

SWILD



#13

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SWILL

Issue #13 Spring 2012

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Editorial: Well, Some of it was True...

Neil Jamieson-Williams

*Sci-Fi calling
And I was there too;
You know what they say,
Well some of it was true.'*

I am now on the borderlands of "old fart" status; subjectively defined and usually requiring the holder of the status to have at least a chronological age of 60 or more, though for those who constantly harp about "the good old days" this status can be achieved in their forties. Which means, although I am not quite yet and "old fart"; I can certainly pass for one. It also means that I have "been around..."

As I briefly mentioned in a previous issue (#9 Editorial for the fannishly pedantic) I did not start reading science fiction with the juveniles; I began with adult science fiction in the form of Arthur C. Clarke, I then tried a little Asimov (which I didn't care too much for, e.g. the Foundation trilogy and I am one of those few heretics that consider The Gods Themselves to be his best novel), discovered Niven, had a brief taste of LeGuin (didn't like Rocannon's World - it was more like a fantasy than science fiction) but I wouldn't pursue her works further until about 1980 when I read The Dispossessed, then Ellison (which led me to Spinrad and Silverberg), and Malzberg (which lead me to Moorcock and the New Worlds writers), and so on. Along the way, I would be introduced to other authors by friends and fellow genre consumers/fans. Certain authors also wrote non-fiction, in particular from the list above, Ellison and LeGuin (and later, Malzberg) which would have a major influence on the development of the SWILL attitude.

True, Swill was begat as middle finger salute in response to the BNF reaction to the surreal prank of the Maplecon Slandersheet.

¹ Apologies to Joe Strummer...

Nevertheless, once Swill was initiated, my take² on the issues of science fiction and SF fandom was strongly influenced by the non-fiction writings of those three authors.

LeGuin and Ellison were my primary influences and it is from these authors that I received the notion that science fiction could be a powerful literary form, a form that could move beyond genre fiction. That the walls should come down between the genre ghettos and the literary mainstream, that science fiction should step beyond the ghetto walls and enter the community of literature. LeGuin would evoke this call in a mix of quiet academic tones and firm calls to the barricades; reason and emotion intermingled with action. Ellison was more like some doom-and-gloom homeless street preacher who's just had his megaphone all charged up again. Here we have similar ideas stated/screamed with anger and calls for retribution and declarations that the day of judgement is near and/or human extinction is imminent.

From both Ellison and Malzberg (with an occasional quip from LeGuin) I received the view that it was hopeless to expect that science fiction would ever live up to its full potential, to be the literature that it can be. The editors, the publishers, the development drones, the producers, the literary critics will never allow this come to pass. Nor will the fans. And as for the writers, they are as much to blame; due to self-censorship to the market, knee-jerk acceptance of the dominant viewpoint of the fans and the gatekeepers, and just simple fear. Science fiction already deals with the unknown, but it is far less reassuring to abandon all safety lines of genre convention and leap into the dark; it is even more fearful when one has no guarantee of receiving any acknowledgement for at least making the attempt and that there is a very strong probability that this fearless act will result in one being vilified, drawn and quartered, and labelled as publishable by both science fiction fandom and the gatekeepers of the genre. The very action of attempting to write science fiction as literature can be an act that is career destroying.

And so it goes... Ellison, LeGuin, and Malzberg have all written essays on the subject since the early 1980's, but the only insights are discussions on the growth of media SF. Their general collective opinion about media SF is very similar to that

² Which doesn't necessarily speak for Swill columnists such as Rainsford and Hoyt.

of many literary fans; if the misuse of science fiction's potential was the normative behaviour in the print medium, it is the second³ most paramount goal in the electronic mediums. No hope, no enlightenment can be expected from these mediums; only possibly, but improbably, can the print medium offer a way through to the transition from commercial art to art.

Maybe, and maybe not. Point of context, all three of these writers are at least 20 years my senior - they come from the time period when the magazine was king, before the great collapse of the magazines in the late 1950's. They have strong memories of the genre as it was and as it developed in the late 1940's, through the 1950's, and into the 1960's. Not I, I was not there, yet. I cannot speak to this time period, the Golden Age and the emergence of New Wave. It would not be until 1969 when I entered the scene as a genre consumer. Thus, I became a genre consumer within the context that books not the magazines dominated print medium science fiction, the electronic mediums still did very little science fiction and most of it was of very poor quality, and the Golden Age was long gone and New Wave had already established itself. Thus, print was the major medium and the reader had an eclectic buffet to choose from. And choose I did, reading works well before I should have, e.g. *Beyond Apollo* and often not fully understanding the work. As I came of age, the New Wave was fading -- beaten back by a reactionary counter-Wave attempting to restore the Golden Age one more. While the New Wave was pushed to the margins, the goal of returning to the Golden Age failed.

