

SWIRE

DE 30



#9

Summer 2011

Table of Contents

Editorials:	The Fan in the Mirror
Pissing on a Pile of Old Amazings:	What They Say About You
Flogging a Dead Trekkie:	What You Say About You
Scrubbing on the Bog Walk:	Letters of Comment
Endnote:	What I Say About You

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Swill @ 30

Issue #9 Summer 2011

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Editorial: The Fan in the Mirror

Neil Jamieson-Williams

This issue of *Swill @ 30* has evolved, unintentionally, into a theme issue; the theme being loosely constructed as what is science fiction fandom and, additionally, what is the current state of science fiction fandom? The articles in this issue will look at what academics have to say about science fiction fandom and what science fiction fans have to say about fandom. For the academics, the central issue is how they construct science fiction fandom. For fans, the central issue appears to be, is there still such a thing as science fiction fandom? I will also provide my own scholarly view of science fiction fandom as a collective in the Endnote.

However, at this juncture, I shall take a more personal reflection of what is science fiction fandom. My first definite encounter with the science fiction genre, other than occasional brushings via Saturday morning cartoons, came in the late autumn of 1969 when I received a copy of *Expedition to Earth* for my birthday (my parents, my mother in particular, hoped to interest me in reading fiction rather than only popular science books on palaeontology and astronomy; it worked). Over the next few months I would gobble up all the Clarke titles available – which weren't very many, maybe six, between the W.H. Smith bookstore and the local library branch in the new subdivision we resided in. I then branched out to some Asimov, bypassed Heinlein (because I had been only been recommended the juveniles which didn't interest me), discovered Larry Niven, and so on...

I recall there being a news story on CTV news about the World Science Fiction Convention being held in Toronto in 1973 and that would have been my first, albeit indirect, introduction to fandom. Now, I knew that there existed such things as science fiction conventions; I didn't actually know what a science fiction convention was and erroneously thought that the Worldcon was held every year in Toronto, but I that these events took place, far away, in the big city. The first convention I attended was the very next year (I think¹). And I would attend convention at least once a year until 1977 when I began to attend conventions more frequently and outside of the GTA. It is from 1977 to 1985 that I actually became more involved in the fan communities

¹ My recollection is that it was a Star Trek convention held at the King Edward Hotel in downtown Toronto in 1974, though local fan history states that there were no conventions in the city that year. It is quite possible that I am incorrect, though I know I arrived at the convention wearing a *Starlost* t-shirt and was abducted during my first hour at the convention by some men in their twenties who carried me into a panel room and presented me to one of the panelists (Harlan Ellison, I was informed later) who went absolutely apeshit, screaming something like, "get it out of here now before I have it disemboweled." I don't think I would have been wearing a *Starlost* t-shirt if it was 1975, but maybe...

of Toronto and then Vancouver. Since 1985, I have not been involved in the fan community, period.

Until, now.

So, what is science fiction fandom? Who is a fan? Am I a fan?

I am firmly of the opinion that the science fiction fan is distinct from the consumer of the science fiction genre; all fans are genre consumers but not all genre consumers are fans. (Note: fantasy is also included here.) Furthermore, most genre consumers are not part of fandom. Most science fiction genre consumers are:

- unaware of the existence of fandom
- are uninterested in fandom
- have a disdain² for fandom
- are ex-fans

A science fiction fan is somebody who not only consumes the genre, but has some form of active participation with that genre and/or the fan community. The active participation (fanac) could be:

- Attending conventions, organising conventions, volunteering at conventions
- participating in genre based online forums, newsgroups, Facebook pages, twitter feeds, etc.
- writing fan fiction (original and derived³), fanzines, blogs, networking sites, etc.
- creating crafts, performance art forms, and visual art forms related to the genre (visual art, movies, websites, costuming, filking, theatre, etc.)
- organising the fan community

And I may have missed some... The point is, one becomes a fan by engaging in some form of semi-public and/or public activity with the genre, thus bringing you in contact with the fan

² They are aware of fandom's existence (sort of) and are contemptible of fandom; "I used to watch Voyager and the new Trek movie is brilliant, but I'm not some sort of Trekkie." Translation: I consume specific genre brands but I am not one of those freaks who dress up in costume and attend conventions. The speaker's perceptions are based on a stereotype (a generalization, usually exaggerated, of certain traits that exist within a group or subculture that are then applied to all members of that subculture) of science fiction fans.

