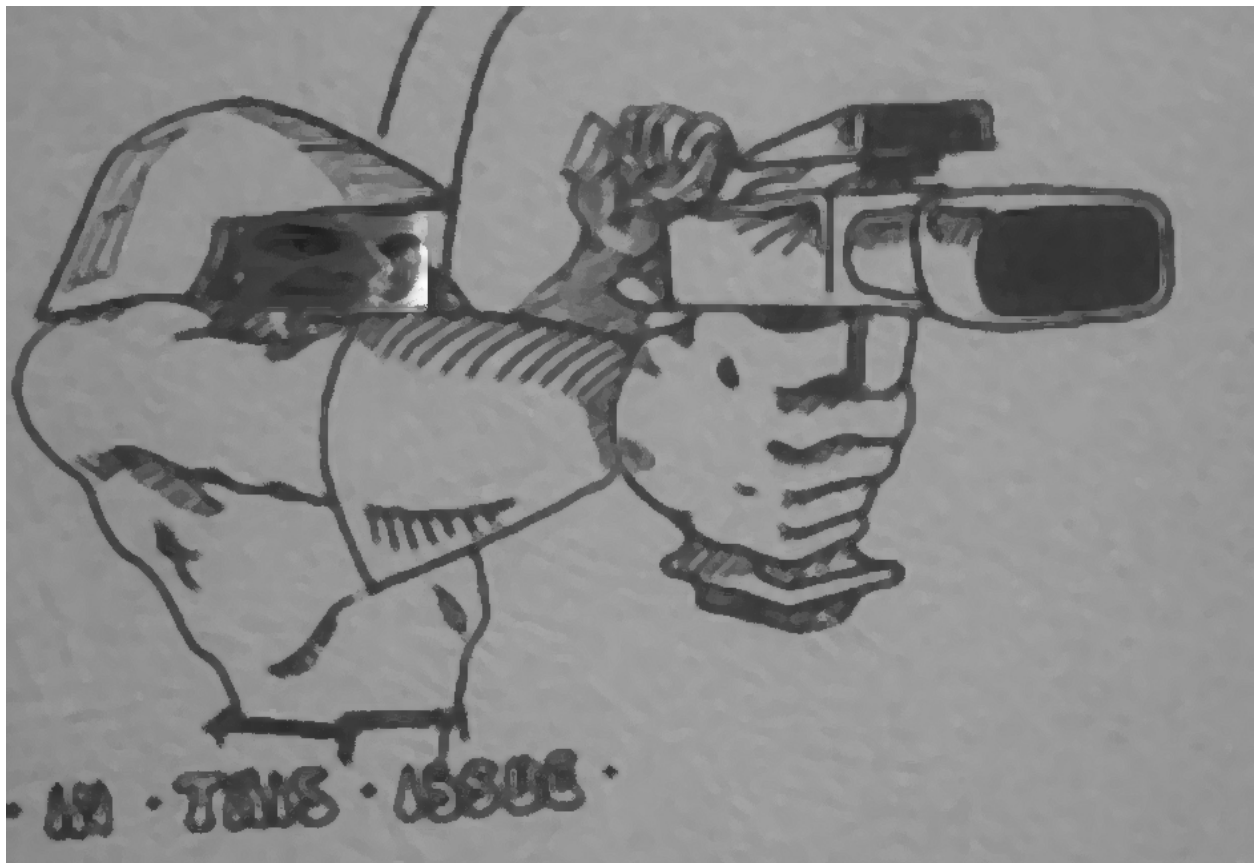


SWILD



#19

Summer -- 2013

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SWILL

Issue #19 Summer 2013

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Editorial: One More (With Hope Final) Time...

James William Neilson

So, here I am again, much to the annoyance of Taral and the FanStuff set, with categories for fandom. These categories will be the working categories for my final survey. Over the past two years I have taken in a lot of input from various fans, including Taral (we disagree, but the opinion was considered), and this has gone into the development of these current categories. So, once again, without further ado, here they are:

Genre Consumers:

These individuals consume science fiction and fantasy content in a variety of mediums from print to television to gaming, etc. They may also have an interest in science fiction and fantasy collectables. They are the major audience for conventions like Comic Con or Sci-Fi Fan Expo or Dragon Con and they may, on occasion, attend large regional fan-run conventions. People within this group do not identify themselves as SF fans. These persons would be viewed as "mundanes" by fans; however, while these people exist outside of the science fiction fan community, they are strong supporters of the genre. These folks love the genre (as a whole or within a particular medium) but are either oblivious of fandom or have no interest in fandom.

