

Widening Gyre 3



Widening Gyre #3

PHILOSOPHICAL TOUGH LOVE AND YANKEE LOYALTY by Ulrika O'Brien

I was talking to Bruce Pelz over the weekend, about this and that, fan fund auctions, Loscon plans, cabbages and kings. In the course of it, Bruce handed me a copy of a proposal to SCIFI¹ for instituting a memorial award for fanzine fan art, in memory of Bill Rotsler, which seems like a fine thing, and worthy. By way of introduction, Bruce remarked, "I know your opinion of SCIFI, but...." That sounded decidedly dark. And Bruce and I have never really talked about my sentiments about SCIFI, so, barring Paranormal Feats, it seemed unlikely. I said so. "Well, I know **one** of your opinions of SCIFI, anyway." Okay, I can spot a conversational dogleg when I bark my shin on the signpost. I left that detour for another day.

The wonderful thing about detours for another day is the way they come boomeranging back to whang you in the head when you're trying to pull together some sort of editorial content. On the other hand, the nice thing about a bully pulpit is that nobody gets to interrupt or distract while you collect your thoughts. Yes, it is a lovely proscenium arch, isn't it? Let's move on to the next room now, wherein the editor beats her chest about Being Misunderstood.

¹ The Southern California Institute for Fan Interests, the Los Angeles non-profit incorporated as umbrella organization for the running of large LA conventions.

I have a feeling I know what Bruce's aside is about. In LASFS smof circles, "Everybody knows," incorrectly, that my opinion of SCIFI is not high. Now, I've made little secret of my opinion that a couple of SCIFI's practices are, well, a stunningly bad idea. I'll spare you the details. The real point is that what I object to, if vehemently, is a SCIFI **policy**, and, at least while wearing my Fuddleheaded Academic hat, I'm a bit nonplused that an opinion on policy should be transmogrified into some sort of overarching calumny of the institution behind it. Part of the metamorphosis can probably be attributed to the natural processes of any game of Telephone — the jungle telegraph is notorious for bit loss in transmission, and as I say, Bruce and I have never really talked directly on the subject. I'm inclined to suppose he took the common wisdom at face value — a minor sin in the gossipy world of fandom, and not one I am guiltless of. But there's still the question of the translation filter; somewhere in the process of transmission somebody turned "Ulrika objects to how SCIFI [implements a policy]" into "Ulrika objects to SCIFI" by mistaken synecdoche. I have a suspicion what that filter might be, and it's one that I find sufficiently pernicious that I think it merits consideration on its own.

The filter in question is what I call Southern Loyalty. I call it "Southern," perhaps unfairly, because when I first encountered it, it was among various fen from south of the Mason-Dixon, and because at least one of them embraced it simply as 'loyalty,' and declared it one of the virtues of the South. The basic tenet of Southern Loyalty, as I understand it, is You Never Criticize or Gainsay Your Friends In Public. If you violate this maxim, you are either not loyal, or not really a friend. Probably both. For example, when two couples I know in Georgia fell out, it was because the first couple had

Copyright 1997 - All rights are retained by the individual creators, unless otherwise noted. *Widening Gyre #3* published November, 1997, and edited in all its particulars by Ulrika O'Brien. Our editorial offices can be reached c/o 123 Melody Ln., #C, Costa Mesa, CA 92627, ulrika@aol.com, or uao-brien@uci.edu. However, any content you particularly hate, and any occasions of missing crucial bits of the colophon, should be blamed on Gary Farber, regardless of actual culpability.

Contents

Philosophical Tough Love...Ulrika O'Brien.....	p.1
Gasp...Michael Weholt.....	p.3
Some Reactions to Online Fanac...Don Fitch.....	p.5
What I Did On My Summer Vacation..Jo Walton...p.8	
The Rules...Teresa Nielsen Hayden.....	p.10
Talk Radio....Ed Green.....	p.12
Letters Column.....	p.13

Art Credits

Brad Foster - p.2
Ian Gunn - pp. 6, 7, 21
Ulrika O'Brien - Cover, 11, 15, 18, 20
Selina Phanara - pp.4, 14
William Rotsler - 9

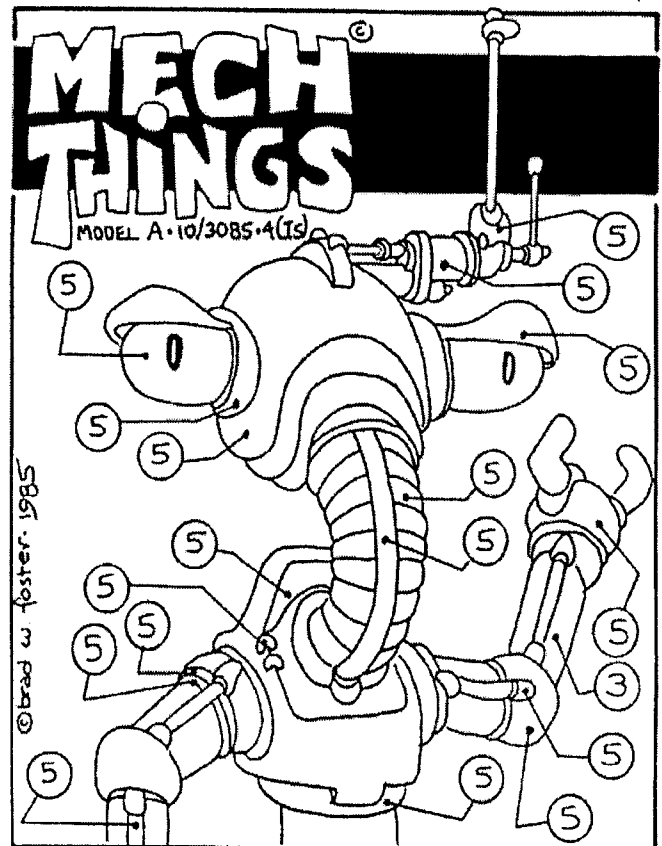
YANKEE LOYALTY (continued)

had a crisis with the baby sitter that sat for both couples' children. First couple expected the second to chime in with denouncing the sitter and moving their sons to another daycare provider forthwith. But the second couple like their sitter. She has a longstanding and loving relationship with their boys, and they thought that moving the boys would be a painful and unnecessary overreaction to events. And they had a much milder reaction to the "crisis" that started it all. Rather than treating this as a difference of opinion and leaving it at that, the first couple concluded that the second Weren't Really Their Friends, and went for the cut direct. There endeth the friendship of many years, for Grievous Breach of Southern Loyalty.

Okay, maybe I was dropped on my head too many times as a child, but this is just utter anathema to me. I will insist that I am quite capable of profound loyalty, but it never, ever takes the form of rendering the object of loyalty above criticism or disagreement. I guess mine is more of a Yankee Loyalty, if you will. If you are my friend, I will love you fiercely, ferociously defend you against unfair attack, support your right to voice your opinion, however fuggheaded, misguided, or plain wrong it might be, and I will cherish your foibles, but I'm damned if granting you papal infallibility is going to be a condition of my friendship. See, I don't think it would do you any favors if I did.

In the course of my years of training in philosophy, among a grab bag of mental quirks, I picked up a great appreciation for fallibilism. Fallibilism is just the pedagogical assumption that first takes are fallible. The first conclusion you reach based on initial facts and assessments is often partly wrong, only a first approximation or first step in the process of a dialectical give-and-take that gets you to a model that really approximates reality or a concept that has some genuine utility and fruitfulness. Fallibilism further suggests that there isn't anything really wrong with that, so long as you're willing to take new data into account, and incorporate corrections into your initial view. Basically, fallibilism says that it's okay to be wrong, so long as you're open to, and willingly pursue, correction. Part and parcel to the viewpoint of the fallibilist is the assumption that criticism is a useful and necessary part of the process of pursuing better, more useful posits. As David Brin once remarked, "Criticism is the only known antidote to error." Criticism is a great gift, because it makes your hypotheses *better*.

Can you see the conceptual train wreck when worldviews collide yet? It may occur to you that fallibilism runs directly contrary to a significant subset of our cultural assumptions. As often as not, Americans internalize a set of beliefs, probably not fully conscious ones, about being wrong, or changing one's mind. "Being Wrong is a Great Moral Failing," and "Changing My Mind Means Personal Failure, and Loss of Face," and "My Ideas Are My Self – Bad Ideas Mean I am a Bad Person," seem to be among those common assumptions. Given those background assumptions, Southern Loyalty makes a certain sense. (Certainly I can more nearly agree with a maxim of loyalty that says you don't publicly humiliate your friends, or attack them as moral reprobates.) Southern Loyalty abhors criticism and dissent as personal attacks on the moral and social stature of the person whose views are criticized. Southern Loyalty is fundamentally anti-fallibilist. But how sad is this anti-fallibilism. How utterly tragic to be constrained to continue to believe your first thought, whatever initial hypothesis you first stumbled on in the blush of youth and ignorance. Too much anti-fallibilism will keep you from ever growing any wiser with the years, and may well keep you from growing old enough to get wise, given sufficiently contrary-to-vital-facts initial assumptions. And if everybody who loves you is prevented by the bonds of loyalty from pointing out your mistakes, that leaves it up to you and your enemies to figure out and implement corrections.



Given what an unalloyedly good and useful thing I think criticism really is, how am I supposed to deprive those I love best of its benefit? If I criticize the hell out of your ideas, it's only Philosophical Tough Love, the Zen grandmotherly kindness of a swift kick in the ass, feel free to return the favor. Who loves ya, baby? But in a world of Southern Loyalists, it is not a gift that is often even understood, let alone embraced. That's the train wreck, of course.

So that's the theory, anyway. I think my LASFan friends and acquaintances have collectively or individually applied Southern Loyalty assumptions to my criticism of SCIFI, and

concluded that I am no friend of SCIFI. But to understand me, if anybody wants to, you have to take any criticism I offer as coming from somebody who practices Yankee Loyalty. I *will* criticize those I love, if I think that criticism can produce real benefit. I can't claim to love SCIFI, particularly, but I am not "Not A Friend of SCIFI" either. What I love is fandom, and the health of fandom as a social venue and agora for communication, and so long as SCIFI is an agent for promoting the health of fandom in Southern California (which I think, in largest measure, it is) SCIFI has my fierce loyalty. But it will be *my* kind of loyalty.



Michael Weholt gets serious. I've had the privilege of demonstrating my Yankee Loyalty in raseff disagreements with Michael, and have never found him to be less than a sincere, thoughtful, earnest interlocutor with a great talent for introspection and honest self-appraisal. I'm not sure I've ever had just the moment of the gasp, but every now and then I do feel my internal landscape rearranged by the tremors of real world events catching up to expectations I never even noticed I had. I stop for a minute and realize I had a vision of the way the future was, and realize it because that way has been closed off at the fork.

GASP by Michael R. Weholt

A few weeks ago, some 15 year-old kid in New Jersey was arrested for the rape and murder of an 11 year-old boy. The names and details of this have been in the papers so I will not repeat them here. Nor will I speculate here as to why it happened, nor hazard an opinion as to the guilt of the accused. And though I feel profound sympathy for the families involved, I'll not write about that here. This piece is about something else.

A day or so after reports of this crime first appeared in the papers, I read an article about it in the online version of the New York *Daily News*. Reference was made to the fact that the accused kid had a web page, and the article thoughtfully provided his America Online screen name. Being the Junior Jack Web G-man that I am, I went to my web browser, filled in the standard information required to get to AOL, then added in the kid's name.

After a moment, the screen blanked then filled with a lavenderish background. It suddenly occurred to me, bright-boy that I am, that the page was still there, and that it was just then loading itself into my browser.

I gasped.
Literally.

Gasping is not something I normally do.

In itself, the page wasn't much: just a kid's web page — concerned mostly with the band *Smashing Pumpkins*. And there was some stuff about his girlfriend: he had never actually met her, of course, but he felt he had grown close to her over the last year through their communications online. There was an essay about his school, and an essay on who would win in a stand-up fight between Beavis and Butthead, and an essay on what it meant to be a True Friend. There was a picture of him, taken about a year earlier — about a year before his arrest for rape and murder.