³ I am using this term differently to its use by cultural studies academics; I am using the term to describe: any fan created fiction that is set within a "universe" that was created by another author(s). E.g. if I write a story set within Moorcock's Jerry Cornelius multiverse it is derivative just the same as if I wrote a story set within the *StarGate:SG1* universe.

community. The degree of participation determines to what extent the individual is a fan. Many people are marginal fans a small minority are trufans; and everybody else lies somewhere along the continuum between those two poles. There are many people who may appear, to outsiders (mundanes), to be fans who really are not. For example, are the four principal male characters on the television sit-com *Big Bang Theory* actual fans?

I would say, having not read the series bible nor spent hours in analysing the dialogue, set decoration, etc, that the answer to that question is no. While all four have comic book collections, figurine collections, watch a lot of science fiction and fantasy media, play a lot of science fiction and fantasy based games, and appear to have read some science fiction and fantasy, the only "fan activity" that they participate in is that they attend ComicCon annually. Does this make them fans? In my view, no; ComicCon is a trade show. Trade shows are essentially events that act as temporary retail outlets targeted at a specific or at specific consumer audiences. Attending the Home Show does not make you a home decorating fan; neither does attending ComicCon. However, I am willing to be flexible and accept that perhaps, one could say the *Big Bang Theory* foursome are marginal fans – though I still think they are more heavy genre consumers than they are fans. That said, the majority of the people who regularly⁴ attend fan-run conventions will tend to be actual science fiction fans.

So, am I a fan? It all depends upon the criteria used to define, fan. From my own defining criteria above; I was a genre consumer who became a fan, who ceased being a fan, yet continued to be a consumer, who is now, once more, a fan. The actual act of publishing *Swill @ 30* is an act of fan activity, thus, I am a fan. Yet, I am still a form of marginal fan.⁵ Fandom is certainly not a way of life, but it isn't a hobby either; my current involvement in fandom is marginal.

Yet, this is also an exploration. How does my perception of what fandom is match with fandom's perception of itself? We will see...

⁴ Attend at least one fan-run convention per year.

⁵ Though I have compounded this by agreeing to be a panelist and moderator at the Polaris convention in Toronto.

Pissing on a Pile of Old Amazings: What They Say About You...

Neil Jamieson-Williams

The “they” is academe – or to be more specific the social sciences and cultural studies – and they have had some analysis of science fiction fandom over the decades. Prior to the late 1980’s the majority of academic articles in the social sciences (in particular, sociology) discussed science fiction fandom as it was in the past – that is, back in the 1940’s and 1950’s. This is because any discussion of science fiction as a literary genre and science fiction fans as a subculture was only a background to the central focus, Scientology. Thus, science fiction fans are depicted as predominantly male, with a strong science and/or technical background, and sometimes a “sense of wonder”. Essentially, science fiction fandom is mentioned as part of the context out of which Dianetics and Scientology emerged.

Since then, science fiction fandom has been studied more in cultural studies and folklore than it has been in sociology, psychology, and anthropology. As I mentioned last issue, the focus here is on electronic media science fiction, fan fiction (with an emphasis on derived fanfic and especially slash fanfic), and filking. The majority of this research is within the postmodernist/post-structuralist paradigms⁶ and feminist/queer theory perspectives within those paradigms; thus, the emphasis tends to highlight issues of hegemonic power, resistance to hegemonic influences, the reinterpretation of/re-production of cultural products by the cultural consumers/users, etc. Essentially, these are studies of electronic media science fiction fandom (or in my day, mediafen) with an emphasis on Star Trek fandom in particular. Case in point, the slang of science fiction fandom is presented in linguistics as the slang of Star Trek (Byrd, 1978) though very few of the terms reported had their origins in Star Trek fandom; they were borrowed from science fiction fandom (Southard, 1982). The work of Bacon-Smith (1992, 2000) while it does discuss science fiction fandom as a whole, does place most of the emphasis on Star Trek fandom and the fan created artefacts that emerge from Trek fandom, e.g. slash fanfic and “Mary Sue” fanfic. Although Bacon-Smith received an undergraduate degree in anthropology her

⁶ I am being kind here; I really, really am. In an academic work I would state that neither of these supposed paradigms are yet mature enough perspectives to be called paradigms as they lack the ability to explain and predict. While they do offer some understanding and definitely offer a strong critique to other paradigms, they fail to provide an alternative framework and methodology. Of course, I am taking a social science viewpoint to the theory and methods used for disciplines that are either firmly within the humanities (Folklore) or which hover around the fence area but more on the humanities side (Cultural Studies).

doctorate is in folklore thus we cannot view her research as social science research, but within cultural studies and the humanities. Now, to be fair, other franchises are also given attention too (Star Wars, Doctor Who, Babylon 5, etc.), as are anime, filking, costuming (cosplay), fanfic, slash, and others; but the spotlight rarely falls upon the oldest segment of science fiction fandom -- the literary fan.