Recently, at the conference Science Fiction: An Interdisciplinary Genre (an English Literature/Cultural Studies conference in honour of Rob Sawyer donating his archives to the McMaster Library) I had the opportunity to talk with a number of people who consumed the genre, enjoyed the genre, wrote professionally about the genre, but did not consider themselves to be science fiction fans. As these persons were all academics, they quickly related the word fan to its origin (in English) of fanatic and made it abundantly clear that they were not fanatics; still, they were all genre consumers.

It is from this population that the majority of the people who make up the science fiction fan community emerged from (while

there are a few cases of individuals discovering fandom first and then the genre, for the majority, they discover the genre and then fandom).

Fans:

The central difference between a genre consumer and a fan is that a fan perceives themselves as being a fan -- of the genre, as an identity, and as a member (in one form or another) of a fan community. And from that one single commonality that unites all SF fans, the kaleidoscope emerges. Everyone has their lists and categories and whatever; there are lumpers and splitters, inclusive definitions and exclusive definitions, and it is one big hodgepodge. I am quite willing to leave it at that -- I am more interested in wider terminology.

Fannish Fans:

Those fans who engage in fan activity that is viewed as being fannish by other fannish fans and therefore is highly subjective and mutable geographically and temporally. For example; when I was a young fan in Ontario, mediafen, even those who published their own fanzines and organised media-oriented fan-run conventions, were not considered to be fannish fans. That has changed over the past thirty odd years and, of course, those people are considered to be fannish today. Another example, in Vancouver (around the same time period), the definition of fannishness was more inclusive and already, albeit grudgingly, accepted mediafen of the type mentioned above as being fannish. True, in both regions at that time, the preferred definition of a fannish fan was that of the literary SF fannish fan. Thus, who is and who is not a fannish fan is rooted within regional and temporal context and those contexts are not locked in stasis, they change.

What that also means is that the fan activity of today's younger fans, largely seen as being unfannish by present fannish fans, in all probability will be seen as fannish in time, if the new forms of fan activity persist, as this style of fan activity is incorporated into the SF fan subculture. The fact that the under thirty segment of fandom are organising their own conventions with emphasis upon the type of fan activity that they are most interested in -- "geek culture", more interactive programming, etc. -- would lend support to the hypothesis that, should those

specific interests remain with this cohort, that those interests will eventually find a place within the regional fan-run conventions.

Fanzine Fans:

Those fannish fans who publish fanzines. It is still too early to tell as to whether or not Fanblog (or similar) fandom will fuse with fanzine fandom. I would say that it is not going to happen really soon, though I think it will occur -- except that the pace of technological change may produce something that supersedes both.

Traditional Fans:

AKA Old Fandom, Trufen, dinosaur fandom, etc. Are fannish, most pub or have pubbed fanzines, and they hold true to the norms and values that were normative of SF fandom in the mid-1970s and earlier. While it is possible that new blood will enter into this subset of fandom, it is highly unlikely given traditional fandom's attitudes and less than inclusive nature. With hope, this small subset of fandom will continue to survive in some form; after all, it was the original form of SF fandom.

And there we are. To cycle back to Issue #9; are the four male leads in the US sitcom The Big Bang Theory genre consumers or fans? I would say that they probably are, just barely (even Sheldon), but that they would not be viewed as being fannish fans within any present definition or worldview of what a fannish fan is -- that is, within any present day definition.

So those are the working categories or ideal types for my research.

Thrashing Trufen: "traditional 'fannish' fandom"

James William Neilson

The Canadian SF Fanzine Archive (mentioned last issue) has the stated goal of "celebrating traditional Canadian science fiction 'fannish' fandom". I promised last time to examine this statement, so here we go.

