

CONFAB

December 20, 1955

11

Bob Featrowsky

Box 634

Norfolk, Nebr.

This is the 15th of December as I start this first master of this issue. And I've decided that the Christmas season is really here. As I'm trying to get this page started, I'm also watching the TV presentation of Dickens' "Christmas Carol"--a presentation that I don't believe I've missed (on radio or TV) for quite a few years. Frederic March has the role of Scrooge, but I believe I was more impressed with Basil Rathbone's portrayal of Marley's Ghost. How long has this story been enacted during the Christmas season? I seem to recall Lionel Barrymore's "Scrooge" going back quite a few years on radio.

Christmas scene

Reception to the last CONFAB was sufficient to assure me that that mag hasn't been completely forgotten during its "vacation". I realize that a fanmag can be forgotten pretty fast if it once gives up a halfway regular schedule of publication. And the readership is a bit harder to come by the second time around. But I'll be in there pitching, just the same...

And first on the batting order is the ol' Hermit of Hermosa Beach himself:

Ed Cox
115 1/2 19th Street
Hermosa Beach, Calif.
15 November 1955

Dear Bob,

Was glad to see CONFAB turn up once more. Hope it isn't just turning over for another nine month snooze. Now to business.

Ole James Broschart sort of put his foot in his mouth a few times in his second letter. It seemed especially embarrassing after his first note. His first mistake was in assuming that the letters written to a letterzine must necessarily discuss the previous letters in said zine.

Look around you James. First, is it so impossible for somebody to bring up a new or different topic in his letter that might cause comment and discussion other than those already on the fire? Remember, fans can be reading other things, many other things, in addition to each issue of CONFAB from which to gain topical subjects for discussion. All letters don't necessarily talk about Joe Schmork's opinions on Alvin Schmalvin's last letter.

What's more, I seriously doubt if CONFAB was conceived to

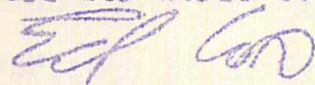
carry on a great thundering tirade for or against anything. Mainly, so far as I can tell, it is a place to simply discuss, heatedly or otherwise, many of the ideas and small items of possible interest of the various people who feel that others might be interested. Why be "effective"? Or better, for what reason be "effective"? Different? I've seen quite a few fanzines lately in which there were extensive letter columns which discussed all sorts of things many of which had about as much to do with science fiction as non-stf movies.

Last and most, if you wanted to know about movies, I doubt if you'd find out much in the "movie magazines". Probably about as much as you'd find out about love and human relations in "true confession" magazines. Or rather, about as realistic and "true" as a true confession mag would be. Or is the simile lacking? Probably. At any rate, I guess the only letterzine I can recall that did more or less concern itself mainly with stf and fandom was the early issues of DAWN. Anybody remember the tremendous battles concerning the NFFF (mainly whether it was worth a damn which it wasn't) and such?

Joan Carr should feel lucky. If the proportion of replies to that of no replies to FEZ are as great as I think, she is indeed lucky. There is always going to be a margin of no return at all in any given batch of zines mailed out. Tis very simple. Don't mail any more to them. FAFHRD has gone out (or will have soon) three times now to a lot of people from whom there's been no reply in any form. Naturally this ceases after about three issues.

Sorry, but this is a short note this time. Short issue of CONFAB too. But in closing, I'd like to mention that if anybody else holds the belief of James Broschart in re topic matter in fanzines, don't join FAPA or SAPS. Unless of course you don't mind such things as talking about music (all kinds), guns and shooting, sports cars vs stock Detroit stuff, women, skin-diving, and any Roscoe's amount of other topics besides stf. Including, of course, beer. Hope this makes people happy.

Yours for worse tv,



And there, Mr. Broschart, you have the counsel for the defense. As a matter of fact, when I printed those two letters in question in the last issue, I had quite a lengthy reply written up but decided against using it. I figured someone might answer the charges better than I could, and you haven't disappointed me, Ed. Not that I'm out after fannish scalps, you understand, but neither am I side-stepping any that might be flang at me.

Anyone care to start some discussions on shooting at sports cars or skin-diving women, or some of the other things I'd said?

Response to the last CONFAB (number of replies received as compared to number of copies mailed out) was about 7%. Response

to earlier issues, when the publishing schedule was fairly regular used to run 2 to 3 times that, which I consider quite good for an average mag. I think response of better than 20% is exceptional. Now there's a question that I don't believe I've seen on a fan-poll: "What is the response, percentagewise, to your fanzine?" How about it, faneds, what is your response?