Here we begin to see the emergence in science fiction that which has appeared within other art forms and throughout culture itself over the past thirty five years. The "fragmentation" bemoaned by fandom begins in the late 1970's - and not because of the rise of electronic media SF as is usually claimed. Electronic medium SF was still relatively sparse at that time, and most of it was banal; too banal to usurp print medium science fiction. No, the change began within the beloved print medium as the mass imploded under the counter-Wave reaction - never to re-appear. In the aftermath the sub-genres (always present in the past, but with less substantial form) manifested themselves as distinct and coherent entities; hard-science, soft-science, science fantasy, new space opera, military, alternate history, literary, etc. These distinct sub-genre entities grew slowly at first, then accelerating during the 1980's (assisted by the appearance of

³ The primary goal being to make money at all costs.

cyberpunk⁴) and the true rise of electronic media SF), until by the late 1990's the stage has been set for the new millennium and the present. A present in which there is a fragmented genre of niche sub-genres and multiple mediums that are in themselves akin to sub-genres; a state that is not unique to science fiction itself but is dominant within the culture itself.

Can science fiction be a literature within this environment? Can there be literature at all? I believe that it can be, though the terms literature, literary, and genre may require some re-evaluation; fortunately, this has already been done. Outside of the ranks of the literati (the current critics of literature who write/present for the major media outlets) and academics of the discipline of English literature; the definition of these terms tend to be thus:

Literature is the art of the written word and can be categorised as poetry, fiction, and non-fiction. Our focus here shall be on fiction, which includes realistic fiction, non-realistic fiction, and faction (those works inspired by or based upon a true story). Depending upon who is creating up the categories, there are about 20 to 30 genres of fiction - many including sub-genres. The most pitiful hackwork and the works of whomever you view as being paramount in the cannon of English literature are all literature, period.

Genre is any category of fiction that tends to use a particular set of literary devices, tone, and content that identifies it as a unique and/or separate body of work within literature. Thus, the definition does not create a binary opposition of X is literature and Y is genre (therefore the work of troglodyte hacks); all fiction is written within a genre (and there about 10 genres within non-fiction).

Literary is the term used by - usually the literati - that defines what has been determined to be important and valid forms of literature. It is an elite definition that is intentionally exclusionary and marks a preference for realistic fiction within the genres of philosophical fiction, experimental fiction, satire, and the nonfiction novel - though it can and does include non-realistic fiction provided that it falls within one of these

⁴ Which was not to everybody's liking. Cyberpunk was despised both by those longing for a return to the Golden Age and by those who were prominent within the New Wave movement itself, e.g. Ellison and Malzberg. In my opinion the cyberpunk movement was a kind of fusion between elements of the Golden Age and the New Wave. Regardless, cyberpunk is now dated and passé.

preferred genres. And it is a term that is used to exclude most of the genres within speculative fiction, as well as the majority of the other fiction genres within literature.

Is science fiction literary fiction? Sometimes, sometimes it is. Most of the time it isn't and most of the time neither are the majority of works written within the other genres of fiction. That is just the way things are. Does that mean that science fiction is sub-standard? The literati would quickly voice the affirmative and I would caution pause and reflection and context. When I took a few, very few, courses in English literature during my undergraduate degree, I was exposed to what was deemed the current exemplars of literary fiction - few of these works have entered into the canon of "classics" of late 20th century literature; in fact, the majority are out of print and forgotten. What makes a work a literary classic, I think, is the skill of craft, combined with a mixture of unique/brilliant use of tone, voice, and literary device, that speaks - in some manner - to the human condition, and can continue to do so decades and/or centuries after it was written.

The definition of literary fiction is subjective and the majority of the present works that have been accorded this status will lose that status in the brief passage of a decade. They possess that status in the now only. Is most of literature, literary? No, it is not. As per Sturgeon's Revelation/Law, "That's because 90% of everything is crud." The quest for art is not safe, it is not secure, and it may not find a large audience. In the present world, the world of the multimedia conglomerates, art is potentially unprofitable and viewed as a barely respectable add-on. They want the sure thing, the guaranteed money-maker (and this is true whether or not you're talking about print or any other medium); if your work can satisfy that criteria and also be art, great. If it cannot, forget it. To paraphrase LeGuin, the quest for garbage never fails, but the quest for art will fail 90% of the time.

I have written hours of radio drama that I fully and honestly admit is crap⁵ and I am proud of that work⁶, nevertheless. Occasionally an episode or a week's run of episodes may possess

⁵ On the Rocks Series 1 (5 minutes/250 episodes) and Series 2 (5 minutes/150 episodes) - a five day per week serial space opera set within the main asteroid belt.

⁶ No so much for the quality, but for the sheer persistence of being able to write and produce these two series under tight time constraints and a very limited budget.

the odd glimmer of brilliance - but most of the time it was rubbish. I have also written a few radio dramas that I am very proud of that did not appeal to the audience here in Canada but found an audience in Europe; dramas⁷ that I still think to this day are my best work in fiction. And I have written many others that are mediocre to good, and that is that.