Now, some may say, who cares. Electronic media has won out over print; print is no longer central. This is a new century and literacy now means media literacy and the ability to use and manipulate multiple mediums. It is far more germane to examine the segments of fandom that "poach" cultural artefacts and remake them in their own worldview and for their own purposes than it is to study stodgy literary science fiction fans. Wake up and smell the coffee...

Well, I care; and these are the reasons why.

To the uber-mundane out there, a summation of the major studies of science fiction fandom over the decades would provide them with this stereotype of what a science fiction fan is. Long ago, before the mid-1960's, science fiction fans were predominantly male, nerdy, technical and science types, who read science fiction magazines and novels, some of whom were into Scientology. Since the mid-1960's fandom has changed to being predominantly female, into electronic media franchises (like Star Trek), who constantly "poach" cultural artefacts for their fanfic, filksongs, and slash fanfic, create elaborate costumes/models/replicas, and some of them are gay.⁷ This would translate to the mundane as thus; they used to be math and science nerds but now they are a bunch of Trekkie freaks.

I do not think that this is an accurate representation of science fiction fandom.

The major problem that I have with these studies is that some of them are not specific in their titles -- the journal article says that it is a study of science fiction fandom, but in reality it is the study of the members of the local Star Trek club in Saskatoon between 1998 and 2000. Of course, this happens all the time where the article title is more vague and punchy -- even academics use hooks. The abstract will provide the general details of what the article is really about as will the article itself. However, if the abstract does not spell it out clearly that the article is only discussing Star Trek fandom, errors in perception can be made. How? Because, most people outside of the particular discipline that that particular journal is published for (very often it is the journal of an academic association/society/institute) are never going to read the article.

⁷ For simplicity I am using the term to describe the entire homosexual, bisexual, trans community; I am old enough to recall when the term was supposed to be inclusive of male homosexuals and lesbians and bisexual persons, not just male homosexuals. While, I make some use of the Conflict paradigm (General, Marxist, Feminist) it is not my preferred theoretical perspective; nevertheless, the fact that the inclusive term was appropriated by male homosexuals as an exclusive term is an example of the patriarchy in action -- thus, a nod to Feminist Conflict theory.

It may be read by academics outside of the discipline working on a similar research topic (e.g. I don't regularly trawl the linguistics, psychology, or popular culture journals).

The layperson is only going to hear about this research if it is reported by a journalist and journalists (unless they are science journalists) are not very good at translating academic studies to the average person. Here is what would usually happen. Professor X has done research on Star Trek fans that has been published in the Canadian Journal of Contemporary Studies. Professor X works at Gore University and the news of his journal article is made public in a University media release. The local paper may decide to assign the story to one of their reporters. Now a journalist is looking for a good story, something that will attract the attention of the paper's readership – best of all, get people who don't normally buy your newspaper to do so. So, the reporter is looking for an angle. If, in the study Professor X mentions that the Star Trek club has their own regular meeting place (provided by one of the members) that they use for club meetings and other functions with a footnote mentioning that the club cannot use the meeting place on Friday's as it is rented out to a local Modern Pagan group; this is something that the reporter will focus on – "Sci-Fi Satanists of Saskatoon". Journalists with more integrity will still read the media release, read the abstract, skim the article looking for good quotes and/or interesting material (as many peer reviewed articles will be very heavy in the jargon of that particular academic discipline), make a few telephone interviews, and write their piece – a piece that will tend to generalise and apply the results of Professor X's study to all science fiction fans.

Another issue is that the researcher themselves may be ignorant in some regards and thus will transmit and perpetuate that ignorance since the academic is considered an expert. There would appear to be some academics, especially postmodern/post-structuralist researchers in cultural studies, who present the literary fan as if they were an extinct ancestor to the modern mediafan. That is if they even mention history at all – history being andocentric and hegemonic bias/filter and therefore something to be avoided – many take an ahistorical approach wherein the literary fan has no existence.