I could describe for you how average he looked, how he didn't look like the sort of person who could do such a thing, but what would be the point? We all know that people who do these sorts of things rarely look like the people who do these sorts of things. He looked like a gawky, gangly, 15 year-old kid, complete with a bit of peach fuzz on his upper lip. That's all. That's what he looked like.

As I said, at first it astonished me that the page was still up (it's gone now — I just checked), but then it occurred to me that *of course* the page would still be there. The kid, presumably having a great number of things on his mind when the cops came knocking, wouldn't have been much concerned with taking his web page down. And it seems unlikely that AOL has a squad of roving webmasters flitting about, deleting the abandoned web sites of AOL members arrested for murder. Just not the sort of thing I picture being written into the manual.

So of course the web page would still be there. And of course my web browser would properly load it. Everything about this minor and everyday web transaction would operate just as it should. Everything would be just as if some poor mother and father had not lost their dear little boy under circumstances the horrifying nature of which most of us can't even imagine.

There was a time not too long ago, when this 15 year-old accused murderer labored lovingly over his HTML tags, when he struggled with his image-source calls and fretted over the endless details that go toward making a proper web page. There was a time when he imagined, presumably with delight, his handiwork flowing over the web and spilling into the machines of his fellow *Smashing Pumpkins* fans. There was a time when an essay on "Which One? Beavis or Butthead?" seemed an innocent goof. That was back when being goofy was still an option.

I predict with some degree of confidence that, these days, this kid has other things on his mind. And his web page sits there like a shoe in a crosswalk, its owner having been knocked to Kingdom Come.

Some years ago, I had a dream in which I murdered someone. I don't recall the general circumstances of



my "crime", but I do recall some of the specifics. The scene was around a campfire, I know. The victim, whom I did not then and still don't recognize, had just revealed to me (overtly or covertly, I don't remember which) that he knew something terrible about me. I don't know what it was he knew, but I remember that his knowing it frightened me deeply. I recall thinking, "If only he were dead, I wouldn't have this problem."

And so, in the dream, I picked up a respectably hefty piece of firewood and while the poor fellow conveniently occupied himself with nursing the campfire, I bashed out his brains.

Naturally, the doing of it jolted me awake. I remember lying there thinking not "how could I imagine doing such a thing?" — after all, it was only a dream, and I think I can honestly say that I have never had the slightest urge to do (much) physical harm to anyone, let alone kill anybody. Rather, I found myself thinking, still mixed up with my dream-self, "I've crossed a line."

About a week later, I had another dream in which I was my old, murderous dream-self again. I vividly recalled my earlier dream-crime, and suddenly that feeling was back: that feeling that I had removed myself from the great mass of the Relatively Innocent and set myself down over there, in the section where the people who have killed somebody have to sit. It's not a section you can ever leave, you know; it's not the sort of line you can uncross.

My waking life is a dull one, for the most part, when looked at in its day-to-day particulars. Through force of habit, I begin to believe that life-altering moments don't really exist. I begin to believe my own propaganda that the way my life is now is the way it will always be. There will never be that speeding bus in a crosswalk; there will never be that sudden clenching in the chest as the old ticker gives out; there will never be that chilling moment when I find myself hanging cartoonishly in space, suddenly realizing that I have just inadvertently walked off the edge of a 5-story building. I nearly did that very thing, you know, not too long ago. The details of the idiotic and near-fatal mistake are insipid and so I won't dwell on them here — except to say that their very inanity makes my memory of that moment all the more horrifying. All I can think of, when the terror comes back, is what an idiot I would have felt as I fell to my death. It seems that for me, at least, there's something especially shocking about the notion of dying of my own stupidity.

We believe but we don't believe in the existence of sudden, life-altering moments. We predict confidently — we are

confident because we don't believe it could ever really happen — that "I could walk out tomorrow and get hit by a bus." And yet when we see such moments smearing themselves over the lives of other people, we stand there aghast, believing in these sorts of moments desperately, clinging to our certainty that it must be the other guy's bad luck, or his stinky Karma, or perhaps his own moral turpitude that let something this terrible happen.

I click on a web page and I am instantly reminded that *anybody's* life, even mine, could — in the next instant — collapse. You don't have to have stinky Karma or

stinky bad luck. You don't even have to murder anybody. All you really have to do is spend time on Earth. You'll get your chance, soon enough, and when you do, the rest of us will sit there staring at what remains of your life -- the way I sat there staring at that kid's forlorn and forgotten web page -- and stupid with fear we will persuade ourselves: "Thank God it's got nothing to do with me", forgetting, conveniently, that tiny gasp from a moment before.



*I think perhaps Don Fitch is another of the fanzine fans who needs no introduction from me, at least to other fanzine cognoscenti. On the other hand, there are certain ironies and felicities and self-referentialities inherent in my running this particular article here. Don and I revolved in different orbits of the same fannish gravity well, LASFS, for years without ever getting to know each other. I knew him by sight, and he me, but that was pretty much the beginning and end of it. I really only started getting a sense of Don when he got online and started contributing to rec.arts.s-f.fandom (or rasseff, to her friends). He's always been a bit of a maverick there, chastising us for our unpolished manners, and posting long, thoughtful essays against all custom of exercise. Bless him for keeping of the rest of us honest, and pushing at the boundaries of the medium. In his article, Don wonders if the boil of creative interaction on rasseff will lead to any unexpected fanzine activity, which is just deliciously ironic. See, it's a fair bet that I never would have started this **Widening Gyre** thing if it hadn't been for rasseff, nor known Don well enough to ask him for a contribution, nor have read his thoughts on being online, as originally mulled on rasseff. This very article would not exist. Unexpected self-referential fanac, ahoy!*

SOME REACTIONS TO ONLINE FANAC, OR, A TOEHOLD IN ANOTHER BRAVE NEW WORLD by Don Fitch

"Fanac is anything two or more fans do together" is a beguiling and interestingly suggestive statement, but too circular to be a definition, and I've recently been thinking about "Fanac is communication". That's certainly not circular, nor is it complete enough to serve as a definition, but it's a useful promontory on which to stand in order to get an over-all view of our microcosm from a particular and useful angle, and it provides an excuse to examine what more than a few people have called "the greatest advance in human communication since Gutenberg invented the printing-press".

Science fiction Fandom can be said to have begun when the "scientific fiction" pulp-magazines (a mass-medium form for communicating SF to a large number of readers) started publishing communications in the form of letters from their readers, including the letter-writers' addresses, so that other enthusiasts of the genre could

write letters to them, communicating support or disagreement. Well...ok, maybe a few local clubs, with meetings at which fans could discuss/argue/communicate orally, came first. What we have the best record of, however, is the fanzines — amateur publications that

rarely had a circulation of over a hundred — through which those early fans communicated their ideas about science fiction and a host of other things. Obviously, we still have fanzines, though in most respects they're greatly superior to the early ones. We also still have fan clubs, where fans can gather and communicate orally (and wave their arms about, wildly), and SF conventions where they can do the same thing as part of a larger group. I don't fully agree with the theory that "the Internet"—this system of tens of millions of sometimes-interconnecting computers — is the most important invention directly bearing on human communication and culture since Gutenberg developed the craft of printing from movable metal type, but it does seem to be one of the most important developments of the 20th Century, and probably of the 21st, where its influence will be most strongly felt.

Even to a newcomer like myself, it's clear that this new medium permits a vast number of people to exchange,

read, or download an enormous amount of wordage and ideas at almost no per-item monetary cost. This is open to practically anyone who has access to a computer and modem, with modest monthly telephone and service provider fees. It's also clear that this is Life in the Fast Lane with a vengeance. You can publish an e-mail fanzine and get back dozens of letters of comment from places as far-flung as Australia and Great Britain within a few hours. You can pretty well assume that just about everything you've heard about "the Internet" is true. Good, bad, or indifferent, it's all present in this enormous microcosm (or "macrocosm", if you will) — "the largest library in the world, with all the books piled on the floor," millions of fuggheads & dull bores and a million or more highly-rewarding people (far more of the latter than one person can handle, even in the comparatively small science fiction and fandom venues), sociopaths and idealists of the highest moral & intellectual order, gems of inestimable value and trash that's disgusting to scrape off of your shoes, as well as an enormous amount of totally-undistinguished stuff that just sits there — all jumbled together with almost no dependable filters or Critics to help select which might worth your time and which probably isn't. This isn't nearly as bad as it might sound; it's easy enough to find the fannish hang-outs, and all you need to do is not be bothered too much by the feeling that there's Great Stuff around and you're missing it — something most of us have long ago learned to live with. If you can survive this in a good library or bookstore, you can survive it on the Internet.

When I /f/o/o/l/i/s/h/l/y/ accepted the job of on-site agent for the Fan Lounge at the 1996 Worldcon, in near-by Anaheim, it was obvious that I needed to be online in order to keep track of how the convention's plans were progressing, and to be able to exchange e-mail with a lot of the people who would be participating in the Fanzine Lounge's activities. So I dug out the modem that "friends" ("It's a Briar-Patch Gift", one of them warned me) in Minneapolis had sent after they'd engaged in an upgrading frenzy, and hunted around for a service provider that would give me email capability with a minimum of effort & expense on my part. AOL seemed to be about the best bet, for various reasons, and I guess it was the best, despite some mildly-annoying flaws that became obvious sooner (their software frequently "has become corrupted") or later (every round of "Major Improvements" seems to result in anywhere from three to sixteen things working *less* well than previously). The books I found weren't much help, being mostly either condescendingly simplistic or confusingly technical, so considerable time during the first year was consumed by learning to deal with this unfamiliar technology and the sometimes rather strange customs, practices, and *mores* of Internet Culture. It certainly is

a wonderful thing to find oneself a neofan again, after so many years.

Indeed, the computerist sub-culture is sometimes still challenging. Some of the forms and practices a few highly vocal computerists insist upon everyone following can seem, to an outsider, to be empty or not-necessarily-applicable relics or rituals of a bygone era. The internet appears to go by something like "dog-years," one year there producing an amount of growth & change one would expect to find in five or ten years in the Real World outside of it. Adjusting to this calls for a degree of flexibility that's not necessarily an at-



tribute of long-time (i.e. older) fans, though a fair number have made the transition successfully. Fortunately, a bit of time & persistence, and a reasonably thick skin, are all that's needed to figure out which of the customs *must* be followed and which of them one can get away with skirting.

Thick skin? Yes indeed, an absolute requirement. My theory is that the Computerists who started it all were/ are mostly Purely Scientific/Mathematical/Intellectual Beings who embody to the utmost what Ted White long ago noted as a frequent difference between in-person and behind-the-typewriter personalities in fanzine fans. They zero in on doing every little thing perfectly correctly, as one must when working with computers, and say things like "You're doing that wrong" with a direct bluntness that might indicate overt and intentional rudeness in other social circles. Figuring out this context may take a while, along with understanding that the person who says "You're doing it wrong" probably

expects you to be able to find out how to do it right (which often isn't at all easy for a newcomer), or to send back a message along the lines of "How can I do it right, given that I have only [xxx] equipment?" The Computerist will then usually grump that you ought to upgrade, sigh, and explain (sometimes in adequate and coprehensible detail) some practical work-around you might try... all the while not overtly relating to you at all as a human being. Then there's the occasional person who'll flame you with explicit and vaguely insulting suggestions that you're a clueless newbie and ought to crawl back under your rock until you've learned enough to take your place impeccably in decent society. Civility seems to be in even shorter supply in online circles than it is in fandom, even though most of the commonly accepted guidelines (FAQs) stress the importance of it and of remembering that you're communicating with a Real Person. In actuality, we're dealing with another fandom here, and one which, like ours, has its own distinct "family manners".