In the editorial of this issue I restate my categories. Using this as a guide, let me deconstruct traditional fannish fandom. A traditional fan is by default a fannish fan, all traditional fans are fannish. They tend to be engaged in fanzines, if not pubbing, in writing, or LoCing, or they have done so extensively in the past. They tend to be consumers of primarily literary SF over media SF -- they prefer written SF to SF films, television, etc. They maintain any local traditional fan community that may exist. They continue to participate in the old-style exchange culture of traditional fans. And some, very few, still reside in "slan shacks" -- shared accommodation arrangements with other traditional fans. However, this is certainly a greying group within fandom, the young whipper-snappers being about age 65 to 70 -- dependent upon geographical location. I say dependent upon location as there would seem to be differing degrees of inclusiveness from this fan category dependent upon region; the more exclusive traditional fans are in their locale, the less probable it is that there are any traditional fans within that local community who are under the age of fifty. Traditional fandom does not appear to be bringing in any new blood; however, I would be happy to be corrected on this (and to know what regions in the world this is happening in) as it would be shame for this category of fandom to die out completely. It would also be a subcultural loss if this category of fandom were to be redefined by the majority outside of it.

While all traditional fans are fannish fans, most fannish fans are not traditional fans. In addition, traditional fans may deem

fannish fans as being unfannish according to their criteria. Bottom line, like it or loathe it, is that majority does rule and it is the majority that determines definitional boundaries. Thus, if a person is not a literary fan but they maintain a media SF website/blog/etc. and they participate in volunteering and/or organising local fan-run conventions; they are fannish (no matter what the traditional fans may say). They engage in fan activity, just not the entire set of fan activity that defines a traditional fan. Just what constitutes fan activity is determined by the majority of fans within a given region, who are also engaged in fan activity, and that definition of fan activity and fannishness will be mutable over time, usually becoming more inclusive approaching the present. As stated in the editorial, what is unfannish now, may be fannish in the future (certainly the mediafan described above -- changing the website to a fanzine -- would not have been defined as being fannish 30 years ago in Toronto). That is the thing about fannishness, it is provisional and rooted in the context of a particular geographical area and place within time.

Thus, the danger of re-definition of traditional fandom by the majority. It is very probable that in twenty years time that that future majority may define traditional fandom as being those people (in their late sixties and up) who still cling to the traits common within fandom during the 1980s and 1990s -- i.e. those people who came of age in fandom before the rise of social media. You know, those old-timers who used to be on SF fan BBSs and who posted on UseNet forums had their own websites and archaic stuff like that...

And fanzine fans... Well, almost all traditional fans are also fanzine fans, and the exceptions are few. But not all fanzine fans are traditional fans, though all fanzine fans are fannish fans. And it is uncertain that fanzines will continue to survive. Again, they may as a small niche, amidst whatever is the dominant form of communication down the road. They will be electronic, like most are at present, and will probably be available in whatever the dominant ereader format is (probably something that is open standard and that you can read on any portable device.

However, the trend is that what is now a traditional fan will be redefined and today's fannish fans will be redefined as tomorrow's traditional fans and that literary fandom will be a niche within a greater fandom that is more inclusive. The greying of fandom has been the subject of much discussion since the recent Worldcon and not just the greying has been commented on, but also the fact that fandom is still predominantly male and European-descent. I.e. old and not diverse, see Lester's column. Fannish fandom, which this applies to, needs to get over itself and adapt to the new situation, which is; you are no longer the majority.

Literary SF is no longer the dominant variety of SF. Fannish fandom is no longer the dominant form of fandom. Thirty years ago, the more inclusive literary fans were making some niche programming available at conventions for media fans. Providing a place for them within literary fan conventions. Conventions like Ad Astra today are doing the same, while still a literary convention (based on GoHs), the line has been severely blurred, from a 1983 worldview, which is why I see this as a literary/media fan-run convention that is making the attempt to include to make a place for the interests of the under 30s (or is it now the under 40s). But, this will not work in the long run as the "youngsters" have numbers on their side, so making a place for them will not satisfy. That is why they are creating their own conventions (just as the mediafen did thirty years ago) and why these conventions are getting larger numbers of attendees.