Stephen F. Schultheis
238 Trumbull Ave., S.E.,
Warren, Ohio
21 Nov 1955

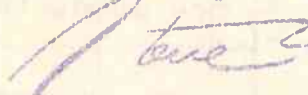
Dear Bob,

Believe me, it was really a pleasure to receive CONFAB again. Slim and noncontroversial as it was in this last incarnation -- and Mr. Broschart to the contrary -- I like your zine.

You know, different fan judge fanzines in different ways: some by the number of pages; some by the excellence of reproduction; some by the quality of the artwork or contents; but I like to judge a fanzine by the length of time, considering the number of pages, that it takes me to read it. There have been fanzines that I have read -- and with interest -- but only over a period of several days, one article at a time, putting the zine aside between times and reading something else of more immediate interest. Then there have been some that I did not finish reading at all. There are some fanzines, though, that never seem long enough. They arrive, I sit down, and my interest drags me through to the mailing address. Then I sit back happily and wish that the next issue (hoping that there IS one) were already on hand. (Yes, these are actually FANLIES that I'm talking about.) There's HYPHEN, for instance, and OOPSLA., and the late and lamented QUANDRY--and, of course, CONFAB. I would guess that it took me perhaps seven minutes, all told, to read the issue, maybe five. Why do I like the zine? What's outstanding about it? I'll be darned if I know. I just know that it holds my interest. "Try the Schultheis 30-second test and you'll see."

Sgt. Carr's letter was most interesting -- for the first paragraph. I must say that I agree with it for the most part and the matter was well put. In fact, I wish I'd written it. In my opinion the greatest benefit of the "great s-f boom" has been that when nonreaders laugh at readers of s-f these days, they don't laugh quite so hard.

Yours truly,



It is a proud and lonely thing to be included in such honored company as HYPHEN, OOPSLA., and QUANDRY -- though I doubt if I would rate it there myself. I agree with the other titles, though, and for my own choices I might add GRUE and the late, lamented PSYCHOTIC to your list. These mags I can, time permitting, read nonstop in one sitting -- plus perhaps a couple of others. All fanzines received are enjoyed but these are among my favorites.

Dick Lupoff
10100 W. Broadview Dr.
Bay Harbor Islands
Miami Beach 41, Fla.
November 23, 1955

Dir Bob,

Got home about 11 Monday night, looked at the mail, letter from Aunt HESSIE, ad from Sears Roebuck, Confab, card from Jac--- CONFAB!! Confab?

I don't know what to say I felt! This was ASTOUNDING, ASTONISHING, AMAZING, STARTLING (a moment of silence please) and even somewhat surprising. Talk about a shock! Well, it's good to have C back, and I certainly hope that "irregular" doesn't mean nine months to gestate an edition. I know several women who can produce a real live human baby in the time it takes you to get out ten pages of ~~type~~ type.

As for the letters themselves...a couple seem to rate interest.

Firstoff, as for your discussion with Eric Bentcliffe on reviews and reviewers...you seem to completely overlook what (in my humble opinion) is the main basis of reviews. Which is the reviewer's justification of his opinion. Any damn fool can get up and say "This is good...that stinks...the other thing, etc." And a lot of damn fools do this.

But any reviewer worth his salt tells why he likes or dislikes a given piece. Purely subjective opinions are fine for Silent Joe, but the reviewer must (or at least ought to) be able to say: This is good because ...it is socially significant ...or it is cleverly extrapolated ...or the author is an unusually talented word-craftsman ...or the story is simply fun to read ...or any other reason.

Further, the good reviewer will tell why and how this is so, rather than simply saying it to be the case.

Conversely, when a reviewer pans a story, he should be able to back up his opinion in similar fashion. Not simply "The story is no good", but "Its faults are as follows..."

And once more, the reviewer should be ready to give the basis of his views.

As for Jim Broschart: Jim, why, if you don't like letterzines, don't you get out the scissors and gluepot when your next CONFAB arrives, and rebuild according to Lupoff's FANZINE CONVERSION FORMULAE, which follow:

1 letter on 1 subject = 1 article
1 letter on several subjects = 1 column
several letters on 1 subject = 1 symposium

several letters on several subjects = 1 letter section
assorted editorial comments, assembled = 1 editorial.