Frankly, I have some doubts about the Internet being, within the near future, an excellent medium for the production of fanzines. The medium seems to be more ideal for the communication of small bits of information -- one screen (about 15 lines) or two of text at a time seems to be the suggested limit. This is great for fans who have Attention Deficit Disorder, or delight in a terse and wittily epigrammatic writing style (which at least a dozen online fans practice marvelously well), but it seems to militate even more than the paper-and-postage cost constraints of traditional fanzines against the presentation and examination of complexly inter-related multiple-idea themes in a single article. Yeah, I like and admire William Rotsler's "Short is Good. Funny is Good. Short and Funny is Best" adage, but I think it would be terrible if fanwriting were limited

to that technique. The very size of the Internet makes it like a big convention, where it's difficult to talk with anyone for more than five minutes, with hundreds of things always clamoring to be done immediately, for instant gratification. It tends to discourage long, thoughtful, complex treatment of any idea or interrelated set of ideas. Most often, what people do is work these things out by way of exchanging dozens or hundreds of messages or postings on newsgroups, which has its good aspects because it involves input from many people, but it's also less individualistic and not quite the same thing as having it all together in one place/article. OTOH, practically nothing — including any particular style of presentation — is absolutely **prohibited** online; fully developed written material is there, and more will be if an audience for it develops, so there are opportunities for fannish pioneering.

There are, of course, currently published traditional fanzines available online. Web Pages hold all issues of *Ansible*, several issues of *Mimosa*, *Apparatchick*, *Plokta* (RSN), and other Hugo-worthy or otherwise excellent zines (often in their original format, with illustrations), dozens of fans have Web Home Pages containing their own fannish writing, and there are several sites where the texts of Fannish Classics such as *The Enchanted Duplicator* and important ancient fanzines are accessible for reading or downloading as they are gradually keyboarded.

There doesn't yet seem to be, however, much of anything in the way on online-only fannish fanzines, created from scratch in and for that medium. They could be produced, in an ASCII text-only version, to be distributed by email and eventually, as technology expands and more universal Standards are established, circulated as email attachments with typographic formatting and fanartwork retained, but "cyberspace" appears to be moving more and more towards Web Pages, and this medium is bound to change the nature of "fannish fanzines" published on it. One primary charm and virtue of fanzines has been that they were produced for a specific and limited audience of people who pretty much shared the common background of a particular and limited sub-culture. Their Identity is built partly on in-group references, shared traditions, and often on writing about things that we'd normally discuss only with people we considered at least sort-of-friends. A Web Page, however, is open to millions of readers, including our next-door neighbors, our employers, our relatives, the local police department, co-workers, advertisers, and potentially obnoxious people we might encounter in the course of our daily mundane lives. I cannot see this as having anything but a chilling and perhaps dulling effect on many traditional fanwriting styles. That's not to say, of course, that we don't all follow Marion Zimmer Bradley's advice to "Never write anything for a fanzine that you wouldn't



be willing to hear read in Court", that we ever say or do anything illegal or improper, or that any fanzine material is ever anything less than 105% fiction. Nor am I sure that fans who approach the production of a Web-Page original fanzine will (or should) fail or refuse to take into consideration the potential non-fan/non-fannish readers and, by writing for a much broader audience, produce something that would certainly be an excellent 'Zine or amateur magazine, but which isn't recognized as a fanzine by that internal Daemon that identifies "fannishness". For that, I suspect we'll stick to on-paper fanzines, and ones circulated to a limited electronic mailing list.

It'll all get sorted out eventually, of course, though meanwhile it'll be interesting to speculate on just what effect Usenet newsgroups such as rec.arts.s-f.fandom are going to have on fanzines and general fanac. That group, alone, is currently generating traffic that would print out at about 500 pages per day. Granted, half of that is headers, and half the remainder is quotes, but still it would make a substantial (and an interesting) fanzine every mortal day. Probably the majority of the most-active participants either aren't fanzine fans or haven't produced a general-

circulation fanzine in many years, but it'll be fascinating to see how this rolling-boil of fannish creativity results in unexpected fanzine activity, and to what degree it will serve as a black-hole substitute for it, as in-person socializing does in so many urban areas. I'm guessing it'll be a mixture of both, if only because one of the treats of online fanac is that you can pick things up and put them aside whenever you feel like it, with none of the constraints and obligations implicit in traditional fanzine activity. What we're seeing here is technological change of an order of magnitude greater than, say, the displacement of the hectograph by the photocopier. It's a new medium and a new *form* of communication — one that can be shaped into something marvelously useful for some major aspects of fanac — and though I expect and hope that it won't replace printed fanzines, it's clearly an important ancillary tool that all but the most technophobic fan would do well to play around with for at least a year or so, to discover some of its potential usefulness... and have a lot of fun, as well.



Jo Walton is yet another Usenaut, active on rec.arts.s-f.fandom, but perhaps moreso on rec.arts.sf.written and rec.arts.sf.composition, which focus on published SF, and the business of writing SF, respectively. This means I don't know her as well, yet, as I do some rasfefarians but from what I've seen of her she's one of those rare, sweet-tempered souls who seem only to speak when they have something witty, interesting, or helpful to say, and passes through Usenet like a splash of clear water glinting in sunlight. I'm still wondering what a kiff is, though.

WHAT I DID ON MY SUMMER VACATION

by Jo Walton

School wasn't *really* starting today, that was a rumor put out to confuse me. However they did want to see New Kids first thing, so we spent most of the morning being shown round Sasha's new school and filling in forms and so on and so forth, leaving us at 11:00 with No Plan.

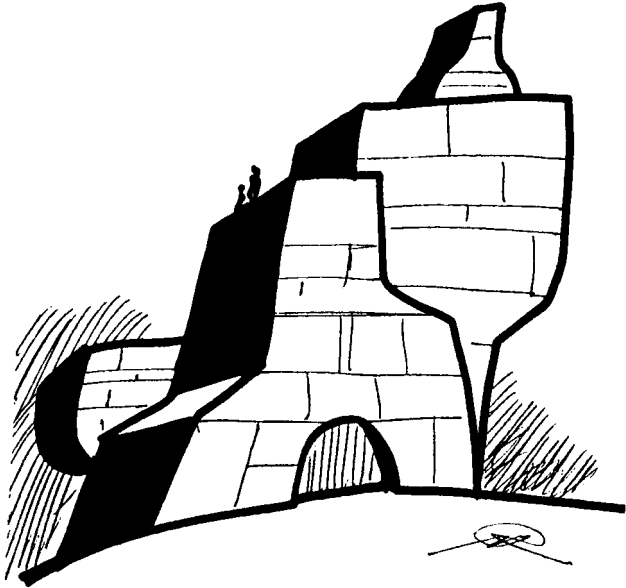
There haven't been any days this holiday with No Plan. We've had Plans days in advance, and Plans modified for the weather, and days on which the Plan was to stay home and do house stuff but this was different.

Sasha decided that what he'd really, really, really like to do on this day with No Plan would be to go out into the country and see a stone circle or a castle, or preferably both. Now that sort of thing is usually best done by starting out on the 9:00 bus West to the Gower, which had of course long gone. True, there was another at noon — I shouldn't have mentioned it. In vain arguments that bus tickets that allow you to go anywhere all day are best bought first thing, in vain arguments that it might rain, in vain sugges-

tions that we might go tomorrow and how about a trip to the swimming pool to test my new bathing costume? Nothing would do but a walk in the country with a stone circle or a castle, or, of course, both.

So OK, I'm easily persuaded to go and look at castles, especially after a morning with bureaucracy. Out came the maps and Plans were made to take in a route past two iron age cairns, a megalithic tumulus called Arthur's Stone, and Weobley Castle, Norman, a mere six hundred years old. As soon as we got off the bus the rain started. "It'll stop," said Sasha, enthusiastically. We squelched off across the fields. "It'll stop," he said, more tentatively as we stood dripping beside the first barrow, "but maybe you should have worn your Canadian Boots." I'd come to this conclusion myself. I like open-toed sandals. I like them a lot. I wear them all the time. But heathland can be a bit boggy, and the water was coming in over the tops.

When we reached Arthur's Stone the rain had stopped, and we saw all the Northern part of the peninsula magically reveal itself from mist-shrouded mysterious



blue shapes to real little square fields (mostly medieval, with some Celtic field pattern) with hedges and little grey houses, then the sands of the North Gower, far below us. Arthur's Stone stands on the top of a ridge, pretty much in the middle of the Gower peninsula, the way we'd come sloped gently down towards the road and the cliffs of South Gower. The way ahead of us was much steeper. Well, those contour lines were a little close together on the map. Never mind.

The stone itself is a huge boulder — about the size of a minibus — standing on stone supports. I don't know why anyone went to that trouble, but it must have been an awful lot of trouble. There must be a mighty hero under there, but we don't know who. The local legend (told to me by the bus driver, but confirmed when I got home, by the *Encyclopaedia of Arthurian Mythology*) is that Arthur found the stone in his shoe when watering his horses at Broad Pool, a few miles east, and flung it away to land there. He must have had very big feet, not to mention a powerful throwing arm. I told Sasha Chesterton's poem about Arthur as we went down.

The way down was full of wildflowers. Heather, in five or six different colours, broom, tiny celandines, cornflowers, and ling. Ling? Ling only grows where it's boggy — squelch. The half a mile of path where those contour lines were not close together could have been a very good example of marsh flowers for those sufficiently booted to care about botany, or those with sufficient composure not to be convinced we would drown at every step. I showed Sasha how to walk in marshes,

and what to look for to walk on. It was nothing to Croggin Bog, I said, and got a strange feeling of nostalgia for that bog I used to play in as a child where half of the fascination was that it was Very Dangerous. I stopped telling Sasha it was perfectly safe if you know what you're doing, and just made sure he knew what he was doing. My feet had forgotten what dry meant by the time we got onto the road, and Sasha had mud right up to the bottom of his shorts. His very solid but new-for-school shoes were covered in mud, and we had an argument about who's going to clean them. I won, but they're standing in the kitchen still covered in mud at the moment.

We happened upon what is marked on my 2.5 inch Ordnance Survey map as "Inn" - the Greyhound Arms, and made a pretty good lunch. I was glad to sit down. After lunch we set off for the castle, up another set of footpaths. These led uphill through woods - wonderful ash woods. SW Wales is full of beautiful ash trees. Then it led over a stile and downhill through woods, opening out onto a vista of the sands and sea and a meadow. Sasha was dubious about the meadow, but it was reasonably dry, so we went on, very soon seeing Weobley Castle in the trees above and ahead of us. We were still about a half a mile from it in terms of walking, because we couldn't go vertically up the cliff, but it was wonderful looking at it from there.

The castle is one of the best C.13 castles I've seen, very well preserved because instead of being ruined by Cromwell like most castles, it was ruined by Owain Glyndwr, who was less thorough. It had a wonderful peaceful feeling, and the views from the windows were spectacular. White-bellied swallows kept swooping through the window spaces above my head and darting away again, black against the sky. After we'd been in all the rooms and planned both how to attack and how to defend it, I stood in the roofless Great Hall and tested the acoustics with some poetry. Sasha sighed and let me, indulgently. I felt briefly grumpy with Graydon for having written the definitive poem about old ruined stone buildings without even having been in one, dammit. Then I just stood there for a while, looking out of the windows at the different angles of the bay and the trees. The sun was out and everything was glowing.

We made our way back towards Llanridian where I hoped there was a bus stop, and further hoped there might be a bus. I pointed out that Sasha was being very unfair in saying I should have checked, as this whole thing was his idea. His good idea. If there wasn't a bus in Llanridian, a mere three miles away, we'd have to walk another couple of miles to Reynoldston, where we knew there was a bus and I even had the time table for it. Then we climbed a stile

into a field, and one magpie flew across right in front of my face. I looked in vain for its friend. Oh.

