

Implosion

Implosion #31 is the local monthly fanzine of Arnie Katz (330 S. Decatur, Suite 152, Las Vegas, NV 89107). It is produced for the 31st Distribution of Apa V, the Las Vegas apa, which has as this month's theme "Rebellion and Revolution" Today is May 5, 1996

Implosion: The Fanzine that proves anyone can publish a fanzine.
Member, fwa.

The following piece is a work in progress. he final version is intended for Broder 5.

The Convention Revolution By Arnie Katz

An issue of **File 770** a couple of months back made me think, really for the first time, about the development of conventions in science fiction fandom. Most of my fanalytic essays concern what I like and know best, fanzine fandom. My needs for "one of those insurgent, analytic articles" (in the approximate words of Tom Springer) impels me to venture into previously unexplored territory.

In that memorable **File 770** -- the same one that featured Glycer's attack on Dan Steffan and Ted White -- both the editor and Russ Pavlac explode all over the last DragonCon. Pavlac's con report excoriates the event's technical imperfections and forbidding ambiance, while Glycer's piece viewed the whole DragonCon phenomenon with Great Alarm and Foreboding.

The extreme reaction surprised me at first. Upon reflection, however, I thought I saw why **File 770** went ballistic over a non-worldcon in Atlanta, hardly the capital of the science fiction world. There's a new con-running philosophy on the rise, and **File 770** articulates the rage and frustration of those who fear its encroachment.

"The Philosophical Theory of Fanhistory," now required reading for serious fanhistorians and insomniacs, looks at the subject from the point of view of a contemporary fanzine fan. While the intermingled threads of the seven philosophies I described embrace all forms

of fanac, I wondered about the nature of con-running philosophy.

Once I donned my Thinking Beanie (the one with the light bulb on the top where lesser fen have propellers), another Katzian Theory was inevitable. That's the risk fandom takes when it allows me to think without proper safeguards.

The history of science fiction con-running is divisible into three points-of-view I call Waves. They arrived serially, but all are present in today's confandom. Corflu fully embodies First Wave principles, the worldcon is the ultimate expression of the Second Wave attitude and DragonCon is the Third Wave's highest achievement so far.

The First Wave (Altruistic Martyrdom) is how con-running began in our fandom. It starts with the first conventions in Leeds, England, and Philadelphia, PA, and recedes to a secondary position in con-fandom some time in the mid-1970s. (I told you the lines are blurry.)

First Wave con-runners consider their exertions a means to an end, a Necessary Evil. They want to see fan friends, and conventions are a cost-effective way to do that. The same impulse that causes people to rotate buying rounds in a bar motivated most sponsors of early fan conventions. Partiers take turns paying, because that keeps the drinks flowing. First Wave con-runners took turns working on conventions so that cons could exist.

Second and Third Wave con-runners who stumble across this article, and possibly some of its polysyllabic words, may bristle at the lowly status early First Wavers accorded conventions. In their defense,, none of the pioneers had built up affection for the process of staging a convention.

The pleasures of bidding, preparing and implementing an enjoyable convention had nothing to do with why most people joined

fandom in the 1930s and pre-war 1940s. Other forms of fanac, like fanzines, clubs, correspondence and collecting, were well-established before anyone thought of bringing fans together at a con. If they had to sail the unfamiliar waters of event sponsorship in order to get together with their correspondents, then they'd accept their share of the toil.

Conventions had such a secondary position in the minds of early First Wave con-runners that many otherwise sensible fans argued that the worldcon should be a biennial event. They claimed that fans would never work up the enthusiasm for or spend the bucks to attend, a convention every single year!

Inevitably, though, many fans discovered that they liked one or more aspects of putting on a con. They gravitated to con-running the way other fans embrace filking, fanzine publishing or masquerades. As more fans learned they could do a convention without going insane, fandom started to add events to its con calendar.

By the late 1960s, fans had a convention season that started with Marcon and ended at the big Labor Day blow-out. The proliferation of conventions made it possible for fans to specialize in con-running. These Second Wave confans saw cons as a valid form of fanac, an end in itself.

Second Wave con-runners wanted to polish and improve their cons the same way fanzine fans strive to upgrade their publications. It wasn't enough that a con provide a chance for old friends to party for a couple of days, said Second Wave fans. A con should be an intense, entertaining experience for attendees.

Just as the First Wave enabled the emergence of the Second, so did the Second give life to the Third. Many current con fandoms have little or no experience in what we think of as traditional fandom. That is, they have never gotten involved with fanzines, clubs or anything else outside the almost-weekly regions.

From the ranks of these confans has come a Third Wave philosophy. Without any special allegiance to fandom as a subculture, these more insular con-runners have had a

nifty new idea: they want to turn their interest in con-running into a business.

Just as the Second Wave philosophy changed the First Wave worldcons of the 1940 and 1950s into the mammoth entertainments of the 1980s and 1990s, the expanding influence of the Third Wave may shape conventions in the next millennium. In other words, I think the Third Wave will gain dominance over the two previous waves, just as the Second Wave eclipsed the first in the mid-1970s.

The tug-of-war between the First and Second Wave philosophies lay at the heart of worldcon bidding battles of the late 1960s and early 1970s. We First Wavers should've realized that, in a struggle between those who do something out of duty and those who do the same thing out of joy, victory would inexorably go to the latter.

The Third Wave will get the upper hand, because people who do things in their spare time can't match the effort of full-time, paid workers who adore their jobs. The DragonCon folks, unfettered by the trufannish concerns that still carry weight with Second Wavers, are free to do things in the most business-like and efficient manner.

That doesn't mean that the Second Wave will Go into the West, any more than the First Wave did. I think that confandom will consist of three tiers of events by the next decade. First Wave cons, smaller and relatively informal, and Second Wave cons, larger and slicker, will exist side y side with mammoth spectaculars presented by Third Wave con-makers.

This revolution develops a delicious irony, don't you think? Second Wavers are now receiving from the Third Wave what they gave to the First. And soon Second Wavers may begin to feel like guests in their own house when they attend some of the larger, more commercial science fiction festivals.

I think I'll just pub my ish and watch from the sidelines.