A convention like Ad Astra will go one of two ways; it will have to become a smaller convention as its fannish fan audience dwindles or the executive will bring in new blood (most likely after the convention really loses money in a big way), young blood, who will completely transform the convention. It will still be fan-run but will only have niche programming for those who are defined as fannish fandom today and only niche programming for literary fandom.

A convention such as SFContario is a literary fan convention that doesn't aspire to be a big regional con and still attracts some traditional fans as well. I don't see this convention disappearing over the next decade, but I don't see it growing much bigger than it already is. Though it does have some

potential to attract some of the under 40s due to its size; a small literary convention that offers the chance to actually meet authors and talk to them as opposed to only queuing up to get their autograph e.g. ComicCon or FanExpo. But it will never be a big convention.

So, Graeme -- I have taken apart "traditional fannish fandom" and concluded it is fading away. And thus, one of the major reasons for the need of a Canadian SF Fanzine Archive and to celebrate and commemorate what was fannish fandom as those of us middle aged folk perceived it to be. Hence, my strong support for the project. Though, I speculate that fannishness will continue in the future, it just won't be fannishness the way it is currently defined.

Pissing on a Pile of Old Amazings

...a modest column by Lester Kinsford

Lester recently read, in the introduction of to a (newly-published) cyberpunk anthology, some quotes of what Bruce Sterling wrote. Bruce wrote these incisive observations in his own fanzine back in the 80s. The observations are still as cutting today. Well, Lester hereby commits to not doing any such thing. Modern life is perplexing enough without some wiseacre columnist saying the things which you, by golly, wish you had thought of first.

Speaking of modern life, or maybe perplexing, Lester and The Swill had a conference, let's call it the Long Branch conference due to the ~~propinquity~~ proximity of the TTC loop and GO station of the same name. Lester was Churchill and The Swill was Stalin, or was that vice-versa? No one ~~en~~ wants to be Roosevelt: dead too soon. Which reminds Lester that another ~~diatribe~~ exposition on TTC routes and Long Branch loop is well overdue, given that major changes resulted in through Queen car service back in 1993 or so. Alas, this column probably does not have space for such an important topic; another time maybe.

Back in issue 17, Graeme comments on a past "Pissing", that one should "never assume a reader is au courant in SF lit". Hence Lester's warning that one should carefully avoid virtual reality stories, which are an au courant trop in SF today. Well, fair enough, Graeme can now doubly avoid VR and save himself some valuable reading time to read something more valuable. However, it is a bit worrisome that old ~~type~~ time fans might be cheerfully ignorant of ~~th~~ what is being written today.

Look, Lester stopped by the skiffy section in Lillain Smith library (also home of the Merrill collection). The skiffy section is a big one, certainly biggest in Toronto, which means biggest in the known universe, what with Toronto being the centre of the universe etc etc. Under "Z", there were considerably more books by Sara Zeittel than there were by Roger Zelazny, and the Zeittel were mostly nice new hardcovers, while many of the Zelaznys were

battered old paperbacks. The lesson here is clear: the newer stuff is what newer fans are reading, possibly by preference, but almost certainly by availability. For old time fans to be not even trying, a wee bit, to be au courant just means that old time fans are talking about stuff that's just not relevant to younger fans. Whether that's old fandom feuds or authors you need to hunt ip in musty second-hand stores. So at least a token effort to keep up with that is au courant might go a long way to being able to talk in new fan's language.

That being said, Lester firmly believes that new fans, at least of the literary side, read "The Science Fiction Hall of Fame" because there are a lot of imaginative stories there. Stories that are not quite conceivable today, kind of like the edicarian life found in the Burgess shales is not quite concivable today either.

There's nothing wrong with being a 20th century fan, nor to be an observer rather than a participant (probably a theme with Swill, eh wot?). After an admission like that, though, there's no place for "why do the young fans not follow tradition" kind of questions. (Which, to be fair, Lester does not fully detect in Gareme.)

