

S W I E E

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#8

Spring 2011

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Swill @ 30 is an evolving work that will probably be quarterly...no more than that can be said at present

Swill @ 30

Issue #8 Spring 2011

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All About Swill

Neil Jamieson-Williams

For a more personal recollection see *A Brief History of Swill* in Swill Online (2001).

1980 The “Maplecon Slandersheet” – a prank ‘boycott’ poster written by Neil Jamieson-Williams (then Williams) and Lester Rainsford. The poster was signed “●SFIC the motherfuckers” and distributed at Maplecon III in Ottawa. Some of the Maplecon organisers actually believed that the Slandersheet had been written and distributed by ●SFIC (Ontario Science Fiction Club) and this created brouhaha between the two fan groups. Once Neil and Lester became aware of this – Swill was born.

1981 **Volume 1, Number 1** (February) Cover Art: Neil Jamieson-Williams (badly drawn self-caricature of Neil holding a pint of beer in his left hand and giving “the finger” with his right. Title composed of punk-style newspaper headline cut-out letters. Editorial by Neil; columns by Lester Rainsford and Andrew Hoyt; Trash the Trekkie, and a reprint of the Maplecon Slandersheet.

Volume 1, Number 2 (March) 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 Jamieson-Williams, subject uncertain... Lester Rainsford’s column *Pissing on a Pile of Old Amazings* titled “A Gram of Brains is Worth a Pound of Shit” attacks Libertarian Party SF, Libertarian Party SF Fandom, and some of the determinist claims made by the political philosophy of the Libertarian Party. The infamous Fat Fan article (uncertain by whom; believe that the first draft was by Hoyt and then rewritten by Neil and Lester). Stephano becomes the in-house artist for Swill.

Volume 1, Number 3 (April) Cover Art: Kevin Davies – depicts Darth Vader on the toilet reading Swill. 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 Amazinings* (Rainsford) discusses the lack of original ideas in science fiction. Articles by Alicia Longspeak (Rainsford), FemFan (Hoyt), and David White (Hoyt). Stéphane begins the cartoon strip *The Saga of My Fame*. 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.

Volume 1, Number 4 (May) Cover Art: Stéphane – cannot recall the subject matter. 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 Amazinings* (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. Writing as Count Eric von Schicklegrubber (Hoyt) defends the discipline of chemistry (which appears to take second rank to physics in SF) as being as important and more relevant to the average person than physics. There are some other filler pieces, some *The Saga of My Fame* strips, and 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 West – this didn't come to pass as May 1981 also marked the first publication of BeSwill by Stéphane (BeSwill would end up becoming Swill East and Swill would be the planned Swill West).

Volume 1, Number 5 (August) Cover Art: unknown. 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. Some reprints e.g. Rainsford's "A Gram of Brains is Worth a Pound of Shit" and other stuff. A large number were distributed at the 1981 Worldcon in Denver and a much smaller number in Vancouver.

Volume 1, Number 6 (September) Cover Art: Vaughan Fraser – shows an alien sitting on a toilet, every sheet of toilet tissue is labelled Swill. Editorial by Jamieson-Williams that discussed Maplecon III (the catalyst for Swill) and how he was pleased that they were now a proper SF convention, article by David White (Hoyt), some filler, and a reprint of the Maplecon Slandersheet. This was the final issue of Swill. This issue was distributed in Vancouver in September and in Toronto in December.

Editorial: The Spirit of Swill

Neil Jamieson-Williams

With a little trepidation, I cast my thoughts back across three decades to frame the question, "What is the spirit of Swill?"

At its core, the spirit of Swill was a shock and awe boot to the head at science fiction fandom. Vicious, angry, intentionally offensive, silly, irreverent, and obnoxious; brimming with the malicious delight of a shock-jock gadfly screaming with feigned anger – all sound and fury – in an effort to rattle the comfortable status quo of the Toronto SF fan establishment while creating the construct of some sort of SF fan rebel or outlaw. The spirit of Swill was that of youthful dissent in a nihilistic, smash-it-up, shit-disturber format.