As I mentioned in the last issue, this is a distortion and does not present the whole subculture. Science fiction books and magazines are still being published and purchased and read. Somebody must be buying these products and reading them and some of those genre consumers will be active as science fiction fans. The literary fan is in all probability not in decline, endangered, or extinct – just ignored. This means that scholars have not researched the entire subculture, only those parts of the subculture that fit their research interests and/or their theoretical perspectives. If your theoretical perspective is that the corporate-state hegemony creates disempowered cultural consumers who, in a better world would take back culture from hegemonic control; you are going to find more interest in the segment of fandom that

appropriated branded cultural artefacts and reworks/repurposes those artefacts than you would be in the segment of fandom that creates original fan fiction. This is not unique to studies of science fiction fandom, the same thing happens in the study of other subcultures.⁸ Again, a holistic research approach would attempt to study all segments of the subculture or those segments that have been underrepresented in previous studies (and actually state that this is a segment of the subculture).

At the end of the day, what academe has to say about you is that: science fiction fans are quasi-Scientists (Spencer, 1981), gamers (Finé, 2002), or mediafem – for the most part Trekkers (Byrd, 1978; Southard, 1982; Bacon-Smith, 1992, 2000; Jindra, 1994; Frazetti, 2010), with barely any literary fem in the population.

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⁸ During my study of Modern Pagans there was far more literature from a Feminist Conflict theory perspective on Wicca that contained data collected from "Dianic" covens (women only) that created the impression that this was the largest segment of the Wiccan population or that this was Wicca to academic outsiders. In fact, it more reflected the theoretical and research interests of the researchers.

Flogging a Dead Trekkie:

What You Say About You

Neil Jamieson-Williams

What do you – that is science fiction fandom – have to say about you? Well, some of you – most of these people being within my age set and older – argue that fandom no longer exists. “There is no such thing as science fiction fandom...” “Fandom has lost its unity...” “Fans are now part of splinter groups...” “...everyone comes to fandom through the internet...” And various other crisis-mongering, handwringing cries of doom.

Some of this is complete rubbish and some of it is true.

"Fandom has lost its unity..." <writer is rolling on the floor convulsed in a fit of hysterical laughter> <15 BEATS> <the writer recovers and composes himself> You have got to be fucking kidding! Fan unity?! What galaxy are you from? Look, I am way, way too young to have been present for the big brouhahas of fan history (e.g. the 1939 Worldcon) but I have seen all kinds of fan wars over the years -- actually war is an inappropriate term, feud would be a better description -- all usually about pointless things. And fans are very good at holding grudges, e.g. those who are still angry about the content of the original Swill and thus have dissed Swill @ 30 based on content that was written 30 years ago. Fan unity didn't exist 30 years ago here in Canada and didn't exist back in the early decades either, according to Moskowitz and Warner, when Worldcons had attendances of less than 300 people.

Though, I am perhaps being a little semantic here, especially if the statement about "fan unity" is coupled with the statement, "Fans are now part of splinter groups..." That, there is some truth to, but only some. The argument is that once upon a time, there was a kind of unity in fandom as all fans were literary fans. That has disappeared and so fandom is splintered and disunified. Okay, maybe; maybe not. Now, depending upon which science fiction historian you subscribe to, the Golden Age runs from 1939 to 1957/1968. That means that I was either born after the Golden Age or in its final years, so I cannot speak from experience only from what I have read. But yes, in those days there were really only literary fans (comic books being a subvariety of the print medium) and the major electronic medium was radio. There was some science fiction on the radio but not enough, as far as I have researched, to spawn a distinct fandom of SF radio. And while fandom was all literary fans, some fans would choose to read one group of magazines over

another, so it wasn't completely unified; each magazine was aiming its content at different segments of the audience.

When I became first involved in fandom, a shift had already taken place in science fiction with the emphasis being on novels and collections over the magazines. The magazines survived and continue to survive to this day, but their influence is nowhere near what it was in the past. With the focus being on book publishing, subgenres became more distinct, such as space opera, hard science, soft science, military, literary (new wave) to name those that existed when I was in my teens. Electronic media science fiction was on the rise due to Trek fandom and the release of Star Wars. This new segment of fandom, the media fans, was just that, a segment. In the decades since the 1970's, electronic media has grown in prominence within our society and culture; science fiction fandom has undergone the same influence.

People older than I and historians talk about the 1960's and The Counterculture; there was a time when there appeared⁹ to have existed a mass Culture in our society. This was changed in the 1960's with the emergence of The Counterculture that opposed the dominant norms and values of the mass Culture. In the United States the polarisation of the 1960's is reflected in that country's "Culture War"¹⁰ to the present day; in Canada, we had followed more of a Western European model with mass Culture and mass Counterculture fragmenting in the 1980's giving us a sluggish but fluid mainstream and a myriad of subcultures and some countercultures. The "splintering" that is bemoaned about is endemic to the culture as a whole as is the loss of "unity"; it is not a phenomenon exclusive to fandom.