Science fiction can at times be literary and a lot of the time it can be absolute shit or again to paraphrase LeGuin, just noise. The same can be said for any other genre of literature, including that most pretentious of genres, literary fiction. Is science fiction a failed genre? Absolutely not. Does it live up to its full potential; not often. Sometimes this does bother me, but it does not bother me enough to scream obscenities from the street corner or wallow in self-loathing. If nobody at all was attempting work approaching art, I would actually care. But there are enough writers who do make the attempt (and very often they fail to pull it off; and some of them actually do accomplish art). Yes, there are many writers who just grind out shit for money (and some of that is at least mediocre); but, at the end of the day, is this really such an awful thing? They know it is hack work and we know it too - as consenting adults, perhaps there is nothing wrong with that. Everybody needs some mindless fluff now and again.

Because, what science fiction does best and when it is, I think, the most artistic is not when it is invoking a sense of wonder, but when it is summoning up the dread engines of the night. I personally don't think that a steady diet of that material is healthy for the soul - some occasional junk food is highly recommended and fortunately, that is not in short supply.

⁷ By the Shores of the Tranquil Sea (55 minutes/1 episode) and The Time Tracks Set (45 minutes/6 episodes).

Thrashing Trufen: A Thorough Tolchocking

Neil Jamieson-Williams

1. tolchock

n. Nadsat slang meaning: a swing or blow

- A. Quit throwing tolchocks at me fanzine!
- B. A tolchock to the yarbles hurt him badly.

2. tolchock

v. Nadsat slang meaning: to beat or strike another person

- A. We were about to tolchock the starry Trekkie when the millicents arrived.
- B. He tolchocked the article and razrezzed the rest of the fanzine into malenky bits.

There will be no waffling, no attempt to give any benefit of any doubt, no boilerplate that this refers to some-but-not-all -- science fiction fans can be self-inflated, troglodytic, provincial, back-biting, cowardly assholes. For some fans, this is simply their factory default setting. For the majority of fans, they are assholes some of the time. Is this some great and wonderful insight on my part; of course not. It is a simple deduction based on the following sources; what SF writers have said about their audience (fans), what fans have written about themselves (fan histories, fanzines, blogs), and personal experience (for the most part recollections).

Let's begin with the writers, shall we. I will limit the field to those whose essays on science fiction, which often sidebar into science fiction fandom, I know well: Harlan Ellison, Ursula K. LeGuin, and Barry N. Malzberg.

Ellison pulls no punches; he has open contempt for most SF fans and for good reasons too. Fans don't know boundaries; fans don't believe that writers should receive a liveable level of compensation for their work, fans think that they know more about a writer's stories than the writer does, that fans lack sophistication, fans are middle-class (with a tendency toward lower middle-class) bozos, fans insist upon placing authors on a pedestal only so that they can knock them down, fans read any

perceived or real negative traits in an author's fictional characters as evidence of the writer's own personality flaws, and so on. He has also said many other negative things about science fiction fans over the years and most of it justifiable. And then there is the elevator story -- this undying tale is the SF fan urban myth that the evil Ellison threw an annoying fan down the elevator shaft at (I think, the 1974) Worldcon in Washington, D.C. It never happened. Then again, we are talking about Harlan Ellison -- the self-appointed gadfly of speculative fiction... There are enough people inside and outside of SF fandom who think that he is an asshole, period. Regardless, he does make valid points.

LeGuin is much softer than Ellison on the subject, but that is in part an illusion. On the surface she mildly criticises SF fandom for being conservative on issues of literary quality and the desire to maintain the genre ghetto. Yet the subtext, in cool tones, states that there is a substantial segment of the SF fan population that strongly desires that the genre be nothing more than infantile escapism and resist any attempt to expand the potential of the genre. The genre ghetto is their "safe place"; the safety of voluntary committal to a mental institution. Sometimes one can be more biting in a quiet, clinical voice than that of a screaming fury.

Malzberg places more emphasis upon the genre itself, but when he does focus upon fandom he makes some similar comments to that of Ellison and LeGuin -- but without the anger or the clinical tone. Here we have angst and a small bit of self-loathing for participating in this incestuous environment; the cross-over between fans and writers and editors and publishers, the entire SF community. The juvenile emphasis in the genre and in the behaviour of fans, the deep conservatism, the middle class fear of the different and non-ordinary. At least in this portrait, the blame is shared.

As for the fans themselves; they may use multiple voices, but in the end, they say the same damn thing. They agree in part with Ellison, LeGuin, and Malzberg -- in part, because what they usually agree with is that these behaviours are to be found within X segment of fandom. Of course X segment will say these negative elements are only to be found in Y fandom, and so it goes... Taken from a wide, collective POV -- it can be said that fandom does agree with the above critique made by the writers.