But was it anything more than prose version of smashing windows and tossing a few Molotov cocktails? Well, yes; it was more than that. To paraphrase myself from Volume 1, Issue 3 – the spirit of Swill was to criticise both science fiction and science fiction fandom while simultaneously being humorous (albeit, a form of humour that was crass, nasty and obnoxious). While the "edge" that Swill constructed was that of anarcho-punk nihilism the content was a critique of SF and SF fandom. However, that critique tended to be sophomoric at its best and idiotic at its worst (much of the content was not intended to be taken seriously and/or written for the sole purpose of generating anger). This is hardly surprising, looking back from the vantage point of the present, I was in my early 20's and uneducated (I was a first year undergraduate who had still not been taught yet and/or had yet to learn how to discern good source material from rubbish). The spirit of Swill was critical and blunt and intentionally malicious and its target was SF and SF fandom. The odd thing is that some – not much, but some – of that criticism was and remains valid.

However, those nuggets that were and are still valid are not unique insights of Swill. They are not necessarily well thought out arguments – kind of like a vulgar and poorly written Rick Mercer rant.¹ Any valid points made in Swill have been said much better, often in more calmer and reasoned and scholarly tones.² Looking back over the few surviving fragments I have of Swill and Daughter of Swill, Mother of Scum as well as the content of Swill Online (2001) I have to confess, I am uncertain as to what there is to say that hasn't been discussed elsewhere and with far superior insight and reason. Is there still a purpose for Swill today, in 2011?

¹ Rick Mercer is a Canadian comedian and political satirist who hosts the CBC programme The Rick Mercer Report. Each episode includes a segment that is a well scripted two-minute "rant," where Mercer speaks directly into the camera about a current political or social issue.

² Aliens: the Anthropology of Science Fiction, 1987; The Cambridge Companion to Science Fiction, 2003 to just name a couple – an unrepresentative sample based upon a glance at my bookshelves here in my cube...

In the Editorial for Swill Online (2001)³ I state that, “The major reason for reviving Swill is so that I can play a game, a game called teasing science fiction fandom.” Well, that turned out to be insufficient motivation. While, I am certain that there existed segments within the SF fan population that did take offence to Swill Online (2001), I never heard about it – nobody sent any angry emails or even any emails, period. And that is perhaps central to the issue at hand; I am not an SF fan.

Let me qualify that, I am no longer an active member of the SF fan subculture – I ceased any real involvement back in 1985. The only “fannish” activity I have engaged in since then has been attending a couple of conventions for one day (the last one being to scout a suggested location for a documentary project I was involved on about conventions – SF conventions being one type – which didn’t materialise) and the creation of Swill Online (2001). Nevertheless, although I am not a “fan”, I remain a fan of SF. It is the primary genre that I read, it is one of my preferred choices in film and television, I use SF in the courses that I teach, I create hypothetical worlds and cultures for my undergraduate student assignments⁴, my current research has a SF element in that it examines potential human interplanetary migration patterns, and based upon the course materials I have created, I have even started to turn my hand to writing short fiction again⁵. So, I definitely can make the claim that I am a stakeholder in regards to science fiction, but not in reference to SF fandom. It is time to remedy that.

In a specific manner, though.

I have no great desire to re-enter the SF fan community as a “fan”. To use a research methodology term; I am an outside-insider who has no intention of “going native” and becoming an insider once again. To be perfectly blunt, I do not have the time to be a “fan” nor do I want my primary social network to consist of the SF “fan” community. But, it is time to re-examine SF fandom through the lens of social anthropology (and perhaps the genre simultaneously as well). And one of the tools I shall employ, in the initial stages at least, shall be Swill.

And so...

Swill is back. For how long; that is still to be determined. It will be a different Swill, perhaps a less interesting Swill; but, a Swill that has lost the in-your-face, youthful shock tactics while still retaining some of the core spirit (as well as the original focal point) of the original Swill.