The rise of the internet has increased communication between individuals. It has made communication less expensive, more available, and allows for the bypass of gatekeepers. Before the internet, telephone was the fastest form of communication and long distance charges were close to being astronomical. Post was the inexpensive means of communication used. Specialty book stores and local clubs/associations offered nexus points where new fans could meet other fans and where bulletin boards¹¹ provided the news of local events, like conventions. The internet does allow for that old communications system to be circumvented and for more neofans to arrive at their first convention sans any subcultural socialisation. It also can/has served to uproot/disempowered old systems of status based on being a BNF from the APA days or newsgroup days; someone who is relatively a neofan can arise to minor BNF status by running a popular and successful blog. However, this change is not unique to fandom either; it is a social phenomenon that exists within society as a whole.

⁹ Appeared being the operative word, it wasn't as unified as it appeared and neither was The Counterculture

¹⁰ Unfortunately, the Conservative Party of Canada is attempting to import this American cultural polarisation.

¹¹ Here I don't mean Bulletin Board Systems but actual physical corkboards attached to a wall.

"There is no such thing as science fiction fandom..." I think that this is absolute rubbish. To quote the Bard, this is "...a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing." Fandom exists, but fandom has changed. Guess what, everything has changed. You cannot change the technology and not have subsequent changes in culture and in society and in subcultures (like science fiction fandom); everything is in connexion. The world has changed, fandom has changed; so, adapt to the new environment as best as you can -- and, if you so desire, you can always maintain a niche on the side that is your version of "true fandom".

Scribbling on the Bog Walls

Letters of Comment

Neil Jamieson-Williams

As I write this, there are only two proper LoCs that have been received¹², two reviews, and one promise of a review. My comments will be in red.

From: "Taral Wayne" ~~taral@swill.com~~

Swill? That um... I suppose you could call it a fanzine... from the 1980s. It's been a while, alright.

Hello Taral... Yes, it has been a while and all that (and it looks like you missed Swill Online in 2001). There is no supposing about Swill being a fanzine – even an antifan fanzine is still a fanzine.

● ONE SWELL FOOP #3 (April 2011), the journal of diagonal relationships

Garth Spencer

I swear that one of these days I have got to do an all-reviews issue, just to catch up on the fanzines I receive in trade.

● One of the most unexpected was Swill, a revival of an intentionally provocative 1980s fanzine from one of Vancouver's Surrey Contingent. I haven't decided how to respond yet (and it's been about a month).

Hi Garth... We've actually had some dialogue via personal email since Swill @ 30 was launched. I look forward to reading your review, when it comes; especially since, as I recall, you were not a big supporter of the original Swill. "The Surrey Contingent"... haven't heard that term for many years, but I did hang with that group even though I lived two blocks away from Burnaby in Vancouver.

● On a side note... If you ever update your fan history and the entry on Swill, there is a slight error. While I still consider the first four issues of Swill (the ones done in Ontario) to be the best,

¹² The others are not LoCs but vitriolic rubbish about either the original Swill or the 20th and 30th anniversary revivals – essentially these follow a standard format of; "how dare I", followed by rantings of how unfannish/evil I am, and so on.

I do not view issue #4 to be the best issue of Swill – that honour would fall to either issue #2 or issue #3.

AURORAN LIGHTS #4 May 2011

The Fannish E-zine of the Canadian Science Fiction & Fantasy Association

Dedicated to Promoting the Prix Aurora Awards and the history of Canadian Fandom

R. Graeme Cameron

ONTARIO:

* Neil Jamierson-Williams has published a new issue of his crudzine SWILL for the first time in thirty years! Is he out to insult fandom like he used to? Worse! He's now a certified academic and wants to find out what makes us tick! Read my review of 'SWILL @ 30' later this issue.

Graeme: Like Garth we have also communicated via personal email since the Swill @ 30 launch; so, here we go in public... Studying fandom is definitely worse than insulting fandom – an insult can be spurious and unfounded whereas an academic study carries with it the aura of validity as some form of truth. Both Taral and yourself appear to have missed Swill Online – which is odd as a few months ago, prior to Swill @ 30, if you googled “swill +science fiction” the broken remains of the old Tripod site (now restored) would have been one of the top ten hits.

Swill @ 30 #7(?) April (?) 2011. A Viléfén Press Publication. – Editor: Neil Jamierson-Williams. You can read this online at < <http://swill.uldunemedia.ca/> > This is one king-hell blast from the past. Swill was a deliberate crud-zine, rude, offensive, and targeted specifically at fandom, which ran six issues circa 1980/81.