Further exploration of SF fan history and other fan documents available on the web provides more than ample evidence to support the statement made above; that SF fans are indeed "self-inflated, troglodytic, provincial, back-biting, cowardly assholes." The evidence is very strong and thus I will accept it as such; while the evidence could be made even stronger through the use of quantitative content analysis and statistical software, I have no desire to devote several hundred person hours to this task - which would only confirm what I have already stated.

As for personal experience, it largely agrees with what has already been said. I have observed this behaviour over the years, I have at times participated in this behaviour as a fan - or viewed it from the side-lines - and thus do firmly support the title of this article; SF fandom is deserving of a thorough tolchocking. Where I would like to place my emphasis is on the self-inflated, passive-aggressive, superiority/inferiority complex I have observed in fandom over the years.

At the core, these perceptions stretch back to the very early days of fandom -- the period known as First to Third fandom (more or less) -- the 1930's to early 1940's. I will not rehash what has been done in personal historical accounts or enter into any debate about the "numbered fandom" time periods⁸. My focus is on one of the major SF fandom feuds from this time and the repercussions it continues to have on the present.

First, some context... In the 1930's the dominant medium was print which was a mass market while simultaneously distributing to niche markets (niche marketing is not new). This was true in particular for the magazine trade, especially for the pulp magazines. Within the pulps there were magazines for every genre and subgenre, from nurse romances to baseball fiction, to railroad adventures, to naval battle fiction, to science fiction, etc. Print fiction was the primary form of entertainment for the populace. Yes, there was cinema and the theatre, but next to radio, print fiction was the most inexpensive entertainment. The pulp short fiction magazines being paramount in that regard; they were viewed as cheap entertainment for the masses (and if you were of the middle class, you wouldn't be caught dead reading one of those magazines). The low status accorded to pulp fiction both for the writers and for the readers is one historical thread.

⁸ This was all well before I was born and covers a period when my parents were infants to about age eight or ten.

This was also the time of the Great Depression. For a large segment of the population, the economy had failed and doubt was now being cast upon capitalism itself. Alternatives such as socialism and communism were being advocated by reasonable people as was the brand new alternative of fascism. In the aftermath of World War I and with the rupture to the economic system caused by the Great Depression, many people perceived that the system had broken and that only a massive overhaul would remedy the situation. Radical ideals were no longer unthinkable and many people thought that only by radical change could there be any restoration to the civilised world. This is the second historical thread.

The major fan feud... I am going to simplify things (as always historical events are more complex than the popularised accounts made of them) here in my discussion (fan historians can pick nits later) as I have already dwelt more on this than I intended to. The feud was over the purpose of science fiction; one group viewed it as escapist genre fiction that (with hope) also inspired an interest in science and technology among the reading public, while the other group viewed science fiction as a social movement that could save the world (or at least make it a better place). In the initial struggles, the latter group appeared to trounce the former; however, at the end of the day, the former group won the feud. There are very few SF fans today that believe that science fiction is (or should be) a social movement.

The perception of science fiction as being a potentially world-changing pursuit through the act of writing and/or even just reading within the genre gave rise to the notion that science fiction was important. That science fiction could save the world... Later on (not that much later) was added the view that science fiction and science fiction fandom were superior to the rest of us "mundanes"; fans are slans (A. E. van Vogt's super-intelligent evolved humans from the novel Slan), and therefore, more intelligent than non-fans. This is re-echoed in the fan acronym FIAWOL (Fandom is a Way of Life). The counter-perception is that science fiction is escapist genre fiction and a good thing too; I just want to be entertained, don't try and bother me with art and politics and all that. Science fiction is a craft, no more and no less. This perception comes with a built in subtext of inferiority or persecution mentality; don't kick me, I'm already down. Don't laugh at me for reading John Goobly, Colonial Agent #37 -- didn't Tolkien say it is our "duty to escape..." Yes, he did. However, LeGuin also raised the

question, "From what is one escaping, and to what?" If your escape is into the phoney, into a cartoon-like world, that is only a wish fulfilment fantasy; you have escaped by locking yourself away in a mental institution.

Between the two poles of this binary presentation we have the usual continuum of variation between the extremes. Science fiction is a marvellous genre, a genre that can speak to the issues of our time and our accelerating technological pace of changes the way no other genre can; when we actually take the effort to do so. Otherwise, it is just another genre of fiction. It is not important. And, neither is science fiction fandom. Sorry (well not that sorry), but it isn't. These words may be tough for those who have volunteered many person-months organising conventions, editing newsletters, writing fanzines; people who want to perceive that all this unpaid labour was for something greater. They want to believe that science fiction and science fiction fandom has some higher purpose. But wanting to believe something doesn't make it an actuality; it really doesn't. To use the other fan acronym FIJAGH (Fandom is Just a God-damned Hobby), period. And science fiction is just a god-damned genre.

Pissing on a Pile of Old Amazings:

...a modest column by Lester Rainsford

How outrageous does one have to be today to get reactions? Or does the whole thing have to be published on Facebook and Twitter?