And to comment briefly upon Joan Carr's experience with the onion-like nature of fandom (each time you peel off a layer and think you're reaching a solid core, you just find another layer) I would say the following:

You might as well get used to it, Joan, cause not just fandom, but all of life is like that. Consider that eminent scholar Me for instance. When I finished high school I thought that I was pretty well educated, but needed just a wee bit more to add the finishing touches.

Now I'm just a little over two months away from a BA and I realize that my ignorance is so great that I can't even guess at its limits. After a couple of years in the army I hope to be able, financially and by standards of academic acceptability, to attend graduate school. Will I (assuming even the best) "complete" my education with an MA or even a PhD? I'm certain that I won't.

I suspect that perfection or completion is impossible in all but the most artificial and arbitrary matters. A baseball player could conceivably hit a home run every time up, for instance. But in matters of broader consideration, perfection is unattainable.

We may in a few cases approach perfection as a limit, coming 99%, then 99.9%, 99.99%, and so on, of the way. Indefinite improvement, but never perfection.

In other matters, the more we advance, the farther we realize ourselves to be from the goal. In the quest for knowledge, for instance, every time the axe of an answer cuts off the hydra-head of a question, two new ones spring into being in its place. So every answer increases instead of decreases the distance between us and our goal of complete understanding.

As you perhaps can tell, I've been studying philosophy. And really, the more I learn, the more abysmally ignorant I realize I am.

Cerely



Speaking of degrees of education (no pun intended), isn't it too bad that homo sap doesn't usually live long enough to really make the most of the knowledge and education he spends so much of his life acquiring. Such things really ought to be hereditary; all the knowledge of the father passed to his son at birth and the combined knowledge of the father and son passed on to the son's son, and so on. Within a couple of generations we should have some pretty smart boys among us. Otherwise known as the Peatrowsky Plan for Promoting the Super-Race. Now a person spends from one-third to one-half of his expected life span just acquiring a decent education. 'Taint fair, that's what it aint--fair!

Stan Woolston
12832 West Ave.
Garden Grove, Calif.
November 12, 1955

Dear Bob,

I'm very glad to see your CONFAB Number 10--gave me a lift to realize you had taken a new life. I say this though I didn't recognize the fans on the cover or the interior portraits by ESHM.

Most of my fan-time is involved in helping N3F keep going. Recently there has been a concerted attempt to get more news of fandom as well as prodrom--of publications, books, conventions, clubs of various kinds. You know--the who, where, and other details of the usual news story, including addresses.

I've written to quite a few possible news sources, both of members and non-members and for some of them enclosed postcards or envelopes addressed to the Editor or to myself. The idea is to get either news, or names and addresses of people who would know some news in the making. For the latter there is the conventions and other planned meetings, the publication dates for pro or fanzines, the special projects in the works and the like. In the line of the latter, there is rumors of a revised FANCYCLOPEDIA and a forthcoming illustrated calendar (with, I believe, 12 astronomical scenes). If you know any details of these--people working on it, etc.--or any other such events, I'd appreciate very much any information.

If you know the address of the New York fangroup who are sponsoring the World Convention, I'd like to know that too.

Maybe I should give the news I do have about the calendar; to get help it should be sensible to give some information. Well, my information says the "Nova Studios of Minneapolis, Minnesota, is producing a calendar specifically designed for the sf fan and space flight enthusiasts... 12 beautiful, 2-color illus depicting scenes from the exploration of the solar system... Various planets and moons, starting with Mercury and working outward to frigid Pluto. The artist, K. L. Ridoug, long-time sf fan, has devoted many hours to research and development, assisted by Robert C. Newman, to create this calendar collector's item... Limited quantities... \$1.00 postpaid from Nova Studios, PO Box 5201, Minneapolis, 7, Minn." I cut this from a somewhat longer ad in FRONTIER, the mag of the Society for the Advancement of Space Travel; they sponsored the calendar.

About Confab: You sure can get yourself in a corner when you make a statement and try to stick to it. Whether it's about the intelligence of a fan or anything else, there are usually enough people around to take up another side of the problem.

The art of criticism is, like Eric Bentcliffe says, sometimes a matter of opinion only. The art of spouting words so it sounds official rather than officious or faked can be developed by practice if the person has a bit of wit to base it on.