Graeme: I discussed this in personal email but I might as well do so here in public and before your original numbering system becomes accepted fact. Here is my scheme. The original six issues of Swill that were published in 1981 (and only in 1981) were given volume numbers as well – okay, we first skip the volume numbers and just focus on issue numbers. Thus, the original Swill are issues #1 through #6 (BeSwill and Daughter or Swill, Mother of Scum are – although related to Swill – distinct separate publications). The twentieth anniversary revival of Swill in 2001 – Swill Online – counts as issue #7. Swill @ 30 Spring 2011, the issue that you have reviewed is issue #8 and the next issue (the one you are reading), Summer 2011 will be issue #9.

Neil has moved on, to put it mildly. He is now “a social anthropologist and qualitative sociologist...and ... I have studied software engineers, amateur and professional theatre companies, particle 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.”

And it is a good fit. However, I just let that quote run so that I could address a sidebar issue and make a correction. Since I teach in the Faculty of Engineering (even though I am an anthropologist) I have been admonished by my colleagues for using the term "software engineers" – the vast majority of software developers are not professional engineers, they are developers of software only. Just as the MCSE I once held (for NT 4.0 for those who are interested in trivia) did not make me an actual engineer in any true definition of the term.

What sort of things would Neil Like to find out about fandom? 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?

In short, Neil wants to hear from you! ...In a certain sense, Garth Spencer and I have been asking similar questions all our fannish lives. I don't know that we're any closer to coming up with answers than Neil, but perhaps we can be of some use to him in his research.

Graeme (and Garth and Lloyd) thank you for your support for the research project. Just an initial observation over the few months that Swill @ 30 has been online, it would seem that only those who remember the 1980's give a shit as to whether or not Swill @ 30 exists and of those people who do have an opinion, only those with a known and/or strong interest in the history of Canadian fandom are positive about the return in the context as a forerunner to the research project. The more fannish people who remember the original Swill hate Swill @ 30 on general principle. While it is not entirely fair for Swill @ 30 to be despised for what was written in the original Swill issues, that is just the way things are. In the true spirit of the original Swill: who the fuck cares – isn't it wonderful to be able to generate anger and offence without writing a single nasty word, simply by existing...

The above quotes seem a trifle academic in nature. Is this not a betrayal of the original purpose of SWILL? One doesn't get that impression from glancing at its pages which reflect the glory of a true crudzine, being written in pseudo-Courier typewriter font (I believe) on a 'typewriter' whose keys are so dirty the 'o' part of p, b, d, & o are filled in with black ink, rendering each page virtually unreadable.

Ah, Graeme... you have been spoiled by at least two decades of word-processing. The pudmonkey font used in Swill @ 30 is far more legible than the ancient manual typewriter I used for the "Maplecon Slandersheet" and the first two issues of Swill. However, you are correct that a revival of Swill using a clear typeface is a no-can-do.

And to top it off, the back page is an ad for SFCOntario covered with 'spray-painted' graffiti calling for fans to boycott the convention. This is certainly the spirit of the old SWILL, an offensive proclamation not meant to be taken seriously but thrust in your face in the hope it will annoy. Believe me, it's just a prank. Welcome back SWILL... the best of the worst...

Thanks, Graeme for the welcome back. Maybe I will win that coveted Elron this time around...

BCSFAzine

The Newsletter of the British Columbia Science Fiction Association

#456 May 2011

Felicity Walker

Swill @ 30 #7? (Neil Jamieson-Williams): Why is it good that Swill was “rude, offensive,” “crass, nasty, obnoxious,” and “written for the sole purpose of generating anger”?

Felicity: Why? Because it was Swill! The entire purpose of the original Swill was to give a "boot to the head" to science fiction fandom -- in particular those fans who took fandom far too seriously.

Also, I agree with Graeme that Garth and he have been asking the questions in Neil's anthropological study of fandom (“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?” etc.) for years.

And so, if fans themselves are asking these questions, it makes it a valid area of study.

June 18, 2011

Dear Neil:

I had heard rumours of another issue of Swill here and there, and of course, when you want to find something, Google it up, and there you are. Swill @ 30 is an interesting publication, and I thought that I will treat it like any other fanzine I get, and respond to it. Perhaps that response might help you with your researches.

Of all the issues you list here, I think I have only Vol. 1, No. 3.

Lloyd, would it be possible to scan that issue and email it to me?

I might have seen your Maplecon Slandersheet because Maplecon III was my first out-of-town convention, and I might not have realized what it was. Also, the Maplecon folks at the time might have found them, and ditched them. Believe it or not, OSFS still exists, in a much smaller form, and the senior members are just that.