Toothless, we are toothless punks, chomping the dentures and reminiscing about the uprisings of '48. While everyone shambles by intent on their iPhone.

Editor's Note: Lester would appreciate some feedback on his columns...

Flogging a Dead Trekkie: Typical Fans

Neil Jamieson-Williams

In issue #10 I attempted to define the various types that are in connexion with SF fandom. Much of what I said there I still agree with, though there was a gross misinterpretation on my part with an email from Taral - thus, my definition of traditional fans is way off. I'm going to take another shot at this...

Genre consumers: These individuals consume science fiction and fantasy content in a variety of mediums from print to television to gaming, etc. They also have an interest in science fiction and fantasy collectables. They may attend conventions like Comic Con or Sci-Fi Fan Expo. People within this group do not identify themselves as SF fans.

Fans: These individuals consume science fiction and fantasy content in a variety of mediums from print to television to gaming, etc. They also have an interest in science fiction and fantasy collectables. They regularly attend conventions like Comic Con or Sci-Fi Fan Expo. People within this group identify themselves as SF fans; the male foursome from The Big Bang Theory would fit in this category. While it is possible that this type of fan could show up to Ad Astra or even SFContario, it is unlikely that this will occur - though, it would be probable that they may attend a fan-run convention like Polaris. The boundary between genre consumers and fans is a blurred one. If the person appears to be a genre consumer but they self identify themselves as a fan; the, they are a fan.

Active Fans: 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 may attend or they may regularly attend fan-run conventions like Polaris and Ad Astra --

they may also attend conventions like Comic Con or Sci-Fi Fan Expo. They may participate the organisation and running of fan-run conventions. They may participate in genre based online forums, newsgroups, Facebook pages, Twitter feeds, etc. They may participate in writing fan fiction, blogs, networking sites, and fanzines. They may create crafts, visual art forms, and performance art forms related to the genre. They may network and organise within the fan community. People within this group identify themselves as SF fans. Most fans who attend fan-run conventions are active fans. There are three major subtypes of active fan; literary fans, media fans, and artisan fans. Literary fans are those active fans that place an emphasis on print medium science fiction. Media fans are those active fans that place the emphasis upon electronic media science fiction. Artisan fans are those active fans that place an emphasis upon artisan aspects of science fiction (building models, art, crafts, costuming, filk, fanzines, etc.). These subtypes are not exclusive, but an active fan will make one of these subtypes primary.⁹

Traditional Fans: These are active fans who identify themselves as being members of a local geographically-bounded SF community and who may belong to a local or regional SF fan organisation/club. In the past - twenty years ago and earlier - traditional fans were fandom. SF fandom was focused around local and/or regional fan organisations; everything was local for the most part. Traditional fans acted as fonts of information and as gatekeepers.¹⁰ And most BNFs (Big Name Fans) arose out of the ranks of traditional fandom. Thirty years ago one way one could launch themselves into BNFdom was to have the disposable income to be part of a continental/intercontinental SF fan telephone tree.¹¹ Fan created their own emic¹² ideal types of specific

⁹ Just to clarify; I am primarily a literary fan (though only by a small margin), who is also a media fan, and an artisan fan. The bottom line is, which of these three takes priority in your identity as a science fiction fan?

¹⁰ I do question the utility of the gatekeeper role, from my recollection it only served create "trufan" exclusiveness - we are real fans and you're not...

¹¹ Back twenty or more years ago, long distance telephone calls were expensive, most people didn't have access to the internet, and there was no texting. A telephone tree was the fastest method to relay information across the continent.

¹² From the native's point of view - in this case the SF fan.

regional fandoms - the concept of a "mid-West fan" has probably lost all meaning except for those fans forty years of age and older. Back in my late teens I was a member of three different local SF clubs. These organisations were the focal points for fan communication and networking (both practical and social).

The rise of the web has winnowed the numbers of fan clubs. There are few organisations that continue to exist as actual fan clubs that have regular meetings, etc.¹³ Much of the local/regional fan activity moved online starting in the late 1990's and, although it has moved around on the internet (few use Yahoo groups anymore and almost everything has migrated to Facebook, for now), online is where the majority of fan activity takes place. With the decline of local clubs/organisations; traditional fandom has also declined. The traditional fans do bemoan this, but that is the way the technology is being used in our society overall. This is no something specific to fandom. But yes, it has diminished the numbers of traditional fandom and reduced their role as gatekeepers. Nevertheless, traditional fans do still exist.

So, there are the basic types I will be working with - for now. Further refining will take place as part of dialogue with various fans and through the SF Fan Survey that I will be conducting. Regardless, it is a base foundation to begin categorising within. Comments and suggestions are, of course, welcome.

¹³ I would hazard a speculation that almost all of the clubs that still survive have a major role in organising an annual convention that attracts at least 400 or more attendees.

Scribbling on the Bog Wall:

Letters of Comment

Neil Jamieson-Williams

As I write this, there is only two LoCs this time around. My comments are, of course, in glorious pudmonkey.

