

PowWow #30

PowWow #30 is by Joyce Worley Katz, created for the monthly assembly of Apa V, Apr. 13, 1996. Thanks to Arnie for doing the onerous chores. This is Mailing Number Thirty, (what a fannishly auspicious number!), and the meeting is short the JHardin/KForman, BWilson contingent because they decided to go paddle their canoes elsewhere this weekend, and the Springer/Funk axis because they've paddled their canoe all the way to San Diego. This leaves me here to segway into the topic of the month, one that always lingers in your mind

Nostalgia

I received a letter from an old friend this week. As we traded catch-ups, I mentioned that Arnie and I were back into fandom. The reply really blew me out of the water: seems my friend now considers science fiction fandom a prime hobby/interest.

"What a miracle of synchronicity!" I blathered as I probed for detail. The reply: "I went to a con in Baltimore last year, and I'm going back again. I had a great time and I'm crazy about Klingon women."

Sometimes it's just as well to leave the past buried, and always think the best of what your lost friends must be like now.

But, dutifully, I'll pack off a stack of fanzines, and Talk Up Fandom for awhile. She's a clever girl, and perhaps they'll take root.

Barnaby Rappaport has touted the idea that fandom's largest group of recruitables (perhaps we should call them seducables) can be found at conventions. These are people who already have some kind of exposure to science fiction fandom; who already consider themselves sf fans. Many of them are even interested in making cross-country friends; some interested in corresponding with penpals.

But most of them will never even know there is a fandom inside the phenomena of conventions.

There are probably a

minimum of 60,000 con-attending fans around the country, (and I believe that number is very minimal.) And, all together, there are probably about 2,000 fanzine fans (counting active, semi-active, inactive and people who've heard about them but never got involved.)

In other words, about one out of every thirty con attendees even hears about trufandom. And the number that involve themselves even for a short time is almost incalculatably smaller.

Barnaby tried, and I believe Ted White may have joined him in this effort along with several others, to circulate more zines at conventions to try to expose a few more people. I know Arnie and I have done the same, by taking over-runs and back issues to the free tables at SilverCons.

So far as I know, not a single fanzine fan has come into fandom because of these efforts.

My own personal theory of recruitment and seduction is that we have to be a whole lot more personal about the effort. I don't believe it is likely that any con fan will drift into fanzine fandom unless there's the added ingredient of personal exchange with another fanzine fan. I believe that it takes a fan to make a fan.

That hasn't always been true, though. It might be worth taking a look at the

difference between now and then to see what happened.

Surely it's not simply the existence of The Clubhouse. Fanzine review columns did bring in a lot of people, but there was an added factor: I believe the zines that people got were more accessible to the new fan, the reader of s.f. fiction. Remember, those people were so ardent about science fiction they bought the magazines -- in itself a rarity. And so anxious for more, that they read the column and sent sticky coins. The zines they received in return were often plonkingly scientific, topical, usually popular-culture oriented. In a word, potatoes to go with the meat of science fiction. Easy to understand. Easy to comment about. Easy to become involved with.

I'm NOT suggesting that we all start publishing book reviews and author profiles. But I think we should recognize that the chatter we delight in often seems obscure and elitest, like an unapproachable closed circle of established friends. It can seem that fandom is complete in and of itself, with "no vacancy" posted to the door to the fan lounge.

Which leads me back to my theory of seduction and recruitment.

Rather than the conventions, I personally believe that the most accessible pool of new

fanzine fans is the local s.f. club. That reservoir of s.f. readers and movie watchers and game players who, unlike the convention attendees, is there for us to work on week after week, if we just will. They're our captive audience, already open to the idea of fandom.

"What Is A Fan?" is a question that gets a lot of different answers. Trufans might take a hard stance and say that the others aren't really fans, by our own definition of the word. But we all know this is sophistry. I believe that anyone who defines himself as a fan is one, if all he does is seek out the science fiction programs on television. As for those who attend conventions, there's no question that they are fans. They've made a considerable effort and financial investment in fandom.

The 30 fans at the convention, versus the one who seeks out fanzine fandom, are having a really grand time. "We stayed six in a room and drank all weekend and I met Robert Picardo," wrote my old friend. "It was a fanrun convention," she bragged to me, knowing that made it "inside" and not just a way to sell ST memorabilia.

This "insideness" lures new fans. The illusion of being on an inside track fuels convention fandom.

It may be helpful to look at another group which is fueled by the illusion of insideness. Wrestling fans all believe that they have special knowledge--that is what makes it interesting to them. The fan who only goes to the arena enhances his little tab of inside dope by watching the t.v. weekly shows. The t.v. watcher expands his knowledge by calling the telephone hot lines. The most avid read the wrestling sheets and magazines, and glory in their "insideness".

Wrestling is based on the idea that most fans last about two years. Sound familiar? So they are

constantly touting the phone lines and the magazines, to keep a new stream of fans biting the hook which is inside knowledge.

But there's no real way fanzine fandom can cope with those convention attendees. Even if one of those over-run zines makes it into the hands of someone who might be interested, the fact that the zines are rarified makes them of little interest. More fun to watch the anime' festival, or to go to the beer bust, or play a game. No difficult inside lingo, no hard intellectual requirements.

I do not intend to start publishing serious discussions of science fiction as my prime fanac. I don't suggest that course of action for anyone else (unless of course that is their prime interest in fandom.) But, recognizing that the zines I like best are somewhat esoteric, I will try to hand-feed fandom to my old buddy. Otherwise, giving her the zines is just tossing them down a dark hole; it takes personal involvement to recruit a fan.

If we really want to recruit more fans, it will take fanzine fans making individual efforts on one-to-one basis. That's how it seems to me.

It's sort of a nostalgic trip, to go to science fiction club meetings. Now that Ken Foreman is president of SNAFFU, all the fanzine fans are making Efforts to involve themselves in the club. So far, we haven't exactly changed the world, but we have made progress. Meeting attendance is up, and so seems to be the enjoyment of those who go. It's sort of fun to get hip-deep in real science fiction discussions, like Is There ESP, and Should We Colonize Our Solar System. It's a nostalgic pleasure, talking about the concerns that dominated our sophomore period of becoming fans. Somewhat surprisedly, I must admit I still like those discussions, no matter that they're the same now as they

were the year I first read science fiction.

And perhaps, if we play the sf club game just right, we'll end up with one or two fans who decide to get involved with the zines.

I think it's worth a try.
(--Joyce Katz)