The art of critical initiative can be developed by habitually putting be-

liefs down for others to read, I believe. This can be done by indulging in letter writing to a letterzine, by editing a zine of any kind, or habitually writing for the zines. It can be hastened by sticking to the guns and getting the letters written regularly, or the articles, or publishing the fanzine.

To prevent the subjects being discussed becoming tedious and repetitious, editorial wit is needed. Or at least it helps. If you get enough answers you'll probably find that some writers take it upon themselves to do more than just comment on old subjects; it's these guys that need to be cultivated, even if you have to write them a personal letter. Of course this just my idea. If you could encourage your "writers" to include at least one subject that wasn't brought up in the previous issue, you'd probably have an automatic freshener. I'm of the opinion that the danger of dullness could be avoided by this means. Variety is a process of thinking, you might say.

I like your two-line interlineations; maybe they aren't a new art form, but they have some novelty. As for the ink, my eyes have been aching lately, but it's not from your ink. The purple of the copies I've had were fairly clear, and that's more than could be said for the atmosphere around here. Yep, good old California smog is the conversational gambit for the radio news people each morn. Lately they've been discussing red and green smog conditions. It's my theory that smog is an attempt of saucer people to alienize the atmosphere in the L.A. basin so they can settle down and enjoy the sights of Hollywood and Vine and thereabouts. (If I were a saucer connoisseur I'd suggest this "proves" they must be from Venus, the smog planet itself).

Bob, why not join N3F? It's no fannish cure-all, but it's a good place to do things if you like to work. But if you join N3F, be warned--I may be prez next year. I've quite a few friends lined up for the directorate, and I believe we can work together well if elected. I've quite a few ideas, as do many of the directors, to improve the group. Perhaps most important is to keep to a schedule for the publications, and for getting renewals in. Then the regular projects should be put into effect as early as possible so there will be less chance of slip-ups. I believe most of the methods of doing an efficient job is before us, if they're applied--encouraging the use of a large number of volunteers to prevent pressure from building up on just a few officers and active members in the correspondence groups and so forth.

In the past, there has been quite a bit of putting off projects, and piling work on newcomers to the ranks. I believe that it might be possible to ask all the editors of fanzines to help with recruiting and news-spreaders as well as news-gatherers. The president, who will be in that office to the end of the year is Walter Coslet. He has proposed that any member who wants to distribute their mag to all the members might find it an excellent way to increase circulation, and build up club interest. I wonder how many members aren't regular fanzine subscribers, and how many would be if they got a variety of fanzine types over a period of a year?

Joan Carr's comments on the adult-

ness of science fiction is well taken, I believe. Personally, I think some of the recent stories aren't exactly good stories either. Actually I'd say some yarns seem more childish than many of the Heinlein stories designed for kids. In the past an author like Edgar Rice Burroughs succeeded in melding adventure with a feeling of being real; very few authors today attempt to do that, I think. I remember Bester for a rather slick, psychological story with a sort of symbolism and some novel effects, but not one I'd consider particularly realistic in the atmosphere it generated. Some authors seem to think that modern sf must be hard and bitter, or involve a tight knot of psychological interreactions before it was a good story. It almost seems to me that the authors or the editors who dictate the policy, are trying to write literature instead of a good story with fairly sound scientific basis.

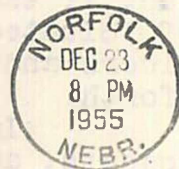
Of course the matter of prozine policy is a big one. On the newsstand recently I looked at a copy of IMAGINATIVE TALES and note that they've moved away from the humorous emphasis in story. It appears that humor is too transient in appeal; the reader becomes bored with one type. The editorial note suggested that readers liked adventure much more--that adventure sold mags but humor didn't. Personally I would say that a too close dictation of policy of any closed kind (adventure emphasis, mystery emphasis, love emphasis) will lead to some boredom on the part of the readers. But then one fan's boredom is another's good reading, and not every story need be considered perfect for a zine to be a success for readers.

Stan Woolston

This had been whittled out of your original letter, Stan. Seems like you've brought up a couple of new items for discussion. I've got to keep my own discussion down to a minimum here if I intend to get this issue out before the holiday rush, so this will be all of #11. See you in #12.. *Bob Peatrowsky*

"You have arisen from the awful pit of gaffe!"

CONFAB
Bob Peatrowsky
Box 634
Norfolk, Nebr.
U.S.A.



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