The concom was quite diligent in spiriting away any copies of the slandersheet they came across. Didn't know that the actual organisation still existed... Are they the people hosting CanCon?

Not sure if you are still in touch with your former fellow droogs.

Yes and no. My fellow droogs had no involvement with Swill aside of sort of cheering on the sidelines in Miriad and Nuclear Bunnies. I have had some contact, but not much, with most of my droogies over the years since we toured the convention circuit way back when with our pal Fritz.¹³ The friends who were contributors on Swill (Rainsford and Hoyt) I lost touch with shortly after I my wife and I were married almost twenty years ago.

Now marking close to 35 years in SF fandom, Swill would be a necessity, if it was still possible to shock people by taking a stab at fandom itself. People would pick it up, scan it and drop it. I would say most people who go to conventions would not consider themselves part of a group we'd call fandom...that idea seems to be completely foreign to the newer people I've met who are forming their own groups and staging their own conventions.

Yes, I agree. Swill would only be shocking today for its strong "political incorrectness" – there were articles that were sexist or could be viewed as being sexist and the Maplecon Slandersheet itself contained passages that were blatantly homophobic. Of course, the entire concept behind the slandersheet and the first two issues of Swill was to shock and offend.

I have found over time the more humourless aspects and people within fandom, and I deal with them, usually, without intent, get them riled up, and then usually back away, so that others can see how foolish they really are. They scream and rant, and generally entertain most people. I try to stay constructive and positive, but a good scream and rant can be quite entertaining. Also, Yvonne and I recently wound up a career of running conventions that spanned 30 years. We'd had enough because we were tired, and our ideas didn't jibe with the majority of other people on the committee. Things have changed; so have expectations and demands of those who go, and we were slow to adjust.

Well, Swill was a prose version of intentionally riling up the humourless and over serious fans. But not as entertaining as doing it face-to-face as nobody really confronted me over Swill; they bitched behind my back, but I had to move to Vancouver to hear what a stink the fanzine had caused in Ontario.

Fandom has changed a lot over time, and yet, in some ways, hasn't changed at all. Be as blunt as you like...I don't think you'll be far wrong.

Okay, I intend to be; but in a constructive and valid manner – i.e. not just to stir things up.

Fandom, even up to a decade or so ago, saw itself as slans, a superior group, mostly because of their reading material, and a little because of self-delusion. Still, for such a literature of liberal ideas, many fans came across as dull and stodgy. (Sometimes, they still do. But, at least, they seem to realize that while fandom may be alive and still going, their part of it may be coming to an end, through simple aging and evolution of what fandom is for a younger crowd.)

¹³ There were four of us who attended the regional con circuit and the 1980 Worldcon as droogs from A Clockwork Orange along with our pal Fritz (a dummy with a Mr. Bill face wig head) whom we would telcheck horrorshow.

Having studied a variety of subcultural groups, this is not entirely unique to fandom. The whole fans as slans concept is more unique; but, the question remains, how widespread is this at present and in what segments of the subculture does it exist in. For many literary fans, my segment of fandom when I was a fan, the changes must appear to be great as the focus has moved from the literature to the electronic media. Nevertheless, the literature persists.

Fandom could use a little navel-gazing on a professional level...the demographics of fandom are wide and varied, as are their interests. My own have covered Trek, convention attendance and operation, costuming and masquerade competitions, writing for fannish publications and steampunk. I can say I am still interested in the last two listed. There has always been someone in our outside of my interest ready to say I am not a fan (in their eyes, anyway) because I don't measure up to their arbitrary standards, or I don't share their interest, again an arbitrary standard.

I would say that fandom deserves a proper academic study and literary fandom has been largely unexplored (most of the research has been done on conventions – for the most part media fan conventions – fan fiction, and filking) to date. The demographics will probably reflect the trends within the larger culture – mass culture has become mass subcultures attended to via niche marketing and multichannel entertainment, and now, individual streamed selection.

The average fan is any person these days, anyone with an imagination who wants to explore the realm of ideas, even if the imagination is a little shallow, or the ideas are a little stale. The average fan is social to a varied extent...more and more, anyone can be a fan. The qualification is that you want to take part. Fandom, at one time, one a single subculture, but with so many different interests, movies and television shows, not to mention so many different authors and artists, we are Balkanized into a myriad of little subcultures. Over the years, Yvonne and I have tried to help out all these groups, with mixed results, but we do have friends in the Trek, Dr. Who, filk and even furry communities. While many will look down on others because of their interest (and fans seem to need to have someone to look down upon), we've tried our best to say your interest is as valid as mine, and help out with their events because we wouldn't feel like we were missing out on anything we liked, and could concentrate on the task at hand, like con suite or green room or registration.

