWILL that grunge look that so befitted it. And, based upon the BNF reaction, we decided to do a second issue of SWILL.

Issues #1 through #4 were printed in Ontario and came out regularly one a month for February through May. Then two things happened: I moved to Vancouver and there was a Canada Post strike. I moved to Vancouver in late May, arriving there just in time for V-Con with a bundle of SWILLs. By the time I had fully settled in and sent out the call, by mail, to get Lester and Andrew to write some material for the next issue, there was only one or two weeks left before Canada Post went on strike on June 30th. The strike lasted until August 10th and so, there was no SWILL published.

Before moving to Vancouver, the plan was that there would be a SWILL East and a SWILL West; Lester (as Arne Hannover) would edit SWILL East and I would edit SWILL West. Both SWILLs would share some content -- my editorials would be reprinted as a column in SWILL East and Lester's column in SWILL West would be the editorial in SWILL East. Looking back, this was a rather French organisational design that probably would have failed in execution. And then, there was the postal strike and BeSwill.

Steve Vano (Stephano) had already begun publication of his own version of SWILL, BeSwill in April and by the time I left the province there was a new issue every week. BeSwill really had a very different tone to SWILL. Yes, it was obnoxious; yes, it was crude; however, it really was not a SF fanzine in any way shape or form. That is because, at the time, Steve really wasn't much of a science fiction genre consumer; he was more of a gamer. So in reading BeSwill one notices this, that there is a distinct lack of knowledge of the genre that the zine is supposedly critical of and even less knowledge regarding fandom. BeSwill continued during the summer of 1981 and disappeared in the autumn of that year.

In late August, I published a Worldcon Special Edition of SWILL (which it would appear that I designated as whole number

5) that we will now refer to as SWILL #4.5 and was a very short issue; just a front cover, a back cover, an editorial, and a reprint of The American Weigh. I don't know how many copies I printed, but I probably made at least 100 that I brought to Denver along with copies of SWILL #1 through #4. I do recall that people were uncertain as to what to make of this fanzine in the Fanzine room at the Worldcon. With hope, someone out there still has a copy of the Wordcon Special Edition -- and if they do, would you please scan me a pdf...

In late September I published SWILL #5 and in late November (maybe early December) I published SWILL #6. Both Lester and Andrew were getting too busy to supply me with regular material. The major reason for SWILL -- ticking off the Toronto BNFs -- had faded as I no longer lived in Toronto. There were actually people who liked SWILL in Vancouver and I was getting more and more involved in the anti-arms race peace movement and the anarchist community to spend time on SWILL. The drive and the desire had faded. As of February 1982, SWILL was no more.

In 1984 I published three issues of a fanzine called Daughter of Swill, Mother of Scum. This magazine had some of the same spirit that was in Swill, but it was also quite different. Each issue was an essay on a single topic; one on fandom and fascism, one on the science fiction of winnable nuclear war, and one on the lack of alien aliens in science fiction. These were distributed to a select group of friends. Of these three issues, the one on science fiction aliens was the best. Again, no known copies of this zine -- however, if you are reading this and do own a copy, please scan it and send me the pdf.

In 1991, I wrote the fanzine Scum. It had a series of essays in it on various topics about the genre and one on fandom. Some reprints of old SWILL columns, such as Lester Rainsford's rant against Libertarian Party science fiction, The Average SF Fan article, and others... Also, there was some material that had been written for SWILL by Hoyt and Rainsford, but never published. I wrote Scum, but I never printed it off and sent it out. It and all the SWILL related things went into a box in the basement, where it would languish until a persistent, but undetected, basement leak in that area reduced the SWILL box and some of my wife's boxes of collected cooking magazines

into a mass of black mould that had to be properly disposed of.

In 2001, Swill Online was published as a website (still there at http://members.tripod.com/swill_2001/). I had hoped that Lester and Hoyt would write something for the website, but they didn't. Swill Online has been designated as SWILL #7. Swill Online made the first use of the pudmonkey font as the official SWILL font (no longer supported on the original tripod site). About 20 copies of SWILL #7 were printed and set out on the fan table at Ad Astra 2001. These print copies also contained a back cover that was a boycott Ad Astra 2001 flyer. Unfortunately, a copy of that flyer is no longer in my possession, but it had a similar tone to the Maplecon Slandersheet.

In 2011, I revived SWILL as a fanzine. This is our thirteenth issue since the revival began. SWILL won the 2011 Elron Award for Worst Fanzine and it won the 2011 Faned Award for Best Fanzine. SWILL continues to be published...

