

The third big issue of a weekly fanzine from
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3 March 31st, 1994 4228 Francis Ave. N. # 103, Seattle, WA 98103.
This is Drag Bunt Press Production # 176.

Let's put the Thor back in Thursday

MY SEVAGRAM CAN LICK YOUR SEVAGRAM... I need to open this ish with an observation that my characterization of my argument with Karen Babich was my interpretation of it alone, and that Karen would like me to note for all and sundry that she does not think that trufen are all snobs and bigots. We've worked things out pretty well, to the point where we agree to disagree on a few points, and whole-heartedly repudiate the hostility with which we were pursuing the issue. I'm glad, because Karen is one of a very small number of fans in Chicago that I would walk across the street to save from summary dismemberment, and we need to encourage her as much as possible.

The genesis of all this dispute, if any one is interested, was a long conversation that sundry fans had at Wiscon two years ago, on the nature of fandom and fannishness. I wasn't there, but I'm told that an inebriated Steve Swartz capped off the evening by going around the room pointing at people and commenting "You're a fan," and "You're not a fan."

Now, I believe that Steve said this with tongue firmly in cheek, but people were not very convinced of that, and the discussion of the propriety of this sort of thing has raged without relief in apas, at convention programs, and in private conversation ever since.

It seems to me that most of the negative reaction to this debate has been occasioned by the belief that those advancing theories of fannish hierarchy intend to use those theories as a basis for fannish segregation or as support for personal elitism. This fear, I feel, misses the motivation which drives people to observe such dichotomies in the first place. The point is not so much to establish a model of those we consider inferior, or different, the proverbial "them"; the point is to arrive at a working definition of who and what we are as trufans, if you will, the proverbial "us." And sometimes it is far more convenient to list the things that we are not - such as costumers, gamers, comic fans, anime fans, Battlestar Galactica fans, even though we may have concurrent interest in some of those fields - than it is to define just what it is we do that makes us trufen.

So many of the things that we used to do - publish fanzines on mimeo, send quotecards around the country, carry on zapgun and plonker fights at the worldcon, and in many, many cases, read sf -- have become less appealing than they once were, leaving us with the difficult task of defining what it is that will allow us to continue to call ourselves fans. Most of the time, it is merely the unshakeable conviction that we are trufen that allows us to make that claim. Once you have come to possess some concept of the advisability of being a trufan, almost invariably, you are one.

I think every trufan knows, in his or her heart of hearts, that there are as many definitions of fannishness as there are fans who care to come up with one. Efforts at taxonomic categorization of the race of fan are doomed by the size of the field. But it is in human nature to always try and separate out a village-equivalent of peers and family with which to live, and most anthropologists say we are incapable of including more than about 500 people in this group. For many of us, that number boils down to the people on our mailing list, and it is to them that we give the greater part of our attention, affection...

and antagonism. It is a mistake to assume that we hold some deep-seated resentment or disdain for the people whom we fail to include in the faanish village. The fact is that our resources are strained to the breaking point keeping up with our extended family as it is, and we have no time for animosity or exclusionary conspiracy against the rest of the world.

Why, Mr. Beevilquist, what a delightful surprise!

ANOTHER HELPING OF LEMON MERINGUE BASTARD? [Now we come to the response received by my comments on TAFF in the first issue of APAK. The amount of mail this venture is generating so far is extremely heartening. My own response to your letters will be locked in brackets like this, and be followed by my initials. -- aph]

LAURIE YATES: "Regarding TAFF, is there anyone standing in British fandom we'd like to meet? If recent Brit fans have not wanted to come to worldcons, or even fan centers, doesn't that say something about them also? ...Perhaps dropping the con requirement would help. Personally, I'd rather visit fans in their home environments than at a crowded hotel."

DAVE RIKE: "I think that if all fmz fans got off their butts and voted each time, there'd be more votes. As for broadening the base...say including a TAFF voting fee as part of one's registration for Worldcon so members could vote on the candidate of their choice...I'm dubious; I don't think it would be successful and probably would not be favorably viewed by the Brits and Europeans. If the other aspects of fandom outside of fmz fandom were interested in mixing it up with overseas fans than they probably would have already started up their own Big Pond funds.

"Has an overseas fan expressed the feeling that he/she didn't care to attend the U.S. worldcon? I don't recall reading or hearing about this." [Well, both Abi Frost and Pam Wells have been fairly forthright in saying how deeply they disliked the worldcons they attended, and there seems to be a general agreement among other Brit fans I have talked to that they wish there were other options open to them. But the disaffection with TAFF in Britain goes far deeper than the issue of being forced to attend the worldcon, as Laurie suggested. There is a growing feeling that TAFF has outlived its usefulness, and ought to be scrapped, as people can generally afford to make the trip themselves if they really want to. It also reflects a fatalism about the future of fmz fandom in Britain which varies in depth with each fan you ask about it. -- aph]

BARNABY RAPOPORT: "The Worldcon was very different when TAFF was instituted in the '50s. TAFF has gone out of whack to the extent that the Worldcon has changed. Our choice is as you describe it. Either we change TAFF to match the modern Worldcon, or change TAFF's destination to something that corresponds to what the Worldcon was when TAFF was created.

"I'm inclined to say to hell with the Worldcon. It's a worthless venue for fan delegates because it's impossible to meet people there. I never got to meet Abi Frost at ConFrancisco, whereas I did get to meet Christina Lake, Martin Smith, and the rest at Corflu Ten. I'd like to see European delegates come to Corflu; North American delegates could go to Novacon or Mexicon or whatever the equivalent is.