Welcome to Swill @ 30. As for the spirit of this incarnation of Swill... It will be to examine SF fandom and SF in a manner that is critical and clinical and intentionally blunt. No doubt somebody will take offence...

³ Not to be confused with the Head to Swill Online blogsite or the swillonline.org website.

⁴ Which works better than Turnitin to reduce plagiarism.

⁵ Not my strong suit, my fiction writing talents remain stronger outside of the print medium.

Pissing on a Pile of Old Amazings!

Raison d'Être

Neil Jamieson-Williams

In the Editorial I stated, "...it is time to re-examine SF fandom through the lens of social anthropology⁶ (and perhaps the genre simultaneously as well)." Well, it is certainly time that somebody in the social sciences made a study of science fiction fandom; so it might as well be me. Back in 1987, it was my intention to study science fiction fandom for my graduate work, but I was sidetracked into researching a subculture that appeared, at the time, to be more exotic.⁷ And as a relatively recent ex-fan, science fiction fandom appeared rather ordinary.

Nevertheless, I almost did stick with studying science fiction fandom, for two reasons. There had been little research performed, then on science fiction fandom. Yes, there were some fan histories, but those were 100% insider accounts and histories (not actual ethnographic research), they were useful as background, foundation material, with which to design the frame for one's research. What little had been done in the social sciences tended to be very cursory overviews intended to introduce the true research topic, Scientology.⁸ Thus, there was a vacuum to be filled. However, at the same time, discussions with faculty (and potential committee members) about my research topic of science fiction fandom would inevitable turn to Scientology as being a more important topic. I didn't want to do research on Scientologists, period. So, I chose to study Modern Paganism.⁹

In the decades that passed, there has been a substantial amount research conducted on science fiction fans; but, very little of this has been done within the social sciences -- and none within social anthropology. The disciplines that have performed studies on science fiction fans are literature (using historical texts and fan histories as part of the context used to ground their analysis of the fiction in), cultural studies, and folklore. Within both cultural studies and folklore

⁶ What is called cultural anthropology in the United States and social anthropology everywhere else -- the study of living human cultures and subcultures.

⁷ Modern Paganism

⁸ These were sociology and social psychology research articles that had really not done a proper literature review and either intentionally or inadvertently created the impression that there remained a strong link between science fiction fandom and the Church of Scientology in the 1970's and mid 1980's.

⁹ As it turned out, my committee strongly suggested that I switch my topic from Modern Paganism to religious tolerance.

there is a strong post-structuralist/postmodernist theoretical framework and the primary focal points are centred on electronic media science fiction, fanfiction, and filking. All of these foci lend themselves to examining hegemonic power influences, the reinterpretation of cultural products by the cultural consumers/users, and the re-production of cultural products by the cultural consumers/users. While this can be all very interesting (and some of this research is really brilliant), it touches on only segments within the larger subculture – though some of these segments are large others are just extremely visible segments. For all of the cultural studies claimed holism, the research simply isn't -- it tends to give voice only to parts of the subculture. Although the academics who have studied filkers (SF and otherwise) generally appear to have sound ethnographic research methodologies it is probably more kind to remain silent in regards to some of the methodologies employed in cultural studies.¹⁰

Thus, from the perspective of the social sciences, the vacuum that existed in 1987 regarding the academic study of science fiction fandom persists to this day. It is a vacuum that I intend to address in the full course of time.

Me? Neil Jamieson-Williams, the evil editor of Swill and arch antifan? Yes, me; and why not?

I am a former fan and in my fannish days I did engage in a variety of fan activities – organising one-day conventions, participating in the organisation of multiple day conventions, filking, publishing APAs, publishing fanzines¹¹, and belonging to SF fan clubs. Though never a “faan”, there indeed was a time when I was most definitely a “card carrying member” of the science fiction fan subculture. On top of that, I most firmly identified myself with that segment of the subculture known as literary science fiction fandom. So, I once was a fan, and now I am not. As stated in the Editorial, although I ceased fan activity, I have remained strongly connected to the science fiction genre.