Rarely has any magpie's sorrow been expressed so quickly. There were three horses in the field, young horses, not very big. Not foals, not spindly legged, but not grown up horses either. They rushed over towards us as we climbed down. I rejected demands that we give them sugar, or biscuits - we didn't have sugar but we did have biscuits. The horses wanted to be friendly. We said hello, then walked on. Two of the horses wandered off, as horses do. Sasha said he wanted to call the brown one Feste. The grey one came nearer and tried to eat Sasha's backpack. I tried to discourage it. We tried to walk on. The grey horse wouldn't leave us alone. I said a magic Welsh word that generally discourages animals and children doing things they're not supposed to. Didn't work this time. The horse decided it didn't like me. It turned around and did something - Sasha claims it bucked at me - and there I was lying in the hedge. It ran away. My first thought was that I mustn't show Sasha that there was anything wrong. I was quite successful at this. My second thought, after I'd stood up, was to get out of the field, which we did. My third thought, out of the field, was that my hip probably wasn't broken, it didn't feel quite as bad as it did the last time it was broken and I walked on it. I have a bruise the size of, well, two horse's hooves, and it's turning a very interesting

colour.

We walked back to Llanridian, eventually I was reduced to saying "No, I don't *know* why it did it, I expect it was as much my fault as the horse's and I don't want to talk about it any more right now," and "Yes, I hope there's a bus stop there *too*."

There was. There was even a seat by it. I suppose there were some fields and trees and possibly even the other cairn in between that field and the bus stop, but I didn't pay any attention to them, it was all I could do to keep walking. I didn't realise until I got home and Sasha was surprised by how impressive my bruise was that I'd actually succeeded in convincing him that nothing much was wrong.

I can't even consider knowing what it feels like to be kicked by a horse as research for the horse bits in my novel. My protagonist would never be so *stupid*, and if one were kicked by a shod heavy horse I doubt one would ever get up again. Sasha had a bath and went to bed, I read him a story and then had a Very Hot Bath and looked at Usenet, and I'm now round to feeling that it was, all things considered, a pretty good day. Tomorrow, if I'm really lucky, I might get some work done.



I met Teresa Nielsen Hayden and her husband Patrick at LAcon III, where Teresa taught me to turn ordinary snack foods into disgusting aliens. (First Rule: It Must Have Eyes.) The swarthy ruffian Patrick I had already locked horns with on rass-eff, but Teresa I knew only by reputation as a much admired Fancestress, Fanzine Jiant, and Holy Relic. Okay, not quite, but people of reliable taste think very highly of Teresa and her acumen as a fanwriter and publisher. Who better to offer some basic rules for how to pub your ish? What follow are some of Teresa's observations, as posted to Usenet, on the making of good fanzines. I took the liberty of stitching them together into a single piece. Teresa tells me she usually likes to endlessly rework her writing until it is just so, so let me take the blame for any remaining infelicities (ha!) as the culpable editor (all editors are bad — unless they work for Tor) who didn't let her rework a darned thing, but just said, "Unless you tell me no, I'm running it." Wit and wisdom is Teresa's own, of course.

THE RULES AS I WAS TAUGHT THEM by Teresa Nielsen Hayden

1. Always save copies of your correspondence.
2. Lots of white space and big pull-quotes make it look like you have to manipulate the readers to get them to look at your text at all. Smaller type, tight margins, and small text-specific illustrations give the impression that you had so much wonderful stuff this issue you couldn't quite fit it all in. (A principle used to good effect, IMO, in the early days of *Spy*.)

3. You have to have a letter column.

4. You have to edit your letter column.

5. An article that you can still bear to look at after reading, editing, stenciling, proofing, correcting, proofing again, mimeographing, and collating it, is worth publishing. If you're bored by the time you're stenciling it, the readers will be bored when they read it. (This rule doesn't apply to your own writing. A lot of writers go through a period of being unable to look at their own stuff without flinching. Patrick and I refer to it as the piece's radioactive half-life.)

6. Rounded lettering guides look friendlier than the squared-off kind. (Okay, so a few of these are out of date...)

7. Six or fewer sheets, two staples. Seven or more sheets, three staples. But not always. (This is a Serious Fannish Issue, and subject to dispute.)

8. Good text always beats mediocre illustrations. (An illustration that's kinda, sorta okay takes up a lot of space for the amount of impact it generates. Bear in mind that a slightly shaggy illustration will almost always look better at 80% reduction. It does wonders for the line quality.)

9. Assume you'll have to write the first issue yourself.

10. Nobody wants to hear about "Why This Issue Is Late", unless something so interesting happened to you that you'd want to write about it anyway. ("Why This Issue Is Late" is a warm up exercise, not a performance. Note: "Why This Issue Is Early" has been done already.)

11. You'll get more reader response if you mention the people on your mailing list whenever appropriate. (This is also a Disputed Issue.)

12. Means of reproduction matter far less than ease and swiftness of production, readability, and frequency of issues. Use whatever works best for you.

13. If fiction is good enough to publish, some magazine will buy it. Fanzines are not fiction prozines with training wheels. The only exception to this rule is fiction of professional quality, which for some other reason cannot be sold to a professional magazine.

14. The single easiest way for potential readers to decide they're not interested in your publication is by having you tell them so. Don't do it.

15. Whenever possible, make your contributors look witty and intelligent.

16. Steal From The Best.

And some subsequent observations:

If you're using a tricky artsy page design, you'll wind up paying more attention to it than to your content.

When you want someone to write for you who hasn't done so yet, you want to convey your *warmest enthusiasm* for the idea that *they* might write something for you.

There's no law against asking your Reverend Fancestors to contribute. Besides, some of them are pretty good.

Learn that when a friend is telling you about some truly astounding, bizarre, funny, thing that's happened to them, you must wait until they're near the end of the story and then say: "Oh God, that's brilliant! Can you write that up for my fanzine?" Do not wait until the end to ask; there might be other faneditors within earshot.

When you're dealing with artists, it is good to talk to them about several specific pieces of their art that you've liked in the past, and why. Artists hardly ever get real feedback, and tend to feel secretly forlorn about it. A useful variant is to say "I loved *x* piece of yours; how did you get it to work that way?" Or: "Cool! What prompted that? Or did it just crawl off the end of your pencil?"

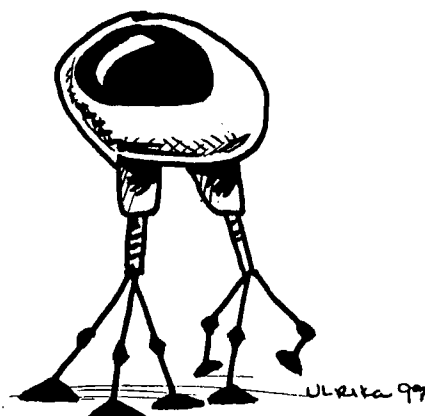
Overall subtext for soliciting contributions: "I pay attention to and appreciate what you do."

Nobody knows what to say to a self-contained article. Walt Willis once told me that he and Bob Shaw got almost no letters of comment when they published *The Enchanted Duplicator*.

Fanzine review columns are often overdone. Sending letters of comment to other faneditors should be done more often than it is.

A reader's mental picture of who else is receiving this fanzine has a considerable effect on the way they read it. (*No kidding*. Patrick and I used to keep a typed list of our readership tacked to the wall above our typewriter while we worked.)

03



Maybe it's all that weird woo-woo cosmic raygun Sci Fi we read that rots our brains and makes us prone to occasional lapses into telling ourselves apocalyptic if-this-goes-on stories about the little victories for the dark side that we see. Or maybe a pessimistic tendency to believe the past is golden, the present is fallen, and the future is dark is just another one of those things the whole race brought down from the trees. Aw, you figure it out. Rounding out an issue of short stories, we'll end on a downer this time...

TALK RADIO by Ed Green

Growing up in Brooklyn, I have the desire for background noise hardwired in my system. It's part of the chemical soup of my mind. The need is impossible to ignore. I

must have something on the radio while I work or drive. Maybe the tree my family crawled down from was the really noisy one in the jungle. The one all the other limb dwellers used to

throw things at, and yell "Shut the fuck up, it's three in the damn morning!" Not that we heard them. We were busy slamming stones against the branches, chattering at the top of our lungs and hooting at the moon.

Maybe that's why I like talk radio. Perhaps I shouldn't admit that to a fannish audience. I should rather admit to pimping sheep to Marines at the local bases; it would seem a more respectable passtime for a fan than listening to talk radio. Then I recall that John Campbell died while watching a wrestling match on TV, and I don't feel too bad. Well, I do, but a cheap justification is better than none.

I like talk radio. From the stand up (well, sit down) comedy of Rush Limbaugh, the BBC style of National Public Radio, the madness of Art Bell, the bluntness of Howard Stern, I listen to it all. It's all total, utter crap, really.

Sometimes something sneaks in that makes it a moment of ear magic. The different ways to say the same thing, over and over. How simple the solution to any problem can be, if *only everyone* would just do...*something*. The glee in hearing yet a new wrinkle to the conspiracy of the TWA mystery crash. The experts everyone wants to be, bringing a new scrap of information to the discussion. The constant proof of just how ignoble the human race really is. It is the face of humanity, ugly, slack-jawed, and vacant in the eyes.

Yet, recently in LA (and in other markets, I've heard), a new program has slid into town. I discovered it recently on a drive home. It's bright, clever, and making money. It's inhuman. It's one more step towards ending the world as we know it, and the unification of the world under one evil banner. It may even cure me of the need for background noise.

One of the local talk stations pumped up the fact that

almost all of its shows were hosted by women. Actually, all the jocks were women, with one or two token male co-hosts. The afternoon drive show, 3:00 PM to 6:00 PM was one such show. The jock had a left leaning bent, but did it with enough of her tongue in her cheek to make it palatable. So, last week I tuned in and heard of all things one of the marches from the old *Mickey Mouse Club* TV show. "Great," I thought. "This ought to be fun!" In Southern California, the home of Disney, the Mouse gets more than his fair share of beating on the radio. But, it didn't get funny.

It got weird.

Right after that one, came another tune from the Disney Cartel. "From Zero To Hero." It's from the new cartoon feature, *Hercules*. I sat in growing awareness that something was very, very wrong. At first I thought it was a parody of the actual tune, but then I recognized the vocals of Michael Bolton. *That* was what was wrong. I swear, he sounds like he's right on the edge of tearing his balls apart when he hits the high notes.

Behind me came the honk of a horn, and the squeal of breaks. In my rearview mirror, I saw the driver giving me the finger. I had cut him off while paying attention to the radio. This wasn't a good thing at all. Afternoon traffic in LA is at best an adventure requiring white knuckles or a total disbelief in your own mortality. It doesn't forgive inattention.

I had to get my mind off the noise and on the road. And every time I tried, it was pulled back, grabbed by the cortex and forced to listen. Disney after Disney. From *Snow White* to *Operation Dumbo Drop*. Think of the siren call of the Elder Gods from the Cthulu mythos, but instead of a black oily poison gleaming from the fangs, picture sugar syrup.

Actually, picture Nutri-Sweet. It does a better job of rotting the brain.

My ears heard every note. It might as well have been an aural traffic accident. I couldn't change the station, I couldn't turn it off. I didn't dare. There was a joke of galactic scope being played on the air, and this fan wasn't going to miss it.

Finally, the top of the hour came. The station gave its call sign and proudly claimed it was "The Disney Station."

Oh Christ. All Disney, all the time! Now that's funny!

When the news was over, the announcer came back on, telling the audience that the next set of classic Disney tunes would be starting now. Another solid twenty minutes of Walt's music.

I toyed with the idea of pulling the steering wheel hard to port. I could swerve the truck against the freeway divider. At 70 miles per hour in a shitty little Nissan, I'd get at least total break-up and maybe even a fireball. It would be a quick death. Much less painful than, oh, listening to Michael Bolton emasculating himself, hourly.

All Disney? ALL the time?

I read in the *LA Times* that Mouse Factory, Inc. (or whatever they were calling themselves), had indeed invaded the airwaves. And it's come to Los Angeles. They have created a 24-hour-a-day format targeted for the kids, and the "kids in us all." Kid music, kid news, kid call-in shows. All with that wonderful Mickey

Mouse flavor, and the underneath it all, if you listen very carefully, you can hear one magical note. A single note that brings glitter to Tinkerbell, silly grins to Goofy, and a shine to Winnie-the-Pooh's nose.