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March 11, 2012

Dear Neil:

Thanks for issue 12 of Swill @ 30...another busy weekend. I finally got myself a daytime job, working at an advertising agency in Mississauga, so letters like this may be short. I'll find out the hard way, I guess, or just type faster.

Goose-Stepping Towards Tomorrow...I had wondered if science fiction was a substitute version of the US' Manifest Destiny; if we can't take the whole continent, we'll go out and conquer the stars. Given how there's the old stereotype of nerdy little fanboys living in their parents' basement (I dislike this old meme, but there is always a kernel of truth in the middle), perhaps the young SF reader liked the authoritarian aspect because he was used to being told what to do, but in mentally assuming the role of the lead character in the story, he was finally in charge, confident, and had others do what he told them to do, a refreshing and empowering change. I must wonder, as we age, and we're presumably in charge of our own lives in a way we couldn't have had when we were kids, we no longer long for that era of adventure to the stars, and SF loses its appeal, and we find something else to read to exercise our brains, like suspense/detective/crime fiction. Much of the fandom connected with this other genre came from SF fandom.

Well the nerdy little fanboys do exist - I have actually met and observed some... Your comments about the authoritarian stream in SF does work for the past when the genre was perceived as a "children's/young adult" genre; however, it fails to explain the past 40 years. I would agree that as I passed my twenties I did try some other genres of fiction, and I still do read outside of science fiction, but discovered that much of the other genre fiction (and all fiction is genre fiction) was just as formulaic as SF and often more so if you read an author's entire body of work. SF does have the expectation that it is going to be more inventive, even when the attempt fails. But, I definitely agree that any desire on the part of the SF genre consumer for authoritarian adventures of the sort I outlined in issue #12, is a retreat into the infantile...

Any issues of Swill left to get? Have you been able to reconstitute a full set of issues yet?

Just issues #1 and #2... Didn't you say that you thought you had a copy of issue #3?

I also wonder about modern SF's quality over its quantity. Have a look in any issue of Locus, there's simply too much to read, and much of it is probably not to any given reader's taste. That's why I tend to stick to SF from the eras I liked most, the 60s, 70 and 80s. Familiar names, stories I like, and it's easier to say I've read most of it, too.

There are books that I re-read from the past and I also read new works as well. I am currently re-reading some Malzberg which I first read at too young an age to appreciate much of the content.

There is some pride in knowledge, and being able to relay to others the experiences you've had in putting together conventions and other events. You'd like to be able to do that, to help others as they stage cons, and send them to school so they have some warning of the problems to come. Because those newer fans are new, they probably don't know you've done all this before, and they may decide you don't know what you're talking about, or the best way to learn is to do and make all those mistakes themselves. Every generation of fans reinvents the square wheel. Roll your eyes, and let them learn, and perhaps you may have the perverse satisfaction of hearing them say, I wish I'd listened... We retired from convention management because we were tired, but also because we suspected that our experience was no longer relevant or usable. People's expectations of conventions change, their interests change, and hospitality laws change, too. Dealers now require contracts for tables; for me, your cheque was your reservation, here's what we intend to provide for you and the room, go have fun and sell out.

Hospitality suite have limited amounts of alcohol if any, mostly because of changes in liquor licensing laws, and a select few who

didn't like the idea of beer in a con suite, and reported it to the LLBO. Newer people will have newer, more relevant experiences, so it was time to go, to let others take charge and allow them to get and use their newer experience. People never thought we'd ever retire, and when we did, there was some level of resentment, how dare we just go? Saying no has become easy to say, but nothing says we can't volunteer here and there, or set up some events of our own. We just don't want to be on the convention committee any more.

All true. And yet, it was the same when we were the young ones - reinterpreting the SF convention for our generation and our interests. Sometimes we listened to the old guard and other times we re-invented square wheels. At the end of the day, the younger ones have to be given the freedom to run things their way, make their own mistakes, etc. If establishment fandom attempts to prevent this; the young ones will just go start their own conventions anyway.

The nostalgia of a past fannish era, even one I wasn't a part of myself, was part of fandom's charm when I first got into it. Its history added a dimension that many other hobbies don't have. Now that I've been around for 35 years, that history is that much more distant, and while there is still nostalgia connected with it, I am finding myself part of more recent history. Some have made the observation that fandom is dying, and the reason for that is that fandom, especially the fanzine fandom I am still enjoying is the most unwelcoming group I could ever meet. I find my respect for the senior group, supposedly at fanzine fandom's heart, is lessening all the time because they use the virtual distance of the Net to slag others and cast aspersions on others they suddenly don't like, and I've been the target more than once, never knowing what brought that on. More than once recently, I have been tempted to tell them all where to stick it, start my own fanzine, and distribute it to those I still like, and to Canadian fans to promote the hobby here. I find a change in direction bumps you out of a rut, and I may be in a rut now. Time will tell.