As a social anthropologist and qualitative sociologist¹² – I hold advanced degrees in both fields – I have studied a fairly wide variety of subcultures within North America (in particular, Canada). I have studied software engineers, amateur and professional theatre companies, particle

¹⁰ Probably the most glaring methodological offense is the use of data collected from a small sample of twenty individuals who have been interviewed for a one to two hour period; that data is then employed to make generalisations about an entire population. Although this is not a sound research methodology, I have seen this type of error occur in sociology and psychology as well.

¹¹ Swill is only my most notorious fan publication (next to being the editor of BCSFAzine for a year). I have published a couple of zines devoted to original fan fiction, co-edited another zine that also included Trek material as well as original fanfic, and I published a perzine devoted to space opera and the works of A. Bertram Chandler.

¹² Sociologists who use interviewing and participant observation – i.e. ethnographic research – instead of surveys to collect their data.

physicists, “open mike” musicians, Modern pagans, BBS groups (a form of palaeodigital online community), and special events (trade shows, community festivals, SF conventions, academic conferences, etc.). Adding science fiction fandom to the list would be, in my opinion, a good fit; both to my ethnographic and to my theoretical research interests.

As an ex-fan, quasi-mundane, and academic I am a kind of liminal figure here; one who is all these things simultaneously, though not. The academic role is central. I am an outside-insider; somebody who knows the norms and values, the lingo, the worldview of science fiction fandom while at the same time remaining apart, without a stake in the SF fan subculture. And the latter is actually a good thing; really, it is. It means that I no longer have any axes to grind (and I don't), though it also means that I have no incentive to try and cover over any warts that I may observe (which may not be popular with those who prefer their “truth” concealed). It does allow for a form of “objectivity”¹³, a distance as well as a familiarity. It makes it possible to be clinical.

Science fiction fandom could use a critical, social science gaze, scrutinising it. It also deserves to be examined from a truly holistic approach which hasn't been done as of yet and given the degree of diversity within the subculture, may be near impossible to attain. However, if that does turn out to be the case, there are segments of the SF fan subculture that have received little attention; this could be rectified. There are many questions to be asked, but here are a few off of the top of my head...

- What are the demographics of science fiction fandom?
- Who is the average fan?
- Is SF fandom a single diverse subculture or is it an umbrella for a constellation of SF subcultures?
- With all of the involvement of cross-over groups, such as, costuming, filking, gaming, Modern Pagan, anime, etc. who is a SF fan and who is not; are there participants who are actually really fans of SF events (like conventions)?
- Is the definition of who is a SF fan a matter of individual identity and interpretation or is this defined by the subculture as a whole? If so, who determines? Does the entire subculture agree with these determinations?

¹³ The whole Cartesian polarity of subject and object is an interesting topic of discussion; perhaps for another article...

- How do SF fans negotiate this diversity? Do they do it well, or not? Do some segments of the subculture negotiate this better than others? If so, why?
- How is SF fandom structured? Is there a structure? Are there structures, each structure organised differently?
- What does it mean to be a fan? How is this identity constructed? How is it maintained? What meaning does it give to the fan in their everyday life?

To list a few.

And that is why Swill has returned. It takes time to organise a research project (and I have yet write up a proposal to run through the ethics committee, let alone begun to develop the grant proposal) and this will form part of my pre-research research. I am reintroducing myself to the science fiction fan subculture in preparation for the initiation of a proper research project. It will be a slow process as I take in the lay of the land. I don't expect to be welcomed with open arms, either. To be frank; I don't expect to be welcomed at all. Nevertheless, it is my hope that our mutual interests will intersect and that we can both get something out of this.

And if not, well, I'm still going to do the research.