Ka-Ching!

It's the start. The final sell out. It's the first note of the ending concert of this world. Listen carefully. The conductor has taken the podium, and is rapping his baton on the music stand. We're an arm stroke away from doom.

It's going to be endless nights of "Just A Spoonful of Sugar," sung by people in funny costumes. People dressed up as lovable characters, armed with napalm and bayonets. Jollyng all of us into a group sing of peace and contentment. Or else.

It's Uncle Walt's plan. Damn his frozen hide.



*One of my hallmark character traits, I suppose, is that I find it desperately difficult to keep out of a good, intelligent argument, especially if it looks to be a promising way to sharpen and exchange ideas on an interesting topic. I'm a bit messianic about the usefulness of dialectic as a means to focus what you think about new ideas, to revisit your thoughts on familiar topics grown shopworn, and to get a keener sense of other people's ideas and reasoning, while having a bit of fun. Those who know me from apas and Usenet have surely remarked on this trait already. Those who are just now tripping over me here in **Gyre** have thus far been blessed with an unnatural and misrepresentative silence on that front. Tut. On finding that D West's letter about **Widening Gyre #1** had more hooks in it than I could happily dispense with in a terse, summary editorial reply, I decided to institute a new loccol regime of periodically addressing provocative letters at length, in hopes of prompting extended dialog here. How often this happens will, of course, partly depend on y'all. I don't want the loccol to eat the zine, of course, but if we can jointly foster some ongoing discussions, I won't mind a bit. Think of it as a cheap attempt at generating more comment hooks. So, without too much further ado, I give you D West. My own comments are interjected, in italics, in the good old Usenet interlinear way.*

LOX & MORLOCS

**D West, 17 Carlisle Street,
Keighley, West Yorkshire,
BD21 4PX Great Britain**

DW: Thanks for the copy of *Widening Gyre*. As a first issue it naturally calls for a fairly noncommittal response. The real crunch comes with issue 3, by which time you should have got things sorted out.

Meanwhile...Well, the first thing that occurs to me is that you don't include enough of your own work. As a newish face you ought to be doing more to introduce yourself. I don't mean that you have to do a personalzine, or give us the story of your whole life, but it would be interesting to have rather more detail on yourself as a fan. (Or even as a human being, if you think there's a difference.) Of course, you could leave the picture to emerge gradually, but considering you're standing for TAFF it might be an idea to speed things up. The voters like to know

what they could be getting. (But I don't intend to vote myself, so you needn't defer to my opinion.) Also, there's the thought that unless you get some hotter contributors your own work is likely to remain the more interesting part of the zine.

*UO: I'll see if I can ignore the slight to my editorial tastes and take that as a compliment. But I think I will tend more toward the model of letting the picture of who I am build slowly, over time. Nothing bores me more spectacularly than the rote litany of my fanlife, such as it's been, and I have a feeling that boredom would transmit to the reader. Moreover, **Gyre** was born as a showcase for fannish writers that are less-known or unknown to hardcore, oldfarte, No 'Net Please, We're Fannish,*

fanzine fans. I meant to create in it a meet point between some of the circles I move in, pull together a mix of apahacks, club-and-convention fans, Usenauts, and Ye Olde Fartes and see what happens. The wild hare to stand for TAFF came later, and is decidedly not the editorial focus. If it hadn't been for a couple of conversations at Westercon and what was then the state of the race (that is, nobody standing) I wouldn't have dreamt of running for TAFF this year, because the only places I can regard myself as a 'well-known' fan are not traditional TAFF-core-voter venues. I realize that your advice to reveal more of myself is quite sound for playing TAFF catch up, insofar as that's really even possible, but I'm not quite so dim that I couldn't have figured out on my own to do things quite differently, if **Gyre** were primarily a campaign zine. But it isn't now, and never was, and I don't really want to mess with my original mission this early in the lifetime of the zine — I'll be very surprised indeed if the force of my personality doesn't manage to show through the crevices anyway. If that's my great undoing in the TAFF race, so be it. It isn't as if there shouldn't be a solid American TAFF delegate, regardless of who wins. (But naturally if I don't win, the UK will be deprived for the nonce of in-person displays of my particular weirdo blend of bouncy, optimistic enthusiasms and caustic, bitchy, good-natured asperity. (Ok, I guess I lied last ish — one last TAFF plug after all.))

DW: You seem to have grasped at least some of the situation, but to be really at home I think you need to understand how completely self-sufficient fanzine fandom can be. When you say "Fandom is a huge place, it contains multitudes" you are in fact referring to fandom-as-a-whole, the multitudes being "anyone who's been to a Worldcon lately". But to a fanzine fan (who may not have been to a Worldcon lately, or ever at all) ninety (or perhaps ninety-five) percent of these multitudes are persons of little or no importance. They're fans, yes, but they're not *fanzine* fans, so they're only half a hop ahead of the people who are not fans of any description. This attitude is often called elitist and might even be called arrogant, like the apocryphal British newspaper headline "Fog in Channel — Continent Cut Off." But as far as the hardcore fanzine fans are concerned the non-fanzine fans *are* the ones who are cut off; the centre is fanzine fandom, everybody else is peripheral, and the numbers are completely irrelevant.

UO: I can gather from your *Typed On A Genuine Typewriter* letter that you aren't even a little bit wired, so there's no way you can know how very well aware I am of the existence of this attitude, as vocally represented by rich brown, and more rarely, Greg Pickersgill (whose version of the tune includes a chorus of "Americans are crap, and I'm ignoring you anyway"). Yes, I do know that fanzine fans

are sometimes terribly, terribly provincial and handicapped by a sort of siege mentality. It's a bit embarrassing but one tries not to be too unkind about it. I assume you're familiar with the old joke about the walled community in Heaven, usually leveled at Catholics? As St. Peter conducts the tour past the forbidding, Berlin-style wall-enclosed enclave he admonishes everyone to be very quiet: "They like to think they're the only ones up here." That one reminds me of a certain flavor of fanzine fans, also. The difference between me and thee (or me and whatever segment of fanzine fandom we're talking about, if you prefer) is that while I am absolutely as much of a snotty, condescending, elitist swine as anybody, I don't tend to assume that the sort of interesting, quick witted, articulate people I enjoy are any more likely in fanzines than any of a number of other pursuits. My interest is in the dialog. Where it happens is less important. Which doesn't, I don't think, mean I can't be at home in fanzines and among the fans who enjoy them.



DW: If someone says they've never heard of you this is likely to be a statement of fact rather than a putdown. Most fanzine fans *have* heard of each other, assuming both parties have been around for more than a year or two. Being around long enough to be noticed is in fact the basic qualification because it also means being around long enough to have made a contribution of some sort and to have picked up some understand-

ing of what it's all about. As for "What it's all about", that's a rather vague phrase for a rather large subject. Opinions differ, and in any case most fanzine fans probably proceed more on the basis of impulse and intuition than on systematic planning or analysis. (Anyone who wants more detail on the cosmic significance of practically everything is referred to my collections *Fanzines in Theory and in Practice* (1984) and *Deliverance* (1995). *FITAIP* is out of print but I still have a few copies of *Deliverance* for a mere \$30. (US dollar notes, no cheques.) Alternatively, if you're feeling broke (or just cheap) you could borrow someone else's. You don't have to agree with the arguments, but having the issues laid out might provide a useful starting point.)

UO: I didn't mean that calling attention to not knowing someone is necessarily meant to be deprecating in some way. I meant that finding the fact of non-acquaintance noteworthy enough to mention suggests a different set of fundamental assumptions than the ones I have. One of those assumptions is

this very fanzine-centric view of fandom that you discuss (and which seems to assume that apa-hacks are not fanzine fans, by the way, or the claim that most fanzine fans know each other would be highly dubious). I meant to suggest that, depending on what in particular one means to get out of fandom, those assumptions might be an imperfect filter for finding it, and meant to offer my zine as an alternative, slightly different filter. You may find that, as a



*filter, it doesn't suit you. This zine is an experiment, a provisional hypothesis, it's something I'm trying out, and I am very dependent on the aid and cooperation of my contributors as well as my own fledgling skills and instincts as an editor. Obviously, even if it all works out to my satisfaction, this project won't be for everyone. Which is probably a good thing – I could use to make some cuts in my mailing list. I'll try to keep an eye out for someone with a copy of *FITAIP*, as I am curious to see what some of your more sustained arguments may look like. Of course, feel free to rehearse them again in these pages if you'd like to accelerate my education – rumor has it that there aren't a lot of copies of *FITAIP* floating around on this side of the Atlantic.*

DW: I'm always rather sceptical about ecumenical and evangelical urges in fandom. You say "Cool people ought to meet each other for friendship and happy meme swapping" and "I feel these connections of love and friendship to all manner of disconnected parts of the great circle of fandom, and near-fandom, and I'd like to pull these strands together and see if they connect." Yes, well, everyone to their own taste, but it's an observable fact that fandom does not consist entirely of warm and wonderful persons giving each other loving backrubs. It also consists of less-friendly persons giving each other whacks in the kidneys. Harmony and mutual admiration may be one side of the picture, but conflict and mutual antipathy are the other. Furthermore, this is entirely as it should be. To be at war all the time would be exhausting, but to be at peace all the time would be insufferably boring.

UO: Oh dear. I can only imagine that I was overcompensating, or something. I am, by nature, nothing like so Pollyannaish as you seem to imagine. I emphatically do not feel Cosmic Wuv for All Fankind. Chalk it up to my trying to make a civilized first impression, or something. Normally, I have great, green, glow-in-the-dark ichor-dripping fangs, and frighten small children and newbies (that's "neos" to you) at a hundred paces. Even as we speak, Lenny Bailes is persistently taking me to task for doing the Usenet equivalent of kicking dogs and stealing candy from babes, and he's not entirely wrong to do it. Lots of people would, I am sure, be happy to fill you in at length on Why Ulrika is Not a Nice Person. If you want British references, I can provide several.

My editorial statement of purpose was meant to be neither evangelical, nor ecumenical. I'm not trying to convert anybody to anything they aren't already predisposed to, and I certainly don't imagine that what I (or anyone) want out of friendship and discourse and argument and community is going to be universal in fandom, or anywhere else. I just mean to suggest that the rough diamonds of fandom are more widely dispersed than some folks seem inclined to

suppose. Your mileage may vary, of course. Remember that my axis for measuring the worth of fandom is interesting people, and the relationships and conversations among them. If you measure off a different axis, naturally your outcome values are likely to be different, too.

But a people focus needn't mean a lovey-dovey, group-huggy, warm fuzzy view of fandom. I know perfectly well that fandom has its share of crotchety, cantankerous, argumentative and bilious personalities, and self-congratulatory condescending BNFs resting on decades-old laurels, and asocial trolls, and all the rest. If they're intelligent, intellectually honest, and have something interesting to say, they're precisely the people I want to get to know better and draw together, 'specially if they can hold up their own end of a decent argument. There's nothing about loving people or being fascinated by interesting ones that requires one to imagine people to be perfect, sweet, golden beings radiating pure joy and wonder. Bleah. That's a very romantic view, and one needn't be a romantic to love people. I'm not, and I do. In fact, I suspect that truly embittered curmudgeons among us are just a form of broken-hearted failed romantics.

DW: It's disagreement, not agreement, which is the life force of fandom.

UO: That's a bit strong, I think, but I'll agree that disagreement is an integral, healthy, and very engaging aspect of fandom. Certainly, disagreement makes for much easier (dare I say cheaper) comment hooks. As you say, each to his own tastes, and I honestly do love to get my teeth solidly into a rousing debate as much as anybody, but I think that the life force of fandom-as-I-see-it is a good deal more complex and subjective than that. The great feuds of fandom have wrought great harm in their time, as well as some good, and the danger with disagreement, however exciting and titillating a pursuit it may be, is that it's a close cousin of puppyish childhood wrestling. It's not that hard for one or several of the contestants to get carried away to the point where someone really gets hurt. People really getting hurt is **not** the life force of fandom, it's an unfortunate side effect.