SWILL Contributors

Neil Jamieson-Williams (Neil Williams)
James William Neilson
Neil Williams
Vladimir Schnerd
unsigned

Lester Rainsford
Illy Litrato
P. I. Leninski
V. I. Lenininsky
Alicia Longspear
Scrotum the Unbathed
Arne Hannover

Andrew Hoyt
Tim Parker
Count Eric von Schicklegruber III
David White
Reginold Planetage

Steve Vano
Stephano
J.R.
Ruby Beroach

Pete Roberts
A Science Fiction fan
G. O. Dowright
Private Parts

J. S. Goobly
Neil Williams & Lester Rainsford

Reverand B. Jeramiha Jones
Neil Williams & Lester Rainsford

Scrotum the Unwashed
a York University English Literature Professor

Rainbow and Kurt Kohl
themselves

SWILL Issues

February 1981 SWILL #1

Cover Art: Neil Jamieson-Williams this was a badly drawn self caricature of Neil holding a bottle of beer in his left hand and a cigarette, while giving "the finger" with his right (the "stubby" beer bottle is not well drawn and the perspective is off so it actually looks like a pill bottle). Neil is wearing a T-shirt that says, UP FANDOM - the originally planned zine title for this intended one-shot. Title composed of punk-style newspaper headline cut-out letters. Editorial by Neil; article by Neil called MediaFen Suck; Pissing on a Pile of Old Amazings by Lester Rainsford; Fun and Games (Thrash the Trekkie) written by Scrotum the Unbathed and reviewed by Neil and Steve Vano; a reprint of the Maplecon Slandersheet; some fake LoCs; and the back cover - same as the front cover.

March 1981 SWILL #2

Cover Art: Neil Jamieson-Williams and Lester Rainsford - depicts three piles of shit, the one in the foreground

labelled "Fandom" with lots of flies circling around it (preferred by more flies than other forms of shit). Editorial by Reverend B. Jeramiha Jones on smut in SF and SF fandom; an article by Jamieson-Williams on Fen Art; Pissing on a Pile of Old Amazings attacks cigarette smoking and the discipline of Chemistry; article by J. S. Goobly titled The Average SF Fan (the infamous fat fan article); article by Jamieson-Williams titled They Space Tribbles, Don't They advocating the death of OSFiC; the very first Stephano My Fame strip; P. I. Leninski The American Weigh: Or, A Gram of Brains is Worth a Pound of Shit which attacks Libertarian Party SF, Libertarian Party SF Fandom, and some of the determinist claims made by the political philosophy of the Libertarian Party; actual real LoCs - only one is semi-fake which is a SWILL writer to writer response; back cover that proclaims that Physics Rules OK.

April 1981 SWILL #3

Cover Art: Kevin Davies - depicts Darth Vader in the Death Star trash compactor reading SWILL #2. Title is also by Davies and would become the standard SWILL masthead. Editorial by Jamieson-Williams on Del Rey Books advocating a boycott for the following reasons: classic reprints are overpriced, new authors are insipid, but most of all for the "self-destruct book" - Del Rey (at the time and least for the books shipped to Canada) was using a substandard adhesive for binding its paperbacks so that the pages would fall out as you read the book. Pissing on a Pile of Old Amazings (Rainsford) discusses the lack of original ideas in science fiction. Articles by Alicia Longspear, G. O. Dowright, Count Eric von Schicklegruber III, and Illy Litrato. Endnote editorial about the purpose of Swill - Jamieson-Williams denies that the purpose is to be nasty and obnoxious for the sake of being nasty and obnoxious - is to offer critique to both science fiction & science fiction fandom, albeit in a manner that is often nasty and obnoxious but not without humour. Back cover by Rainsford that is part of a SWILL contest.

May 1981 SWILL #4

Cover Art: Jamieson-Williams - "No Name" cover based upon Loblaws No Name house brand of the time: 1 SWILL 12 GRAMS NEW. Editorial by Jamieson-Williams on the disconnect between the future imagined by SF fans of the 1930s and 1940s and the world of 1981 (no World Union, no abolition of war, no fair

redistribution of resources, no real conquest of space).
Pissing on a Pile of Old Amazings (Rainsford) discussed the
TTC and cycling in the Caledon Hills. Hoyt as himself bemoans
the fact that the science fiction section is filled with Star
Trek and Star Wars and other television and movie tie-ins but
little real SF. Science or Fiction by Steve Vano. Twinkle
Twinkle Little Laser by Count Eric von Schicklegruber III
defends the discipline of chemistry as being as important as
and more relevant to the average person than physics. Review
articles by Stephano and Illy Litrato, Marginal Phun by J.R.,
LoCs, and an Endnote by Jamieson-Williams. In the Endnote
there is the announcement that there would be a Swill East and
Swill West - Jamieson-Williams was moving to Vancouver. Arne
Hanover (Rainsford) was to head up Swill East while Jamieson-
Williams would edit Swill. Back cover by Jamieson-Williams

August 1981 SWILL #4.5 WORLDCON SPECIAL EDITION

Cover Art: unknown (would have used the Davies masthead and
may have been a reprint of the issue #3 cover art). Editorial
by Jamieson-Williams that argued that the Worldcon should be
called the Americancon - the convention had a mostly US focus
with few international fans attending. Furthermore, at the
time, only a single Worldcon had taken place in a non-English
speaking country. I also viciously trashed the Baltimore in
'83 bid as I was a supporter of the Australian bid. Reprint
of The American Weigh: A Gram of Brains is Worth a Pound of
Shit. Most of this print run was distributed at the 1981
Worldcon in Denver and the remainder in Vancouver. Again, I
have no copy of this issue and I am going entirely on
collective recall.