"Another problem which you allude to in passing, is that N.A. and U.K. fandom are in little contact. Last year I'd never seen a zine by any of the nominees, and I voted for Michael Ashley because he was the only one I'd ever heard of. We're not reading each other and the result is that we have less interest in meeting each other." [This is the recurrent theme in about half of the letters I received: The problem isn't in TAFF, it is in the fandoms which TAFF

is meant to serve. It's hard not to agree. Perhaps the thing we could do which would best help TAFF would be to just send more zines and locs and articles to British faneds, assuming we can find any. Others agree.... -- aph]

STEVE SWARTZ: "...if we truly open up the institution to the broader run of fans, don't we risk starting to exchange the...Laskowskis with the Brits, rather than the relatively high quality of fans that still seem to be selected to make the trip?

"I think that would be the worst thing that could possibly happen to TAFF, and I think we need to guard against that kind of watering-down when we think about "expanding" it. The message needs to be that diversity is good, but Hugo-style, McDonald-land "diversity" is no diversity at all...We need to figure out who "our own" are, out there, and connect with them efficiently. As for the rest, let them eat Chalker.

"Maybe so long as we can continue to raise airfare and expenses and keep things in the family, TAFF is better off ensmallled than enlarged. Maybe TAFF is well-linked with fanzine fandom, for better as well as for worse, and what we should worry about is writing fanzines, encouraging others to do so, and help TAFF by helping our scene."

TED WHITE: "Obviously, a Worldcon was once the best way to meet all your friends from overseas. I don't know that it's necessarily the worst choice now. The fannish "inner convention" is there, after all. On the other hand, making a TAFF trip to attend a Corflu or Mexicon is not a bad idea.

"Opening up" the TAFF process is what those folks in the Wimpy Zone tried to do in their own inestimable way a few years ago. It struck me then as a dangerous notion, and one prone to many potential pitfalls. Basically, it gives people wholly ignorant of the process and the candidates control (or a significant voice) over the outcome and could lead to many abuses of the process. TAFF would go the way of the Fan Award Hugoes.

"But making TAFF more insular does not strike me as a good idea either. I favor the middle road, the one we're on now, more or less. Out in the open, but mostly ours, for our benefit." [This, more or less, begins to emerge as the consensus. Add some flexibility to the trip itself, but keep the voting about where it is. Improve TAFF by improving Fandom. -- aph]

RICHARD BRANDT: "...We must also recognize that we may just be in one of those periodic lulls in trans-Atlantic fan activity, marked by a noticeable shortage of fanzines crossing the waters. Un less 'zines are sent to the other side of the ocean, what other exposure do we have to fans, especially the bright new sort, across the Atlantic? Contact would be pretty much confined, I would suppose, to those who have already established a communication in some other fashion (such as by physically going over there)...Of perhaps more merit is the idea of dropping the requirement to attend Worldcon or Eastercon; I was warm to the suggestion in years past that the North American winner might attend Mexicon instead, and of course for the European crosser we could offer the option of Corflu (or maybe even its pale shadow, Ditto)." [If you're right about this being a lull, all I can do is damn the luck -- aph]

DON FITCH: "TAFF has always posed some prickly questions for me. Should it be an Award for many years of high-quality fanac? (So it goes to an Old Fan, and Tired, just before fading into gafia.) Should it go to a talented and hyperactive young fan? (One who may very well, in a year or so, depart for the challenge of some mountain other than fandom.) Is the Ambassadorial aspect so important that one should vote for a pleasant, outgoing, sociable personality over a nerdish person who produces superb fanwriting? (Accomplished ConFans and gregarious socializers don't always seem to need to write/publish

anything at all.) I still haven't come up with any conclusive answers to those questions, though I generally operate on the basis of some tentative one." [Excellent points, Don. Anyone want to answer? --aph]
ROBERT LICHTMAN: "Your impression of what constituted "frequent" in the fanzine fandom of 25-35 years ago is somewhat skewed. I recall fanzines that didn't come out that often being termed "irregular but frequent" and generally I considered anything that came out at least quarterly as qualifying for the appellation. And while "the diffusion of SF and its archetypes in to every corner of mainstream culture" may have enlarged the ranks of readers of the stuff, so far as fanzine fandom is concerned its "Ranks" have enlarged to only about double what it used to be. That is to say, in 1958-64, I could cover everyone I was interested in reaching...with a print run of 125-150 copies whereas nowadays 250 seems to do it." [My point in underlining the increased popularity of SF was to note the difficulty for anyone who wanted to publish a focal point fanzine today; the term has lost its meaning, as fandom is no longer an entity capable of focusing on any single social or theoretical nexus. Within fanzine fandom, it's as practical as it ever was. -- aph]

MORE ROBERT: "I'm going to be concise in my response to your observations about TAFF. The two paths you offer up are unacceptable in my opinion. The election and fund-raising process is already opened up to a large segment of fandom. The simple requirement that one have been active in some fashion for about a year prior to any particular TAFF race excludes only the very newest members of our subculture. Dropping it would provide a means for candidates to gain election based on their ability to reach "no nothing" voters...Your other suggestion -- to make TAFF "even more of a private toy for fanzine fandom" -- is equally unacceptable. There simply isn't enough money in fanzine fandom, for one thing, to support something as expensive as TAFF...From my own experience administering for three years, its my observation that without the contributions that come in from conventions TAFF would be hard-pressed to keep up with the financial obligations caused by the cost of delegates' travels, let alone the additional expenditures associated with fund-raising. [Which is something I was honestly unaware of. We'll pick this up again next week with a letter from George Flynn which I just can't squeeze in. Thanks also to Jeff Schalles, Janice Murray, & Arthur Hlavaty for their cards. Next time: Pennant predictions! -- aph]

You can hear the street urchins cat-calling, "Eh, Bombachos!"

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Address Correction Requested