Finally, since this has already run overtime, Lester has something to comment on from Immortal Confusion. There was a panel with a name somethink like "Diversity in SF", and was in one of the BIG rooms and was pretty fully. So the whole thing started, and after a minimum of introduction, a womoan on the panel said "SF is totally diverse and welcoming". To the assorted gasps from the audience, wshe said, "You become an sf fan by working at conds, and if you come and volunteer for a con, you will be accepted. Cons will accepty anyone as a volunteer."

Lester may be paraphrasing a bit freely, but that was the gist. A riot then broke out....well no, unfortunately. The woman, who was obviously a senior fan, and quite white, pretty munch maintained here "you becomd a fan by working for a con, and anyone can volunteer to work for a con, therefore SF is totally open and welcoming" line.

Thing is, even if Lester agreed with her chain of logic (he does not, as a matter of fact), a quick head swivel in the panel's audience showed a very large number of white people, plus a couple of what Lester guesses are called "African Americans" in the states, as well as an oriental (author?). The fact is that ~~congoers~~ con-goers are not a particularly diverse crowd, even in a suburb of Detroit which is famous for arab and Iraqi populations (Lester drove down to Warren for falafel type meals). Lester assumes that con-goers are a more diverse crowd than con organizers, although that is an assumption. SF is a pretty white sort of thing, and at least in the panels and events that Lester attends, is a white an aging sort of thing. Lots of white and grey hair, and entirely too many beards.

Lester would guess that genre consumers are a bit more diverse than "active fans", but even there, it's probably pretty white. There are all sorts of people on the streetcar (which runs to Long Branch, of course), and some of them are reading SF, but most of them are....white. Although young. (Lester does not ~~an~~ necessarily approve of their reading. Lots are reading Martin's big series, and most of those are reading one of the first books. They should escape while they can!) (Lester gave up partway through the second book, and has no regrets.)

Since we are talking about old time fandom, ~~Lester was~~ the death of Frederik Pohl is a sad event. Lester recently read "The Way The Future Was", and went to Fred's blog. There's the RIP note. Fred died September 2nd. Not only was he as old-time a fan as there was, he was blogging up until the day before his death. That's probably the best way for a fan to go, with boots on....and apparently having pretty much finished a sequel to The way The Future Was. Lester looks forward to reading it. RIP Fred.

Flogging a Dead Trekkie:

Violating the ~~Taboos~~ Norms of Science Fiction

Part 3 of 8 – Introspective Tales

James William Neilson

Malzberg's Taboos of Science Fiction or in my terminology, Norm Violations. These are story concepts and/or plots that if written -- if the norms are violated -- are unpublishable; no professional editor in the genre will touch these stories with a three-metre pole, and certainly would never, ever publish them.

NORM VIOLATION TWO: Introspective Tales

"Material which is highly internalized. That is, science fiction written from the point of view of a meditative and introspective central character whose perceptions are the central facet of the work, whose reactions to the events of the story are more important than the story itself."

Okay, I like this kind of stuff. I really don't see why this is hated so much other than it is hard to write an introspective tale that is also an action piece. If all you want is a pure action-adventure space opera, or a Campbellesque problem-solving story, then an introspective protagonist is really going to turn you off. As I said, I enjoy this type of story. I think that this type of story has strong value. I think that it is this type of story that raises the genre to high art. And it is also the type of story, like anything else, that you don't want a steady diet of -- everything in moderation and all that...

Norm Violation Two is also very similar to that of Norm Violation Four -- there is some cross-over here. And the usual response is

-- where's the story? Because, in the classical sense, there isn't one, or there isn't much of one. The science fiction approaches realistic mimetic fiction (aka mainstream) but it ceases to have plot as its prime driver. It may also ask or demand more from the reader, which is not a horrible thing at all. However, if the intention of the reader is to chill out after a long day of mental exercise at work; this type of story may be an unwelcome surprise and could end up poisoning the well for any future stories of this type or from this particular author. Especially if it has been hyped in the back cover blurb to seem like it has a classical plot -- false advertising really ticks people off. Therefore, for short fiction, especially within the magazines, editors will tend to not opt for this kind of story as it can produce negative subscriber reaction. Anthologies can be kinder, dependant upon theme...