Fandom is not dying, it just continues to change. Traditional fandom is indeed dying due to technological change and different foci of social interaction within society as a whole - though it is quite probable that traditional fandom will not go extinct, but continue to survive within the habitable niches that larger urban centres provide. Fanzine fandom is in decline for a similar reason - the current preference for blogging - but, like traditional fandom, fanzine fandom will continue to persist. Once the novelty of blogging runs its course, fanzine fandom may

experience resurgence - though I can never see it reaching the prominence again that it once held in the palaeodigital¹⁴ era or earlier.

Why don't you publish your own fanzine???

That was a longer loc than I expected. Off it goes, many thanks, and we will see you at Ad Astra.

Yours, Lloyd Penney.

Talk with you at Ad Astra...

March 30, 2012

Kevin Atchison -- relayed via Lester Rainsford

"I had a chuckle going thru Swill and seeing some very old "Fanzines" that I thought had been "consigned to flames of woe" some time ago. It is good to see that some of the old enthusiasm refuses to die. Give my regards to Neil and may he keep up with the imaginative work. But it is no Reticulum!"

Hi Kevin,

Yes, I had thought Sirius was long lost, but there it was in the Swill archive in Lester's possession. No fancic fanzines for me these days - just SWILL. Of course SWILL is no Reticulum. Nevertheless, I think that the old issues of Swill still stand up, but I am not too certain that the same could be said for Reticulum. Nevertheless, Reticulum was good for its time... Send me an email, sometime. Neil

R. G. Cameron

The Frenetic Fanac Review #1

SWILL # 12 - February 2012

Faned: Neil Jamieson-Williams

Available at <http://swill.uldunemedia.ca>

Long story short, SWILL used to be a rude and crude crudzine sticking pins in the somewhat overly inflated ego-balloons of fen

¹⁴ Roughly from 1950 to 1995. The Lower Palaeodigital from 1950 to 1970, Middle Palaeodigital from 1971 to 1980, Upper Palaeodigital from 1981 to 1995. Digital era begins post 1995...

everywhere, or such was the intention circa 1981. Neil revived it last year in the guise of same, but in actual fact it may be the most important and significant SF zine published in Canada today, for its purpose is to definitively define what fandom was and is through discussion and research. A dry, academic exercise? Academic for sure, for that's what Neil is these days, but not dry, rather a juicy morsel saturated and dripping with the old Swill spirit, albeit far more articulate and meaningful than it was thirty years ago.

Again, thanks for the kind comments regarding SWILL. I do disagree with your statement that SWILL "may be the most important and significant SF zine published in Canada today..." I do not believe that I am alone here, either. Your fellow fan historians Messrs Taral and Spencer do not appear to hold the same opinion regarding the revival of SWILL.

Of course, one has to get used to the 'Pudmonkey' font replicating a manuscript produced by a typewriter with dirty keys, but that is merely the price of admission.

Hey Graeme, didn't you read the LoC column from issue #12? Pudmonkey is now only used for article titles and my comments in the LoC column... or do you also have a problem with VT Corona?

Now having praised SWILL for dissecting fandom most gloriously, naturally the current issue has very little to do with fandom, and instead dwells on how the evolving world is turning out to even worse than dystopian SF predicted.

Ah, rest assured, fandom has been dissected in this issue...

In his editorial, titled "Goose-stepping toward Tomorrow," Neil writes:

"There is an unfortunate and strong authoritarian undercurrent within science fiction... Ursula K. LeGuin in her 1975 essay "American SF and the Other" also touches on this theme as she questions the preference for, "authoritarianism, the domination of ignorant masses by a powerful elite...democracy is quite forgotten. Military virtues are taken as ethical ones... It is a perfect baboon patriarchy"... And I agree, the passion for authoritarianism in SF is a retreat to pre-human primate social organisation."

Neil then talks about the typical SF authoritarian setup, cuddly father figure benevolent dictators ruling over featureless masses for their own good, etc., etc. I personally am not so sure this reflects right wing tendencies on the part of the authors so much

as laziness. It's a lot easier to concentrate on a few nifty characters and leave the rest of humanity in the background than it is to conjure up a radically novel society whose cultural mores and motivations are mind-bogglingly different from our own and unlike anything in human history to date.

Still, what are the implications of Neil's premise, why is it important to note? He proposes that the SF in question has proven distressingly prescient, that we are in fact moving towards such a future. He states:

"...since the end of the Cold War, authoritarianism has been on the rise within the Western democracies. Civil liberties have been eroded (for our own safety), social programmes gutted, the average wage continues to shrink, the middle class is in decline, while our politicians vote themselves substantial pay increases, and our corporate CEOs hire analysts to recommend that annual compensation is inadequate and must be increased, the right to strike and collective bargaining is being curtailed, and the financial sector was permitted (due to the relaxing of government regulation) to create the worst recession since the Great Depression and handed the taxpayer, i.e. the average citizen the bill. The current trends point toward a more authoritarian future, everywhere..."

