

I hope you don't mind me looking at my notes. You see, I figure there had better be someone here who knows what I'm saying, even if it's only me.

I gather I'm supposed to convince you all that fandom is still a force in science fiction. Well, to begin with, I'm sure you'll all agree that fandom is a force. A force is a thing that moves objects from one place to another, and by god it moved me. No, what the other side are going to argue, I suppose, is that fandom uses its force in the wrong way. That it spends too much time talking and writing about fandom itself instead of about science fiction. In other words, that it doesn't take science fiction seriously enough.

Well, of course there is a trend that way, and it has been going on for a long time. By a curious coincidence I happen to ~~have~~ have with me an extract from a magazine called....er...AMAZING STORIES, Vol.1 No. , dated in which our guest of honour wrote the following momentous words.

"One of our greatest surprises since we started publishing AMAZING STORIES is the tremendous amount of mail we receive from---shall we call them 'scientifiction fans'?--- who seem to be pretty well orientated in this type of literature."

That is the book of Genesis of science fiction fandom. Fandom was created and named. Now in the beginning was Forrest J Ackerman. And the Lord looked at Forrest J Ackerman and saw that he was good. And he divided him into two parts, the light and the serious. The serious he called Sam Moscovitz, and the light he called Bob Tucker. And ever since then these two people have, for me at least, symbolised the two aspects of fandom.

Now I don't think anyone will disagree that the serious side of fandom is still a very powerful force. Serious constructive fans write scholarly reviews of immense help to authors---or at least immense interest, because pro authors like ego-boo too---, they dig up rare works for anthologists (some of which would have been better left buried), they give inexperienced editors useful information and advice (whether they ask for it or not), they publish checklists. They do a hundred and one things to help the pros and improve the standard of science fiction. Take even in the last few months such worthy efforts as the Don Day Checklist, the Ray Bradbury Review, the Journal of Science Fiction, and FANTASTIC WORLDS. And in Europe the International Fantasy Award and Ken Slater's OPERATION FANTAST. But if these serious constructive fans have a fault it is that they cannot see that there is a place for the lighter side of fandom too. They used to criticise Bob Tucker for not taking science fiction seriously enough, and they are criticising his successors today for the very same thing. Way back in 1939, to quote from THE IMMORTAL STORM, Sam Moscovitz [QUOTE] "realised that when people laugh at ~~something~~

And it's better training for an imaginative writer, which is maybe why so often a promising new author pops up suddenly from the ranks of the lighthearted fans while the solemn ones are still discussing the work of his predecessor. It's not so much that ~~that~~ he couldn't write long sober articles about the distinction between science fiction and fantasy and which it is that Ray Bradbury writes and so on. It's just that he's exhausted these subjects as topics of conversation. There's just so much can be said about them and most of it ~~has~~ already been said. Several times. Once he's sat through it ^{all} once the brighter fan rapidly leaves the serious constructive stage and emerges on the other side looking for something that gives him more scope. He's apt to find it in the fascinating world of fandom itself, with its wacky mythologies and fantastic legends and its constantly changing population of interesting people with engaging senses of humour.

It's a world that annoys some people who don't like things they don't understand. They feel they're being left out of a private joke. Well of course in a way fandom is a huge private joke. You find the same sort of thing in any group of people with a common interest. There are national jokes and regional jokes and office jokes and family jokes; ~~and so on and so on~~ Even engaged couples have their own little jokes between themselves, with a jargon of their own for the things that interest them. There's nothing wrong with it. ^{And} It makes no more sense to criticise ^{the little world of} fandom ~~for~~ being cultish, ~~and not~~ ^{and} ~~not~~ ^{wonderful} ~~for~~ using its own jargon. Personally I think fandom is a good joke, in that sense, and ~~it~~ ^{the most} I wouldn't have it changed for anything. The most surprising ^{and wonderful} things have happened to me since I came into it.

Finally I'd like to say this. I've tried to prove that fandom is a constructive force in science fiction because that's what I was asked to do. And I do think (I believe it is important - not so much for what it does as for what it is.) that it does act as a sort of training ground for young writers. ~~But~~ ^{But} what I don't see is that it needs to justify its existence as something that helps to sell science fiction, any more than anything that gives pleasure to people needs to be defended because it doesn't do something else. Why, you might as well criticise people singing in ~~the~~ their bath because it doesn't increase the sale of gramophone records!