So, what about my story? Well there are two stories, maybe three, that would fit under this violation -- though one violates both Norm Two and Norm Four, so we'll save that one for later. The one that best fits Norm Violation Two is doubly evil it; it contains two different introspective tales that are only the most tenuously linked to one another. The story also has mild undertones of Norm Violation One and a slight pinch of Clarke's History Lesson (just a miligram at the most). As far as the webstats go, not a lot of people read SWILL, so I am probably not damaging the experiment by providing the story title, which is Making Stones.

Making Stones has already been rejected by Market #1 and Market #2 and currently resides in a slushpile with Market #3.

The Title of my Norm Violation One story is Taking Care of Business which is currently out at Market #2 having been rapidly rejected at Market #1 -- they did not like it at all. More progress on the experiment next time...This story is currently out for consideration at Market #1 and I will report on its progress next time.

Scribbling on the Bog Wall: Letters of Comment

James William Neilson

As I write this, there are one and one half LoCs this time around. My comments are, of course, in glorious pudmonkey.

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August 28, 2013

Dear Neil/Jim:

Many thanks for Swill 18...it's taken a while to get to it, given I am still frantically job hunting. Something has to give soon, and I hope it's not me. Anyway, a few comments to try to fill a page.

In this province, my main documents like my SIN card, my birth certificate card and health card do not expire, but the plastic eventually rots. I could use replacement cards for each of these, but it's a giant cash grab for the province, and the health card will need to be renewed periodically, as opposed to the red and white one I've had forever. There's also a non-driver's licence ID card I'd like to get, but that's a cost as well.

Well my new Quebec birth certificate has arrived -- it is a piece of paper, unplasticiised, that I am NOT to plasticise or laminate and that should I do so, this action would void and invalidate the document. Oh, and on top of that, the birth certificate makes absolutely no attempt to make it difficult to forge and thus, would be easier to forge than my old expired birth certificate. SHRUG

The City of Toronto was also forcibly amalgamated some time ago, with the idea that taking apart a level of government would save a lot of money. It didn't happen, because that one level of

government was replaced with regional councils. I live just down the street from the old Etobicoke City Hall, now the Etobicoke Civic Centre, where the council meets. This costs even more now, and there was never any savings to begin with.

Same thing here in Hamilton, except the old City of Hamilton, was strongly in favour of amalgamation and was glad that the province rammed this through. SIGH... We will see what happens with the campaign, but the province will not budge on this issue and only an NDP government might, possibly but not probably, be open to discussion.

That's one thing I noticed...I started my fannish/SF reader career with hope and aspirations for the future, and at some point, or a particular age, the hope and aspirations went away, the future looked more dystopian than utopian, and we started being more reminiscent of the past, the good old days. More than just SF fans go through this; I am sure we all do. Reality reared its ugly head, to be sure, but I wonder if there is a particular point when that happens, and what the circumstances are to cause it. Very true, government is less for the public and more for the corporations, as if we were fountains of unending amounts of money.

It looks dark right now and who knows, we could still end up with a Gibsonian cyberpunkesque dystopian corporate society sliding down the tubes to total environmental collapse; we may also turn the whole thing around and create a completely new global society that is more utopian (by our standards). Nothing is determined yet. I am a cautious optimist -- though the current trends do indeed point to dystopia...

I still read SF, though, but I have a pile of unread books on the shelf, and I am more willing to ditch a book that just isn't entertaining me than I used to be. Even legendary names in the genre get back on the shelf when they are dull. Perhaps I need a new genre when reality gets really ugly, and I need to forget about it for a while, and take a mental vacation.

Personally, I am all over the map. In my fiction reading: right now I am reading *A Turn of Light* by Julie Czerneda and also Heinlein's *The Moon is a Harsh Mistress* (I didn't start with the juveniles so I didn't read much of Heinlein and someone told me the whole plot of this novel before I got around to reading it when I was younger; anyway, I am reading it now). And I have some British SF to catch up on as well...

My loc...I must have been pretty pissed off by some of the things I read online that day. I still want to see your results and reasons. I have heard of a new literary SF convention in Montreal coming up next year, and I hope I can be there for it.