September 1981 SWILL #5

Cover Art: Vaughan Fraser - shows an alien sitting on a
toilet, every sheet of toilet tissue is labelled Swill.
Editorial by Jamieson-Williams Viva, Maplecon that illuminates
the relationship between Maplecon and SWILL -- Maplecon III
being the catalyst for SWILL - and some of the early history
of SWILL (this editorial was a primary source for the early
history discussed in this article). Jamieson-Williams also
does extend an olive branch of sorts to Maplecon 4 as they are
no longer also a comic con and have returned to being a SF fan
convention. There is a column by White thrashing tween and
teen fans (most of whom are mediafen), a column by Hoyt on
Star Wars, a book review column by Reginold Planetage about a

fictitious book. Some LoCs from Ruby Beroach, a new cartoon by Jamieson-Williams (Star Captain Bruce), an endnote (sort of) titled After the "Worldcon" that takes back the nasty things said about the Baltimore bid (which actually won) and restates that the rest of his argument remains sound and stands. The back cover is a reprint of Maplecon Slandersheet.

November 1981 SWILL #6

Cover Art: Unknown. No copies of this issue remain, so this is all recall - as good as that is. I know that I brought some home with me for Christmas and gave a copy of this issue to Kevin Davies at a party and I remember that he wanted me to stop using the SWILL "masthead" that he created for the SWILL #3 cover and to stop crediting him in the zine (Kevin was starting to get some decent contract work as a SF & F artist and no longer wanted any association with a zine such as SWILL). Kevin also criticised my own strips - Star Captain Bruce - as being shit. I know that the issue he was talking about wasn't issue #5 as there were at least two Star Captain Bruce strips in the issue. As for what the rest of the content was in this issue; I have no recall. This was the final issue of the original SWILL.

February 2001 SWILL #7 Swill Online

For the twentieth anniversary of SWILL I created a website called Swill Online. Cover Art: by Jamieson-Williams (a cut and paste photoshopped image of a voodoo doll wearing a propeller beanie with R.I.P. written on it and a knife through the heart labelled "Fandom"). An editorial by Jamieson-Williams on why create Swill Online - to tease fandom. The State of the Genre states that it is very healthy thank you very much so stop whining and complaining. Is There Anything Unique About Fandom argues that there isn't. A Brief History of Swill is a partially correct and partially erroneous as it was written entirely on recall sans any primary source documents. In the Endnote Jamieson-Williams states that the site would be updated irregularly over the year and hoped that some of the old SWILL columnists and contributors would send in some material. They didn't and thus the site was never updated.

SWILL @ 30 SWILL #8 through #12 2011/2012

When I revived SWILL as an online fanzine, my original plan was that it would be a continuous issue, and that new content would just be added to the zine in almost a blog-like fashion. But after the launch of the fanzine and February I started to receive some LoCs and thus the only update to the very original issue #8 was a new column Flogging a Dead Trekkie where I ditched the original concept and went back to the traditional fanzine format of individual issues. Cover Art: A man in a chemical suit wearing a bowler hat sitting on the steps leading into some sort of containment area, with an umbrella tucked under his left arm and an open 650 ml bottle of beer in his hand. I used tweaked the original picture to make the man look more droog-like and make the umbrella sort-of look like a willy wacker and performed further modification on the photo. This cover art was then colourised for each season. Lester Rainsford rejoined SWILL for issue #11.

SWILL #13 through #17 2012/2013

The SWILL @ 30 masthead is dropped and replaced with the original masthead from issue #1. Cover Art: Jamieson-Williams as Anti-fan (who oddly enough looks kind of like Guy Fawkes) holding a lit 19th Century spherical bomb. Again distorted for each issue to indicate the season.

SWILL #18 through #22 2013/2014

Original Issue #1 masthead remains. Cover Art: the original cover art of Sirius #1 with Jamieson-Williams face photoshopped in. Again, with modification representing each season. Back cover is a photo of Jamieson-Williams in 1980 giving his old pal Fritz a mild tolchock; with minor distortion effects for each issue.

And that, to date, is the (nearly) definitive history of SWILL.