DW: Fundamentally, fandom is a game, and as with all games the relationship between the players is adversarial. Obviously, some players are keener competitors than others, and all the players have to co-operate to the extent of observing certain basic rules (without which the game would be impossible or meaningless) but any satisfaction the game provides comes from the outdoing or overcoming of opponents, not from agreeing to love one another and fix the scores so that everyone gets a prize.

UO: This is an interesting metaphor, and I think it catches

a piece of what goes on in fandom generally, and fanzines particularly, quite nicely. (In fact, if you also consider non-competitive games and play, I think there are all sorts of insights to be drawn from applying Huizinga's theories from **Homo Ludens**, and Ermanno Biencivenga's theories on play to the role of fandom. A wonderful, fruitful metaphor, if you go that way, but I think that's an essay for another day.) Surely, some people are very competitive, about fanzines, about arguments, about convention running. But as a model for capturing the whole of fandom in any comprehensive or consistently useful way, I think it fails. I know some people are in fandom to count coup on each other, and some percentage of those may be in fandom **just** to count coup, but I think there are all sorts of phenomena that can't be accounted for on the 'game' model. For instance, there's enough unsung galley-slaving work that goes on at the staff level in conventions, in clubs, in TAFF races, and in fanzines that can't really be accounted for by the desire to make points, since virtually nobody but those immediately concerned knows about it. (For that matter, I think it's far from true that the relationship between the players in all games is adversarial, though I admit that thanks to Wittgenstein I've spent more time than is probably healthy considering what constitutes a game...) I prefer an anthropological view of fandom; that is, I see fandom as a culture, as somewhat like a community.

In general, though, I think it's useful to have an array of metaphors to apply to any given phenomenon, since no single metaphor is likely to yield all available insights. So thank you for this one.

DW: Personally, I don't "feel these connections of love and friendship to all manner of disconnected parts of the great circle of fandom." I reserve my interest for those people who show signs of wishing to play in my particular game. Anyone else has the same status as a stranger met by chance in the street: someone who might conceivably be agreeable enough, but towards whom I feel no special obligation or bond. The world is too big to give attention to everything and everybody — one has to pick and choose. In the end it's nearly always a waste of time trying to recruit people to fandom (or some subset of fandom). If they don't already have the taste then no urging or argument will convince them. The most one can do is say "here it is" and let them take it or leave it.

UO: Well, naturally, I don't feel any particular bond with total strangers, fannish or not, either. An overarching Brotherhood of Fan is not on my agenda. I

*meant that my personal circle of acquaintance catches some only-partially-overlapping portions of the Venn Diagram of Fandom. As far as I'm concerned, **Widening Gyre** is just precisely about saying "here it is." I've just aimed at having a slightly different "it" and talking to a slightly different (and in some quarters, more prejudiced) audience to say it to.*

DW: Perhaps some of the above will help to explain why I'm never very keen on Geri Sullivan's 'Fandom as Family' thesis. Apart from the inherent implausibility of the metaphor (fandom being so much more large and varied and families being so often so much less than ideal) her relentlessly bright outlook is enough to drive anyone to a life of crime. (Or maybe drink. I can never make up my mind.) Aversion to such heart-warming stories of simple goodness is no doubt evidence of some awful character defect, but perhaps this is something you should ponder as an editor on as an editor: tales of bad behaviour are entertaining, whereas tales of shining virtue (and plastic ducks) merely make one feel slightly ill.

*UO: I dunno as I'd say it's an **awful** character defect. Maybe a bit trite, though. It's well inside the boundaries of the British Eyore archetype. At first blush, it's a bit reminiscent of the unrelentingly tedious doom-and-gloom-and-black-clothes-and-Poe-and-Byron wilting posture that seems to be the sum and substance of so much Goth culture: protracted, histrionic teenage angst. Ho, hum. Yes, **of course** the 'Fandom As Family' metaphor has its weaknesses. So does the 'Fandom As Competitive Game' metaphor. So does the 'Fandom As Culture' metaphor. They're just conceptual tools for sorting out a phenomenon too big to be grasped whole. I wouldn't want a steady diet of any of them, myself.*

DW: Passing over Charles Stross's piece (which was sort of ok but inconsequential) and Michael Weholt's (which was not ok, being incomprehensible) I come to Debra Fran Baker's account of the collision between con-going and the Jewish Sabbath. This was certainly interesting, in an eyeball-popping sort of way, but I had trouble maintaining my concentration. I kept thinking "No, she can't be serious" then "Yes, she is serious" then... Well, it was real Sense of Wonder stuff. But I'm afraid if this was written as a kind of PR piece for Orthodox Judaism it didn't exactly do a good job.

The problem here is not particularly with the formal religious elements. Every religion has rituals which are meaningful to believers and meaningless to outsiders,

but for those who have accepted the basic Argument from Authority ("I'm God, and you have to do such and such because I say so,") there's nothing unreasonable about following orders. Apart from obedience to the Divine Will there's also the argument that the discipline of adherence to ritual is a beneficial thing in itself – the equivalent of drill in the army, or a sort of spiritual keep-fit exercise. The real difficulty arises when this purity of purpose starts being compromised and trivialised by all the tweaks, twiddles and trickeries which adapt the demands of ritual to the convenience of the participants. The result is to turn what should have been an exercise in austerity into an exercise in casuistry. You're not allowed to do this or that – unless, that is, you can dream up some more or less fantastic re-interpretation of the rules which permit the exception. Religion practised in this way seems about as spiritual as tax evasion. It has been reduced to a series of pious dodges to secure the maximum credit for the minimum cost and inconvenience. Such acrobatics may satisfy the performers, but zeal in the pursuit of loopholes and the exploitation of technicalities is apt to strike the detached onlooker as merely shabby. The final impression given by the behaviour Baker describes is that neither the laws nor those who profess to follow them deserve much respect; the laws because their absurd arbitrariness is exposed by the very ways in which they are circumvented; the followers because their tortuous compliance is so evidently a series of legal fictions.

UO: I can't deny it. I've harbored similar dark thoughts myself. But I suspect that many of these accusations of insincerity or casuistry may be attributable to having misunderstood the substance of the rules and rituals in question. I have a feeling that someone observant can address this better than I can. For a starter, see the excerpted exchange between Janice Gelb and David Bratman, reproduced elsewhere in the loccol.

DW: Strange goings-on. An interesting article, as I said, but not quite in the way its author presumably intended. Come to think of it, I suppose I could say the same about the whole of this issue. But I'm notoriously hard to please, so I expect you'll be able to live with it.

UO: Well, thanks for a wonderful vehicle for elaborating on some of my views; I'll do a good deal more than live with it, I'll appreciate it as the terrific foil that it was. This was a very helpful, informative, and revealing letter. Though, perhaps, not quite in the way its author intended.

CS

Now on to other letters:

Maureen Kincaid Speller, 60 Bournemouth Road, Folkestone, Kent, CT19 5AZ, UK
mks_pk@cix.compulink.co.uk
mks@acnestis.demon.co.uk

The last time I wrote a loc, G. Pickersgill commented that it was so tightly knit, he couldn't take it apart for the loccol. I've never been able to decide whether to take this as a compliment or a criticism. Insofar as it says anything about my writing generally, as articles are presumably intended to be taken whole then it must surely be complimentary that Mark Plummer has just abandoned dissection of an old article of mine for other purposes, informing me that it's too tightly constructed. On the other hand, this leaves me confused about the function of a loc. Is it a comment to the person producing the zine, who may or may not choose to reprint parts of it for further discussion? Or is it a direct response to the rest of the fanzine's readership, an edited conversation through an intermediary? Such is my confusion, this is the first loc I have written since the last one, and I am no wiser on the matter except, perhaps, that I have a sneaking suspicion that it's bad to write for the sake of performance, which is silly, as what else is fan-writing but performance, albeit of a very particular kind!

Given the subject of your editorial essay, I hesitate to say that I had not come across your name before I linked up to r.a.sf.f., but as you'd almost certainly not heard of me either, then we are about equal. We seem, though, to have other



things in common. We've been in fandom about the same amount of time (late 1979 in my case, when I searched out the local university SF group because I was fed up with talking to myself), not to mention a lot of work in apas (I've written my way through ten, seven of which I still contribute to on a more or less regular basis), and we are both standing for TAFF. Fanzines I've known about for almost as long as I've been in fandom. Indeed, I regard that circle of fandom as my natural habitat, despite excursions all over the place to see what was happening, but the relationship has always been strange and erratic, mostly because of a lack of time, and indeed discipline, when it comes to loccing the things, not to mention the endless philosophical tangles I knitted for myself. Getting involved in producing Banana Wings, not to mention contributing to it, has been a good thing, along with Mark nagging me to produce my own zines again. Three in ten years, two of them in the last eighteen months - obviously a moral there. Deciding to stand for TAFF is also concentrating the mind wonderfully. I'm reasonably well-known over here for the things I have done in fandom, but America is going to have to rely on what I say. I'm already regretting the ten years when I didn't say that much out loud.

One of the dangers of writing is the very emotional liberation you touch on. Indeed, things that are hard to talk about become almost too easy to write about sometimes. And choose the wrong forum and liberation can become a prison of another sort. I wrote my way through depression in one apa, only to find at the end of it that people had stopped listening, not only to my writing on that but to everything else I said. It took a while to realise this and go elsewhere; ironically, 'elsewhere', the same writing style, focusing on the world and my relationship with it, general to personal and back again, seems to be much more appreciated. I can only conclude that somehow, the first apa changed and I didn't notice.

I regret the last ten years too for the very fact that writing is, as you say, a tool of fannish friendship, and I feel as though, by neglecting the writing, I have neglected the friendships as well. I've no way of knowing whether that's true or not, but feeling that it might be is surely bad enough. One of the nicer things about getting a modem and getting on-line has been that it quickly put me in touch with people I'd not heard from for ages. On the other hand, the immediacy that email brings is very, very testing, and as I said, discipline hasn't always been my forte. Actually, I find r.a.sf.f and the whole on-line business quite odd; like I am standing outside a cage, looking in through the bars, lobbing in the occasional 'stone' to attract attention. I don't think I shine in the cut-and-thrust of on-line life, especially not on Cix, which has a newsfeed of such slowness and antiquity the messages might as well arrive by semaphore. As you may have noticed, I have switched feed, so maybe I shall

feel more in touch as a result. I can't say, though, that I've ever been troubled by people on r.a.s.f.f wondering who I am. Truly, I live in a perpetual state of disbelief that anyone has ever heard of me, or indeed remembers meeting me. (The reason for this is that I have an extremely good memory for names and faces, and find that I often remember people far more clearly than they remember me, which has caused embarrassment on one or two occasions; now I tend to assume the opposite, which spares blushes and may bring pleasant surprises). As you say, there is no reason why anyone should know who we are, but having in the past bought into and then discarded the idea of fandom as one big happy family, and knowing that it is a very big place, I am always a little surprised when the parts do overlap.

Debra Fran Baker's article on Orthodox Judaism and conventions was fascinating but at the same time I was uneasy about some of the issues raised. Over here, I guess we are much less aware of this. Generally, the extra requirements for conventions tend to be medical ones, to do with access, or involving babies so, on the one hand, I am impressed by the way that Debra organises matters in order to integrate her fannish and religious life. Without wanting to devalue it in anyway, it's no more or less sensible than planning in order to integrate a new baby into one's fannish life, as I have watched people doing. I also found her description of preparation for and eating of the Shabbat meal very moving; there was something very attractive about the sense of community it painted, not at all like many of my experiences of going out for a convention meal.

Geri's article is splendid. This is the kind of fannish writing which overwhelmed me when I first started reading fanzines, as well as being an evocation of the kind of fannish life I do believe in and am sometimes able to plug into. I said I had rejected the notion of fandom as one big happy family, and indeed that holds true, but I still find the idea of a fannish family attractive, and not just on the simplistic basis that you can choose your friends but not your relations. (My family and I have long since parted company from one another, my choice, though I have some contact with my brother, who seems to like having a faintly bohemian — I believe he uses the word 'hippy' - big sister, while Paul has only his father, now terminally ill.) I know from my own experience that life is more congenial when one has people around who understand how one's life is constructed.