I happen to believe he is correct.

That is because you are a perceptive individual...

On the positive side, our near future will eventually make the old dystopian SF look like Utopian SF, and as a result SF will regain its popularity as harmless escapist literature. Just goes to show, there's a silver lining in every cloud..

By the way, Neil is looking for copies of the three issues of his 1984 zine DAUGHTER OF SWILL, MOTHER OF SCUM, his own having been destroyed in a basement flood (I think). If anybody owns one or more of them, he'd appreciate scanned versions being emailed to him.

Thanks for the additional request, especially as any copies would probably be found amidst the collections of Vancouver and Pacific North-West fandom.

Unfortunately for us, his opinion of his 1975 zine SIRIUS SCIENCE FICTION is "I have re-read the issue and to be blunt, my content really does suck, end of story. The only excuse (albeit lame) that I can give is that at the time that Sirius #1 was published I was 16 years of age..."

Unfortunate, that is, in the sense he is reluctant to scan it and share it with us. Personally, I think it would be representative of the teenage fan mindset of that bygone era and consequently a most interesting blast from the past... To be clear, I don't subscribe to a desire to read only the 'good' zines, the 'quality' zines, the 'best' zines, and so on. I have a historian's perspective. I'm interested in ALL zines (in the SF genre) be they award-winning masterpieces or crudzines, beautiful works of art or hopeless messes.

As Harlan Ellison once said, "It take's just as much effort to write a bad novel as a good one."

And the same goes for fanzines. It's that inspired if inadequate effort by beginners I'm especially interested in. Besides, most of the famous fanzines of first fandom were churned out by eager teenagers, and what a load of crap, especially political crap and libelous infighting is to be found in the pages they wrote, yet many gems too, or at least the beginnings of a fine crystal garden.

In short, I don't care if SIRIUS SCIENCE FICTION sucks! I Wanna reads it!

Graeme, I do agree with you in part, but only in part. There are two other concerns other than my opinion that my content "sucked". Unlike issues #1 and #2 of Swill, there is only one surviving copy of Sirius #1. To scan Swill #1 & #2 I had to remove the binding (not a big problem as it was a single corner staple). For Sirius #1 which had card stock covers, it was professionally triple stapled by the printer - while it can be taken apart, it cannot be returned to its original condition afterwards. The second concern is that this was a fanfic fanzine and that means that I do not have the rights to reproduce the fiction content that was written by others (fiction that the authors may wish to remain forgotten). What I may consider doing is retyping the non-fiction content that I wrote and my single story in the issue and making that available; but, only when I have the time to do so...

Anywho, check out last previous issues of SWILL which do indeed explore the nature of fandom

And congrats on yet another fanzine title - even though you are the CFFA grand pooh-bah, are you trying to insure a win of the CFFA by flooding the market?

Endnote: Survey Says...

Neil Jamieson-Williams

The first survey for the SF fandom research project is now up and running. This is not the only survey that will be conducted during the course of this project, just the first. As such it is a general demographic survey of fandom. I have chosen radio buttons for the survey and there is no option to choose "No Answer" for any of the questions asked. That is because I really need this exploratory data as the basis for the design of future surveys and formal interviews - plus it will provide the type of data required in the benighted hope that I may be able to obtain some SSHRC funding for this project. All responses to this survey will be anonymous and confidential.¹⁵

The survey is called SF Fan Survey #1 and it can be found at the link below

<http://uldunemedia.ca/lime/index.php?sid=17227&lang=en>

One final note about the back cover; there isn't one. Future issues may have a back cover, most will not. Although it has been a SWILL tradition to have back covers that trash a particular convention, not every issue of the old Swill did this. The tradition of detourned convention poster back covers will continue, but in a different format. I want to have the time to put in a good effort on this and to that end, I would like some input. Therefore, from now until November 1, 2012 there will be a poll running so that you, the fannish multitude, can select which Canadian convention should be honoured with having their convention poster detourned as the back cover of the annual issue (SWILL #17) that will

¹⁵ Okay, if I really wanted to - and I don't want to - I could probably work out the IP address that you responded from. However, since most internet users today have a dynamic IP address assigned by their provider, this would be of little utility. Point is, it is for all intents and purposes anonymous.

be published February 2013. There are ten conventions on the list; the nominees are:

- Ad Astra 2012
- CanCon 2012
- Con*Cept 2012
- Hal-Con 2012
- Keycon 29
- Polaris 26
- Sci-Fi on the Rock 6
- SFContario 3
- VCON 37
- When Words Collide 2012

If there is a convention that you feel should be on the list and isn't you can email your suggestion to swill@uldunemedia.ca

The SWILL Poll is located here:

<http://uldunemedia.ca/lime/index.php?sid=18567&lang=en>

Till next time...

The Pith Helmet and Propeller Beanie Tour

April 2012 - July 2012

Ad Astra 2012

Polaris 26