Flogging a Dead Trekkie: Changes

Neil Jamieson-Williams

When I first put up this site a couple of months ago the idea was that I would create the pdf file Swill @ 30 and continue to add and change it over time. Yes, very arty and all that. I still like the idea overall but I have decided to abandon it for several reasons.

The first being that I am starting to receive some feedback, not much, but some from the SF fan community. Some of this I would like to include and some of it I have no intention of allowing further than my email box.¹⁴ In order to do this I am going to have to move to a more traditional format, that is, to have issues of Swill @ 30.

This also feeds into a second reason, since “I am reintroducing myself to the science fiction fan subculture”, perhaps I should make an attempt to fit in – to the best of my knowledge from when I was last part of the subculture. And so, changing Swill @ 30 to a quarterly format would make it more like a real fanzine. Beginning next issue, there will be a LOC column and perhaps some other fannish stuff (or not, it is to be determined). One of the key factors as to whether or not Swill @ 30 becomes more fanzine-ish would be dependent upon content – if it is all me, it won’t be fannish except that there will be a LOC column. So, I am open to receive contributions; though I will only “print” what I like. Then again, it is very doubtful that any variety of Swill could be said to be “fannish”.

The third reason is that moving to an issue format allows me to use Swill @ 30 to request and receive information over the course of time. This could be a valuable tool in my pre-research research. For example, back 20 years ago when I had approached, and received approval, from the Ad Astra convention organisers to study their convention – which didn’t happen – I was cautioned about using a survey as that would “get people’s back up”. In particular, the hard science fans (the typical Analog reader of the time period) who viewed survey research as being hand-in-hand with bureaucracy and therefore “evil”. As I was an Analog subscriber myself back then (today, I buy the occasional issue¹⁵) I understood that there may be a segment of the hard science audience that might feel this way but I didn’t think it would be anywhere as large as the

¹⁴ Such as the nice person who compared me to Satan and claimed that I was the greatest anti-fan in history (hey, I remember the old anti-fan cartoons from thirty years back – when do I get my black hat and cloak and collection of explosive devices?).

¹⁵ Not because I have any problems with the magazine but because I no longer have the time. For example, the Globe and Mail is my choice in newspaper and I used to subscribe to it; then, I noticed that most of the papers were going from the doorstep to the recycle bin unread. I cut back to just the weekend paper, yet noticed the same problem. In the end, I cancelled my subscription.

convention organisers were claiming. Nevertheless, I decided, based on their “local knowledge” of the Toronto fan community of that time, that if I did the research, I wouldn’t use a survey.

I am a social anthropologist and that means that even though qualitative methodologies (participant observation and interviewing) is our primary method, there is no prohibition on using quantitative method (like surveys) when it is applicable. It is applicable when studying subcultures within contemporary industrial cultures. So, here is the question:

Do science fiction fans have an aversion to surveys?

This would be of interest as there are subcultures that are survey resistant¹⁶ and it would be best to know that from the beginning. That said, the team of psychologists who studied fans at the AussieCon 4 in 2010 discovered no resistance to surveys, even among the Canadian fans in attendance. So is the claimed resistance an Ontario thing? Is it a Toronto thing? Or is it a trait that existed 20 years ago and is not expressed in the present day fan subculture.

Thanks in advance...

¹⁶ For example, Modern Pagans; a high survey response rate for this subculture, even with their own periodicals and web portals is 3%.

Endnote: About the Back Cover

Neil Jamieson-Williams

Well it just wouldn't be Swill if there wasn't some sort of "convention boycott" flyer. After all, it was the Maplecon 3 boycott flyer – distributed at the convention itself – that would become the source of inspiration for the original Swill. The 100 hardcopies of Swill Online that were printed all contained a boycott flyer for Ad Astra 2001 – the hardcopies were distributed at that convention. And now, Swill @ 30 asks you to support our plea to boycott SFContario 2010. *

Thank you for your support

* Temporal anomalies, chronomic rifts, time machines, etc. not included.

SFCon Ontario

Boycott

↓

November 19 - 21, 2010

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