For myself, I took the claims about the tightness of your writing as a challenge to my overall editorial badness.

Only you and I will know how much I cut, though. Not too much to keep you from locking for years, I hope. I do think locs are 'for' several things, including all of the ones you mention, and probably others as well. I suspect every editor and letter hack has a different priority ordering of purposes. For now, the things I happen to be looking for include dialog among the participants, potential interest to the readers, performance opportunity for the letter hacks, and egoboo for my contributors. I'm trying to take Andy Hooper's advice and be merciless about excising praise for myself and the zine generally — I get to read it anyway, and it's of limited interest to the reader. I would be similarly cold-hearted about praise for my contributors except that I am trying to encourage them to come back for more abuse.

Funnily enough, my own perpetual surprise at people knowing me comes from having a really erratic and dodgy memory for names and faces. I've been on both ends of the transaction where only one party remembers meeting the other, and each position adds to the overall unexpectedness of a relative or apparent stranger knowing me.

Gary Mattingly , 7501 Honet Ct., Dublin, CA 94568; gmatting@dnai.com

"The Dreaded TAFF stuff". For some bizarre reason I have difficulty envisioning you doing a performing seal routine. I'm not saying it wouldn't be interesting, just unlikely. Admittedly I primarily am only aware of you through printed media and my computer screen but it still seems unlikely. And who is this dear long suffering Hal person? Is that how he is introduced in public? Never mind . . .

"Wilma's Koan" was well written but, um, just a bit depressing. However "Sticker Shock" by Ed Green certainly lightened up the mood. Enjoyed it.

For some reason, "Highlands" from the new Bob Dylan album, "Time Out of Mind", seems vaguely appropriate playing in the background while I read "To Fremont By Moonlight". Enjoyed it. He certainly can turn phrases in a most entertaining manner. And it made me think of a restaurant in Detroit where someone I once knew worked as a waitress for a while. Pleasant thought but much has changed since then.

"Lox & Morlocs" - This elitist fanzine fandom thing goes both ways. I was quite astounded when a local con fan replied to my offer of help that I must submit a fannish resume before he would consider allowing me to work on his convention. Most convention chairpersons like to receive help. Also I'm not that particularly well known in fanzine circles but I have been around since 1969 or so and this

was 20+ years later. I decided he really didn't want my help and, for that matter and at that point, I didn't really feel like giving him any help.

Enjoyed your "Getting Centered" but I'd enjoy more of your writing. I'm almost always entertained to find out more about people. Unfortunately I'm one horrible conversationalist therefore more often than not I must find these things out in some oblique manner, from the edges looking in, you know.

P.S. I see mention of your web page but I don't see a URL in your zine. A hunting I must go.

I don't actually have a home page up — it's been on my RSN list for two or three months, and I think I'll have to put it on a more urgent list, RSN. What I think Kathy Routliffe was referring to was one of the pages associated with the UCI Graduate School of Management, which is where I work. I once listed the page on rassel because it includes a picture of me, perhaps of interest to the idly curious. A web search on my name will yield that page (<http://www.gsm.uci.edu/academic/fembabrochure/index.html>) and a very few other minor fanwritings, as well. Seek me rather by Deja News, if you want substance.

William Breiding, wbreiding@juno.com

You took Harry Warner's concern for your well being on the Internet a little too seriously here--nowhere in the hard copy of WG2 could I find your postal or email addresses. Luckily I had kept the envelope, and so entered your address in my little black book for future reference; dredging your email was fairly simple--all I had to do was remember how to spell your name. (Okay! I'll put you in my e-address book!) Surely your zine deserves some sort of colophon? *[Actually, charitable theories aside, I Just Fucked Up. Just because I got some things right on the first issue doesn't mean I can't backslide later. Obviously I should post my own burgeoning check-off list of Rules for Faneds somewhere prominent. —ed.]*

Last things first, your back cover. This was a nice exercise, and echoed well with both of the pieces by Andy Hooper and Gilbert Head. It had the detail of Andy's piece, but something of the tone of Gilbert's. A nice subtlety was the unspoken wash and immersion one feels when swimming, the sense of isolation and peace, similar to your experience walking through Aldrich Park. So. Question #1, designed to reveal something of yourself: What tasks do you perform in your air-conditioned office on the campus at Irvine?

Ron Butler's piece was a nicely tied together dirge, itself a koan of darkness. And of course Ed Green's piece was a

real hoot. This is the kind of shit one fantasizes about being able to do all the time. Nice pacing.

David Bratman's letter raises the question of the mystery of baby pigeons and new fanzine fans. I know where baby pigeons come from: Moss Alley in San Francisco. I



lived on the top floor of a tenement on this alley in the South Of Market area for about a year and a half with my former fiancée. One of the bedrooms there had a window that faced out to an air space between other dilapidated flats. In the various nooks and crannies outside the window we had the brooding spot for all baby pigeons. Let me tell you, they worked fast and furious out there, nesting, mating, fighting, squawking, feeding, growing, and eventually flying away to infest the world. As to where new fanzine fans come from: perhaps they begin forming in the ooze and muck at the bottom end of this air space, and spring up fully formed with personal computers under their arms, and enough money to pay for photo-copies.

Answer #1: I am a petty academic bureaucrat (in my very own, petit academic bureau — shared, of course). I do all sorts of tedious administrative support stuff so that our Executive MBA students don't have to do it for themselves. Basically, for a really breathtaking amount of money, students who want to get an MBA part time from a UC school with the benefits of a UC faculty, while continuing in their careers full time, come to us to take classes nights and weekends. Our program office takes care of all the nugatory detail stuff, like providing the

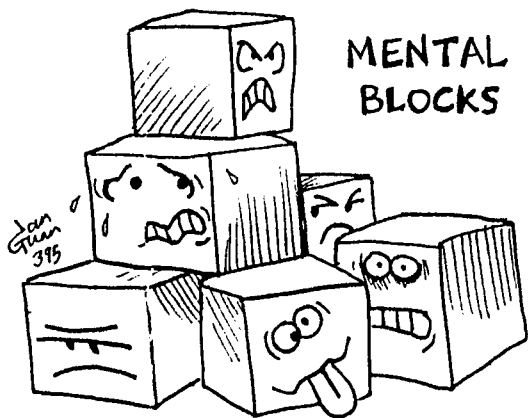
text books, assembling and distributing course and research materials, registering the students in their classes, purchasing and distributing parking passes, arranging travel and meal details for off-site courses, researching details on University resources, providing the notebook computer and software and software support the students will need, and so on and so forth. For anyone who has ever been a graduate student in any other department, the level of support and service we provide is boggling, or was to me. What I do is make sure that all that support and service actually happens for the 120 or so people I'm in charge of looking after.

Tom Sadler, 422 W. Maple Ave., Adrian, MI, 49221-1621; tomfamulus@dmci.net

As far as I'm concerned you don't have to apologize in any way for running for TAFF. You've been in fandom plenty long enough even if you aren't widely known (or as widely known as some people might prefer). I am confident you will make as good a TAFF representative as anybody, and maybe better than some. Part of the original idea was to send interesting fans from one country to another so the fans in the other country could get to know the fan better. You're definitely an interesting fan I'd want to meet. So just go on with your campaign wholeheartedly. After all, D West puts your odds much higher than mine...

[A piece of handicapping I never expect to fathom. My best guess is that he's joking, my second best is that I don't really want to know what his reasoning is. —ed.]

Second, if you don't want to put that much of yourself into *Widening Gyre*, don't. It's your fanzine and you are



the sole decider as to what goes into it. I know people have pestered me about putting more of myself into TRF — and I've been doing so, although a bit reluctantly.

I don't actually mind writing about myself and my life when I have something to say. I couldn't quite face putting out a regular perzine, though. It's not that I can't ever find anything worth writing about in the course of my daily life and observations, but the pressure to do so to a schedule would be terrible, I think. I'm not the sort of person who likes a lot of rigidity and order in life to begin with, and even if I did, I have yet to find a way to have really interesting insights with any degree of predictable regularity. Satori comes when it comes when the wave crashes, and then it's mop up time again. Thanks for the encouragement, though.

Murray Moore, 377 Manly St., Midland, Ontario L4R 3E2 CANADA; murray.moore@encode.com

Widening Gyre 2 is visually attractive. I gazed speculatively at the winged cat on your cover, pondering whether it might be a fat beaver. It's the tail, you see. I wore a Toronto in 2003 bid T-shirt during Ditto 10 in Cincinnati last weekend. Several fans helpfully commented on the weasel in the space suit which decorates the T-shirt. The weasel is a beaver.

My favourite articles were Andy Hooper's "To Fremont by Moonlight" and your "Getting Centered." Ron Butler's "Wilma's Koan" is pure and simply told. Gilbert Head's "Journal of the Scept'red Isle Tour," alas, did not come off well following the Hooper. I was more engaged by Andy's description of his short walk than by Gilbert's travelogue. If the two were on stage, Andy would be speaking in verse and Gilbert would be showing slides.

Aahz, aahz@netcom.com

I'd rather you didn't print my snail address if you publish this, not because I'm worried about who'd see it, but because I consider myself primarily a member of Virtual Fandom, and my e-mail address **is** my address.

I really enjoyed Debra Fran Baker's description of obeying strict halacha (Jewish law) at a con. I was reared in the conservative tradition, and despite being mostly non-practicing these days, it was still mostly easy for me spot all the humor. It was a particular challenge for me to try explaining a lot of the stuff to my non-Jewish primary partner.

I'm glad I met Ed Green at Baycon this year before reading "Sticker Shock" in WG2; I could almost hear him relating

that story. BTW, on WG1, why is Debbie Notkin's front cover blue and mine yellow? I thought the cover of WG2 was really cool, but I'm not sure I understand it (assuming it has a point at all).

I like the idea of cross-breeding different areas of fandom. I really liked the line in WG1, "Cool people ought to meet each other for friendship and happy meme swapping." Only problem, of course, is that I have nowhere near enough time for all the cool people I already know, let alone all the cool people **they** know.

I never do seem to get an entire run of Gyre copied off at one time — covers are whatever colors are handy at the time, consistency is not a watchword. All my covers have been, so far, various considerations of the regard of flight. Among fantastical winged things, I've supposed for some time that a winged cat might well grow slow and fat...

Now, in that much bruited spirit of dialog, and in the hopes of answering some of our correspondents' concerns or questions about observant Judaism, I'll reproduce an exchange of e-mail between Janice Gelb and David Bratman on the subject of Debra Baker's article and the melachah.

From: janiceg@marvin.Eng.Sun.COM
To: d.bratman@genie.com
Subject: Your LOC to "Widening Gyre"

In your LOC to Ulrika's *Widening Gyre*, you said that one of the things you learned in your Reform Jewish upbringing was that "the function of the Sabbath prohibitions was to serve as a framework to form a mental space in which the Sabbath could be kept separate and holy. You don't use electricity to keep you away from the temptation of doing the sort of 'work' activities associated with that." Far be it from me to criticize your religious training but in fact, this is incorrect. The Hebrew word *melacha* that is commonly translated into English as "work" is defined as 39 categories of things, and lighting a fire is one of them. It's not that using electricity might tempt you to do work associated with it; using electricity is **itself** the forbidden work.

Some of your confusion might stem from trying to use the definition of the English word "work" for things forbidden on the Sabbath. I suspect this because of something else you said in the LOC, that "working on a convention may definitely be a mitzvah but it's also work." In fact, there are many tasks you could do at a convention that do not fall under the 39 categories of things forbidden to do on the Sabbath. Whether they might be considered "work" in the English sense of the word is completely immaterial; they do not fall

under the rabbinic definition of "work," which is the only thing that counts when talking about the Sabbath and its restrictions.