As touched on above, we are all "balkanised" today. There is no real single mass culture and fandom is no different. How we get along with one another is something else. Fandom is not really good at this, historically – but they are not alone in having this difficulty. However, the slan notion of superiority, if it still remains would mean that fan X will tend to view their interests, say in Farscape, to be superior and thus correct and true and the interests of fan Y in Trek to be inferior.

What does it mean to be a fan? Perhaps fandom is a social support group to continually tell ourselves we aren't the geeks and nerds the media think we are, although in many cases, not all, the media is right. Fandom has embraced the derogatory terms geek and nerd, and taken them for themselves.

I think that this debate rests on accurately defining the situation and contexts. First, who is a fan and who is not. I would say the majority of the people who consume science fiction (and fantasy) as entertainment, regardless of their preferred choices of medium are not fans themselves. I know many academics and engineers who read and/or watch science fiction, but don't attend conventions and are not engaged in fandom period – these people are fans of the genre, but they are not fans. These people probably outnumber the population of fans by at least a factor of ten. Those people who have been labelled “geeks” and “nerds” do have a greater probability in being interested in science fiction and fantasy, but most of this population are not fans. There was a time, roughly fifty years ago, when most science fiction fans would have been “geeks” and “nerds” but that had already changed back when the first issue of Swill was published and has, in all probability, continued to change since 1981. However, the general public doesn't see the difference between the IT guys in the basement with all of their Star Wars paraphernalia and the science fiction fan subculture; they are one and the same from the perspective of the average person. One of the goals of my study will be to clarify this issue – of course, having the results diffuse into popular culture is another thing all together.

SFCOntario is the product of a slightly newer generation of con runners, but they are all people I know, who also brought in people they knew from elsewhere and other interests. Last year was a good time, and this year, it is the Canadian National Convention. So, sorry, no boycott for you! Ad Astra saw its 30th year this year, but it has changed in its focus over the years, so SFCOntario has moved in to cover literary SF as well.

No boycott for me! Damnit! Well, I was actually advocating the boycott of SFCOntario 2010 not the 2011 Convention.

Two pages for this is fairly good, so here you are. I don't know if you intend future issues, or if this letter of comment can serve as the beginning of a conversation on fandom. Maybe I can guide you as you come back in, and get you in touch with various people, don't know what else you have in mind. If nothing else, good to see you return, and I hope you find something you might like and appreciate in fandom today. Yvonne and I have, which is why we're still around after 35 years. Let's see what your response to all this is. See you soon, I hope.

Yours,

Lloyd Pennéy

Well, at the outset I wasn't planning to have issues, but I changed that just hours before you emailed me your LoC. Your letter, with slight edits is in issue #9 Swill @ 30 Summer 2011. I will be attending Polaris in July; with hope, I will see you there. Neil

Endnote: What I Say About You

Neil Jamieson-Williams

And what do I have to say about you? Not too much, yet. I have been out of circulation for over two decades. Just by sticking my toes in the water I can tell that on the surface some things are the same as they ever were. As for the rest of it all; I will only know once I jump in -- which I shall do in July when I attend Polaris 25. Once I have tossed myself into full immersion environment within the subculture, albeit a temporary immersion, I will have a better idea as to what the lay of the land is.

What can I say that I haven't already said? Nothing. So, I will just repeat a few key points:

- Science Fiction fandom is not as unique as it thinks it is. While many fans are creative to very creative this is something that other leisure based subcultures share, e.g. little theatre.
- Science Fiction fans are not all closet Scientologists, gamers, or Trekkies.
- Science Fiction fandom is no more splintered than the rest of society is.
- Science Fiction fandom is not endangered or threatened, not even in regards to the literary fan.¹⁴

Beyond that, further reconnaissance is required. And so, "once more unto the breach..."

¹⁴ The fact that there is a brand new literary fan convention in Toronto, SFCOntario, would lend support to the hypothesis that literary science fiction fandom is quite alive. I would also offer another hypothesis, that literary science fiction fandom rather than being on the wane, may actually be a kind of silent, or quiet, majority within fandom.

IMPORTANT BADGE INFORMATION: Your badge is your proof of membership, and is required to be worn and visible at all times. Please make it responsible to many of our members express their pride in their membership on the badge. If you have a badge, please bring it to the convention. If you do not have a badge, please purchase one - and there will be a limited number of these available - we need you to bring a badge to hold your badge during your time at the convention.

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