

A MODEST PROPOSAL

BY WALT WILLIS

"Order!" said Moskowitz.

The room fell silent, except for a slight rustling as several of those present replaced the fuses on their hearing aids.

Moskowitz nodded to Korshak, who rose and fixed the gathering with a glassy stare. "This Extraordinary Meeting of Elder Fans," he said, "has been called by the Policy Committee of the Secret League of Old ENFs. To those of you visitors from abroad who are not already members, I should explain that the League was founded to enable us members of the Old Guard to keep in touch with current fandom without the indignity of actually having to publish or write to fanzines. The method we adopted was to choose two of our members to undertake these unpleasant chores on our behalf. The short straws were drawn by Tucker and Enever. To the remainder of us these two circulate every quarter a report on current fandom. Armed with these intelligence reports we were able to intervene at conventions, easily out-manoeuvre these modern simpatons, and assume our proper place at the center of affairs. Recently, however, the situation has become more difficult."

He pressed a button on the table before him and a bell could be heard ringing distantly in the bar. Shortly Tucker entered and walked to the speakers' table. Putting down his glass he began: "The trouble is simply that we can't keep up with modern fandom; it's too confusing. This present trend started as far back as 1981, when Lee Hoffman deceived me and the rest of fandom. Since then it's going from bad to worse. In the last two years some fifty fans, starting with Multog, Reaburn, Edwards, and Joan Carr, have been found to be imaginary. Others have been alleged to be imaginary and have turned out to be real. And that's not counting fans who change their names and pop up again under new ones, and femfans getting married. But even that wouldn't be so bad if it wasn't for all these neofans who keep appearing and disappearing all over. There are hordes of them, virtually indistinguishable from one another, and they keep springing up all over the place. Often the first you hear about one is that he's about to retire from fandom. I tell you, we can't follow it all ourselves, still less explain it to you. It's enough to drive me to drink...if I couldn't still walk." He picked up his glass again and left the room.

Korshak rose again and the buzzing subsided. "Well, there's the situation. Obviously something has to be done if we are to preserve our rightful place in fandom without actual effort. Now, it seemed to your committee that this present South Gate Convention is the ideal opportunity for a new and radical approach to all the age-old problems of fandom. Having had ten years to make their plans, every single fan in the world is here at this convention. All the questions which have been inconclusively debated in fanzines for years can now be settled once and for all by a simple vote. To this end we have arranged to put all the issues that have ever divided fandom on the agenda for this morning's Business Session."

There were excited murmurs and a rustling of beards, instantly quelled as Korshak held up his hand. "By now," he went on, "the convention will have finally settled the exact status of Yagvi and the culpability in the matter of Courtney's boat. They should have proceeded to the motion sponsored by this committee for dealing with the neofan problem. Our special corps of wily fan politicians, led by Dave Kyle, will railroad through our simple, tidy, and effective solution. With the political experience and

intriguing ability of these Machiavellian veterans of countless smokefilled rooms, there is no doubt at all that it will be accepted by the convention. I am awaiting word from Kyle at any moment of our success."

"But what is the solution?" asked Carnell.

"Basically, the plan is this," said Korshak. "Since neofans are in effect interchangeable units, quite indistinguishable from one another, we propose to deal with them as such. As soon as a new fan writes to a fanzine he will be visited by a posse of Old Fans and branded on the forehead with a code number. This code number will indicate the neofan's geographical location, age group, sex, interests -- bheer, sports cars, women, jazz, men, photography, guns, hi-fi, stamps, science fiction, etc. -- and intended apa. (There'll be much less trouble with people jumping on and off waiting lists if it means another session with the branding iron.) He would have to use this code number in all his fanac instead of his real name."

"That seems pretty drastic," said Bill Temple.

"Perhaps," said Korshak, "but think of the advantages. Not only would it put a stop to all these hoaxes, but it would make things easier for everyone in the ordinary course of fanac. Say you get a letter from TE2BJF; you know right away that this is a Texas teenager who likes Jazz and Bheer. You can answer him without bothering to wrk out which one it is, if indeed there is more than one. Fandom would at once be reduced to manageable proportions. Relieved from worry, the ordinary BNF, as well as our agents, would be able to indulge once more in carefree easy fanac. Finally, think of the money Convention Committees would save in identity badges!"

"Is not this branding idea rather cruel?" quavered gentle old George Charters.

"Nonsense," rejoined Korshak. "Everyone knows neofan have no feelings. Look at the way they behave to one another. Personally, I'd much rather be branded quickly and neatly than be forced to drink a bottle of haircream. Besides, brutal initiation rites are natural to teenagers; and they'll be able to look forward to the Ceremony of Recognition which will be a marvellous incentive for their fanac. It will be like this. A BNF will begin to notice that some letters and fanzines from TE2BJF are subtly different from others. He compares notes with other BNFs in due course. There is no doubt about it, signs of originality are appearing. Eventually the lordly ones are unanimous-- one of the TE2BJF class is ready. A group of local BNFs seek him out and break the good news. In a simple but touching ceremony the neofan, breathless with joy, kneels to receive the accolade from the symbolic gold mimeo crank and be invested with the beanie of True Individual Fandom. Then he is borne away amid scenes of wild rejoicing to have his brand removed by plastic surgery by Doc Barrett. Henceforth he is no longer merely a member of the Class TE2BJF, but may proudly use his own name. News of the Award is --"

Korshak broke off at the sound of running feet in the corridor. Dave Kyle burst into the room and stood panting for breath.

"Ah, Dave," beamed Korshak, peering shortsightedly, "did the Convention accept our idea all right?"

"Yes," gasped Kyle, "but some neofan got up and pointed out how hard it was for them to tell one of us old BNFs from another --"

"Bolt the Door!" screamed Eshbach, quick to see the danger.

"No use," groaned Kyle. "They've got Harmon with them." The sound of trampling feet was heard in the corridor.

"They've stolen E.E. Evans' cigar," groaned Kyle.

Korshak was white. "You mean --"

"Yes!" screamed Kyle. "They've lit it!"