I should note that this is a common misunderstanding, and that as kids we tried it out on our rabbi. ("Well, if we can't do work on the Sabbath, does that mean we don't have to make our beds?")

I mainly write this because you say that what Debra described is an "emphasis on the letter over the spirit of the law." The spirit and the letter of the law must be understood in rabbinic terms, not in terms of what the meaning of the word "work" in English might be.

From d.bratman@genie.com
To: janiceg@marvin.eng.sun.com

Really hasty reply here, and I may be showing my ignorance, but I don't think I'm misunderstanding the nature of the word "work". We've got a chain of reasoning here:

- 1) The Lord said, "Keep the Sabbath."
- 2) This was interpreted as meaning, "Don't do on the Sabbath the stuff that makes ordinary days not-Sabbath" (that's a nonsensical way of putting it, but I'll trust the meaning is clear), by which was meant "work" in both the technical sense you're describing it and work as in work for your daily bread. (You don't do your Sun work on the Sabbath, or do you?)
- 3) This required, Jews being Jews, a long detailed list.
- 4) One thing that got on the list was lighting a fire.
- 5) Much later, "turning on a light" was interpreted as a form of lighting a fire.
- 6) And later than that, "using a keycard" was interpreted as a form of turning on a light because it also starts a flow of electricity.

6 depends on 5 depends on 4 depends on 3 depends on 2 depends on 1. **Why** are we supposed to do all this? So that we'll have a holy day every week and not spend all our time slaving away at mundane things. But if we spend our time trying to figure out how to get around these rules, or doing work in the secular-work sense because it doesn't fall into these particular categories, I think we're missing the point. Is a person running around gofering at a convention but not turning on any lights really keeping the Sabbath better than a person studying Torah who unfortunately has to turn on his study-room light in order to see the print?

From: janiceg@marvin.Eng.Sun.COM

To: d.bratman@genie.com

Once again, you're trying to interpret this as "we're not supposed to do any work on the Sabbath to make it different from the rest of the week. Stuff like the job we do every day or stuff that requires a lot of effort is work so those are the things we shouldn't do on the Sabbath." That's a common-sense logical interpretation; it is not, however, a rabbinic one.

Here's the rabbinic chain:

1. According to the Bible, God said: "The seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord Your God: in it you shall not do any melacha."
2. The rabbis, as with other things in the Bible that needed to be more exactly spelled out so we knew how to follow them, said: "What is this melacha that the Lord doesn't want us to do on the Sabbath day to keep it holy?" They decided it was the 39 things that were done to create the Temple in Jerusalem.
3. As new things came up, the rabbis looked at them to see if they fell within those 39 categories. If they did, they were forbidden to do on the Sabbath.

You say, "Is a person running around gofering at a convention but not turning on any lights really keeping the Sabbath better than a person studying Torah who unfortunately has to turn on his study-room light in order to see the print?" The answer to your question is, according to rabbinic law, yes. A person doing badge checking at a con is not performing any acts forbidden on Shabbat; the person turning on the light is. Again, it's not a concept of "work" as much as it is "forbidden activities."

[In the final exchange I'll skip David's separate message, since Janice's reply includes it and makes inter-linear reply and commentary – ed.]

From: janiceg@marvin.Eng.Sun.COM

To: d.bratman@genie.com

DB: So what we're supposed to do to keep the Sabbath holy is not build any temples? (Or activities tending in that direction.) Well, OK, but it doesn't sound worthy of one of the Ten Commandments to me.

JG: No, we're not supposed to do "melacha," that word being defined as 39 categories of the things done to build the temple. Whether they're being done to build a temple is, of course, irrelevant.

DB: Electricity is certainly a logical extension of fire - if they had had electric generation in Temple days, I'm

sure it would have been wired for it. By the same logic, if the workers had had badges, I'm sure somebody would have been assigned to check them.

JG: First of all, I'd strongly advise you to stop trying to use logic :->. Second of all, what they **might** have had in the Temple is irrelevant to the definition.

*DB: **Would** you work on your day job on the Sabbath if you could do so without breaking any of the 39 rules? (Leaving aside the fact that Saturday is not a normal work day - there's plenty of reasons why people might choose or need to work on Saturday, or Friday night for that matter.)*

JG: There is virtually nothing I could do relating to my day job that does not violate something in one of the categories. This may prove the point that the categories of activities do prevent one from doing what you would define as "work."

DB: I keep returning to "work" in the secular sense because I still haven't got an answer to the question, why? How did the rabbis decide that it was that particular category of work? Why did they think the Lord wished to forbid that and only that? Notice that the 39 categories are a subset of the secular sense of "work" (certainly I'd describe building a Temple as "work"). Given the general tendency of the interpretation of the rules to build a strong red zone around the known specifics (of which extending "building a fire" to "using a keycard" is a good example, and the separate dishes for milk & meat is a classic), it's curious that this aspect of the interpretation should be so narrow.

JG: Why do you say it is so narrow? I've provided the list at the end of this message, and an explanation that may be clearer than mine in these messages. Also, there certainly had to be an extension of the "rules" because new things have come up that aren't specifically listed, so the rabbis have to figure out whether they fall into one of the categories or not.

Please realize that the rabbis **had** to come up with some definition of what "work" meant: it would be chaos to have every Jew decide for him- or herself what he or she considered to be work.

DB: If I were one of the rabbis, I'd say that while I didn't think the Lord meant us to sit around being dour all day on the Sabbath like Scottish Presbyterians - Judaism is after all the religion of Pesach - He also meant that we should not lose sight of the fact that it is the Lord's Day. Certainly keeping the 39 rules concentrates one's mind on something, but

from Debra's account that something isn't the Lord, but the technicalities of how to get around the rules without breaking them. This is a dismaying state of mind.

JG: I think you're looking at it from the backwards end. Mostly, one does not concentrate on the technicalities of how to get around the rules without breaking them. However, if one is away from home, one has to figure out how to keep the rules in an unfamiliar environment that isn't set up for that, and where things (such as door entries) are not under your control.

You might argue that one shouldn't leave home on the Sabbath so one doesn't have to contend with such things—that is certainly an option.

DB: What, as a Jew, is your reaction to the opinion that Al Gore committed a federal crime by making fund-raising calls from his office, but that it would have been perfectly OK if he'd gone across the street to a phone booth to place out-going calls, and taken incoming call-backs in his office? That is what the law says, but it also seems to me to be missing the point.

JG: Well, it's a matter of whether he's doing so using the facilities and materials of his office or whether he's doing it on his dime, so to speak. That **does** make a difference, I think, although the end result is the same.

*DB: I have never been one to seek logical explanations for **all** the rules, e.g. the theory that pork is forbidden because of trichinosis, which theory doesn't hold up. (Although I do tend to wonder if shellfish are forbidden because they're really just giant bugs. Ugh!)*

JG: In fact, the "bug" argument does work according to one interpretation of why the rules of kashrut exist: one theory is that the animals that we're forbidden to eat are mostly scavengers, and that we're supposed to only ingest animals that have qualities similar to what we want to be like!

DB: There is a certain appeal in the simple statement, "We're Jews. This is what Jews do." But I think it should be taken in the same spirit as the things you do because they're what you want to do. (Not that you have to want to do it, just that you should take it in that spirit.) Debra can do what she wants to, but her choice of how to do it makes me, as a Jew, uncomfortable for her.

JG: I'm not sure what you mean by this.

DB: Possible other ways of doing it: 1) Acknowledge that going to a convention is going to involve breaking a few of the rule-extensions and don't worry about it. (This is what eating out anywhere but a glatt-kosher restaurant involves. One doesn't order blatantly forbidden foods, but one doesn't know where the plate has been, or always what the food has been cooked in. Even those whose motivating force is allergies are often in for a big surprise.)

JG: Not a great example--people who are serious about keeping kosher do not eat out in anything but kosher restaurants. If absolutely pressed and having to eat out, they will eat cold salad without dressing; when eating cold neutral (neither dairy nor meat) food, it does not matter what the plate was used for.

DB: 2) Acknowledge that being an observant Jew is not consistent with going to conventions on the Sabbath and either don't go (again, on the model of an hyperallergic friend of mine who'd love to go to cons but rarely can risk it) or take the Sabbath off (on the model of people who don't go to cons on Friday or non-holiday Mondays because they haven't got the vacation time).

JG: This is definitely the way to go if you are really serious about Shabbat observance. However, I do know people like the Bakers who think that the arrangements they have to make to be truly Shabbat-observant at a con are worth it.

DB: These are ways in which people whose imperatives are physical deal with the problem. They suffer inconvenience, but they know they have to. If we're going to keep the rules, we should know we'll suffer inconvenience too. (I know this: it's part of why I don't keep the rules.) I just don't think that standing helpless in front of an electric door is what the Lord had in mind. Of course, who am I to say? But who is anybody else to say?

JG: Well, if you're going to follow Jewish law, you pretty much grant the rabbis the authority to say...

Post Script (From a post on soc.culture.jewish that I save for such discussions):

Melachah generally refers to the kind of work that is creative, or that exercises control or dominion over your environment. The word may be related to "melech" (king; Mem-Lamed-Kaf). The quintessential

verse, which G-d ceased from on the seventh day. Note that G-d's work did not require a great physical effort: he spoke, and it was done.

The word melachah is rarely used in scripture outside of the context of Shabbat and holiday restrictions. The only other repeated use of the word is in the discussion of the building of the sanctuary and its vessels in the wilderness. Exodus Ch. 31, 35-38. Notably, the Shabbat restrictions are reiterated during this discussion (Ex. 31:13), thus we can infer that the work of creating the sanctuary had to be stopped for Shabbat. From this, the rabbis concluded that the work prohibited on the Sabbath is the same as the work of creating the sanctuary. They found 39 categories of forbidden acts, all of which are types of work that were needed to build the sanctuary:

- | | |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------|
| 1. Sowing | 2. Plowing |
| 3. Reaping | 4. Binding sheaves |
| 5. Threshing | 6. Winnowing |
| 7. Selecting | 8. Grinding |
| 9. Sifting | 10. Kneading |
| 11. Baking | 12. Shearing wool |
| 13. Washing wool | 14. Beating wool |
| 15. Dyeing wool | 16. Spinning |
| 17. Weaving | 18. Making 2 loops |
| 19. Weaving two threads | 20. Separating 2 threads |
| 21. Tying | 22. Untying |
| 23. Sewing two stitches | 24. Tearing |
| 25. Trapping | 26. Slaughtering |
| 27. Flaying | 28. Salting meat |
| 29. Curing hide | 30. Scraping hide |
| 31. Cutting hide | 32. Writing two letters |
| 33. Erasing two letters | 34. Building |
| 35. Tearing a building down | 36. Extinguishing a fire |
| 37. Kindling a fire | 38. Hitting with a hammer |
| 39. Taking an object from the private domain to the public, or transporting an object in the public domain. | |

(Mishnah Shabbat, 7:2)

—Janice

WAHF: Ron Butler, Ray Radlein, Teddy Harvia, Pamela Boal, and DM Sherwood

CONTRIBUTORS' ADDRESSES:

Don Fitch: FitchDonS@aol.com
3908 Frijo
Covina, CA 91722

Brad Foster
PO Box 165246
Irving, TX 75016

Teddy Harvia
701 Regency Dr.
Hurst, TX 76054-2307

Teresa Nielsen Hayden: tnh@panix.com
681 Union St., Apt. D
Brooklyn, NY 11215

Selina Phanara
PO Box 10143
Burbank, CA 91510

Jo Walton: Jo@bluejo.demon.co.uk
5 Vivian Road
Sketty, Swansea SA20UJ
Great Britain

Michael Weholt mrw@panix.com
311 E. 14th St., #4B
New York, NY 10003-4220

CHANGES OF ADDRESS:

William Breiding 1037 E. Mitchell Tucson, AZ 85719	Richard & Nicki Lynch P.O. Box 3120 Gaithersburg, MD 20885
-----------------------------------------------------------------	-----------------------------------------------------------------------------