Your tour dates...we weren't at Fan eXpo, but we will be at SFCOntario 4 (we have a vendor's table) and Ad Astra. We hope to be at the London Worldcon...the Texas Worldcon starts tomorrow as I type. And, I think Reversed Polarity is a one-shot convention celebrating the 50th anniversary of Doctor Who, so I don't think there will be a second one.

Yeah, I didn't think it would take too long for Montreal to form a new literary con. I won't be attending Reversed Polarity -- is this the last gasp of TCON? I will be attending the London Worldcon (don't know if for two or three days) as our trip to the UK is to see friends who live in the north of England.

Made the page, so I am done. See you with the next issue, and I hope this makes it in time.

Yours, Lloyd Penney

Okay Lloyd, will see you at SFCOntario -- the next ish will be out in time for that con. Plus, on Friday night there will be a SWILL party...

In the section eFanzines received, Felicity reviews Swill @ 30 #11 where she says, "...it sounds like there was some bullying in the original Swill, which still seems like a bad thing to me. For fairness, I read Swill #2 to see for myself, and it makes much more sense if you take it as good-natured punk sadomasochism than if you take it at face value. I guess it depends on whether you feel included or excluded by the zine's attitude."

Bullying, I remember that. So much fun... The joy of been beaten up every day at school in grade six. Why; because I was a "traitor" and a "frog" who had committed the heinous crime of being born in Quebec, that the core French that I learned in Montreal was light parsecs ahead of what was being taught in Ontario, that curriculum in the Quebec school system back then was about one year ahead of the curriculum in Ontario, that I was a Catholic attending regular public school (due to the timing of the move, my parents couldn't get us into the local Catholic school for that year). And to top it all off, this behaviour was supported by the school principal whom I recall my father referring to as a "fanatical Orangeman". Yeah, I know bullying; only they had a different term for it back then, patriotism. I really don't think that SWILL was bullying. Though, in the worldview of 2013, it probably would be to some people -- to which I say; whatever.

Just for the record, the people involved in the original SWILL (and the two of us still involved in the current SWILL) were not the "in-crowd" or anywhere near the centres of fannish power, back in 1981. We did attack the elitism of the self appointed trufen as well as any attributes that we associated with them (e.g. The Average SF Fan article) and we used an 90cm brush to spread our tar with -- collateral damage occurred and innocents/semi-innocents may have been harmed in the process. While this was an unfortunate occurrence, in the spirit of SWILL (then

and now), our official response is: "Grow a backbone and get off my lawn!"

Just one small point, this review is appearing in the September 2013 issue of BCSFAzine for an issue of SWILL that came out in January of 2012. You do realise that 7 issues of SWILL have come out since issue #11 (issue #19 will be out in a few days time with this review as a LoC in it)?

Anyway, hope all is well out in BCSFA-land, and from the Lord of SWILL a big hello to all I once knew out there (Surrey Contingent Rules Okay)...hoping to snag another precious Elron again this year.

Endnote: Demographic Snapshot

James William Neilson

So, just some general notes on the first survey as well as from coded participant observation fieldnotes. The majority of survey respondents were people who attended SFContario and Ad Astra with a very small amount of Polaris attendees and still none from Fan Expo. Therefore, the current data is skewed toward Fannish Fans with virtually no data yet collected from Fans.

The results mirror Lester's column this ish.

The average SF fan today is a European-descent, 42 year-old, male, married, without kids, with a post-secondary degree or diploma, who earns an average of \$63,000 per year, who is an early adopter of new technology, and tends to read science fiction and fantasy just slightly more than they watch it, who reads over 20 books per year and watches at least 4 hours of programming per week within the genre, whose primary fan activity is to attend conventions and they attend at least 2 per year, they have never been a member of a SF fan club or organisation, just barely (50.6%) view fandom as a way of life, they have never published a fanzine, and they have been involved in SF fandom for at least 20 years.

So, thus far, I am only capturing the responses of those who have been long-time fans, most of whom -- like myself -- are greying. I am not getting data from the younger crowd, period. I think that I shall get one of my comsci students to design a survey app for release -- it seems that even an online survey is not catching the under 30s...

Okay, that's it until next time...

(Backcover, Portrait of the Anthropologist as a Young Droog #2)

