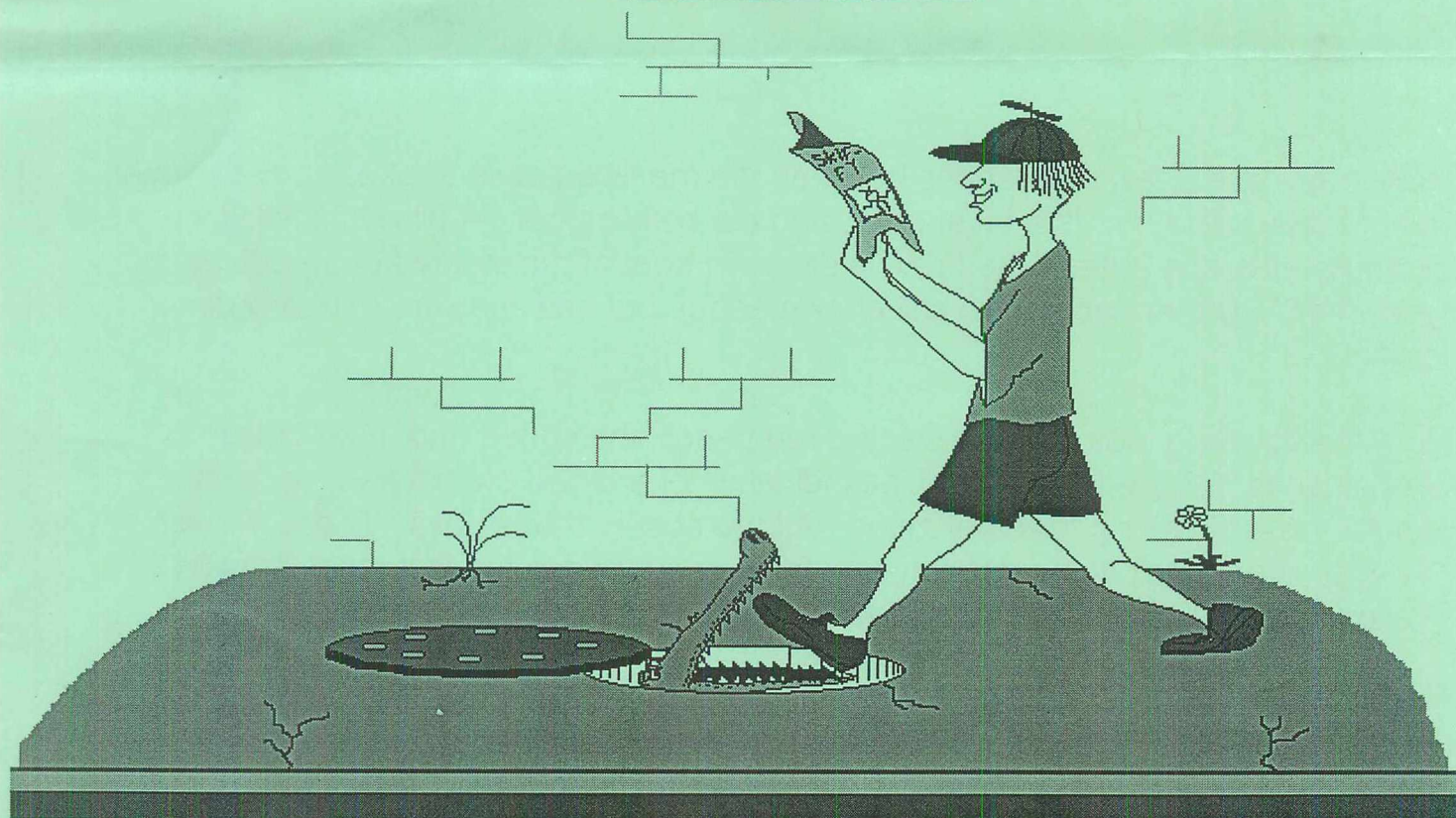
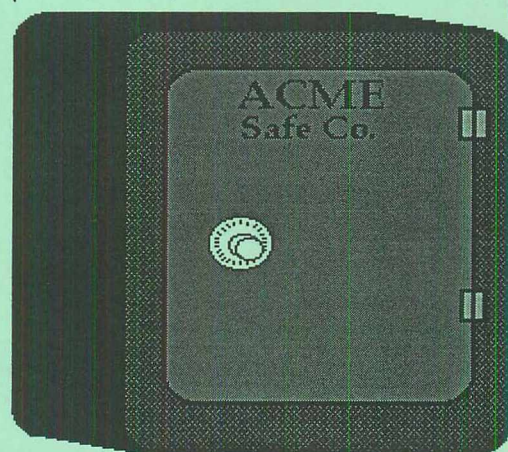


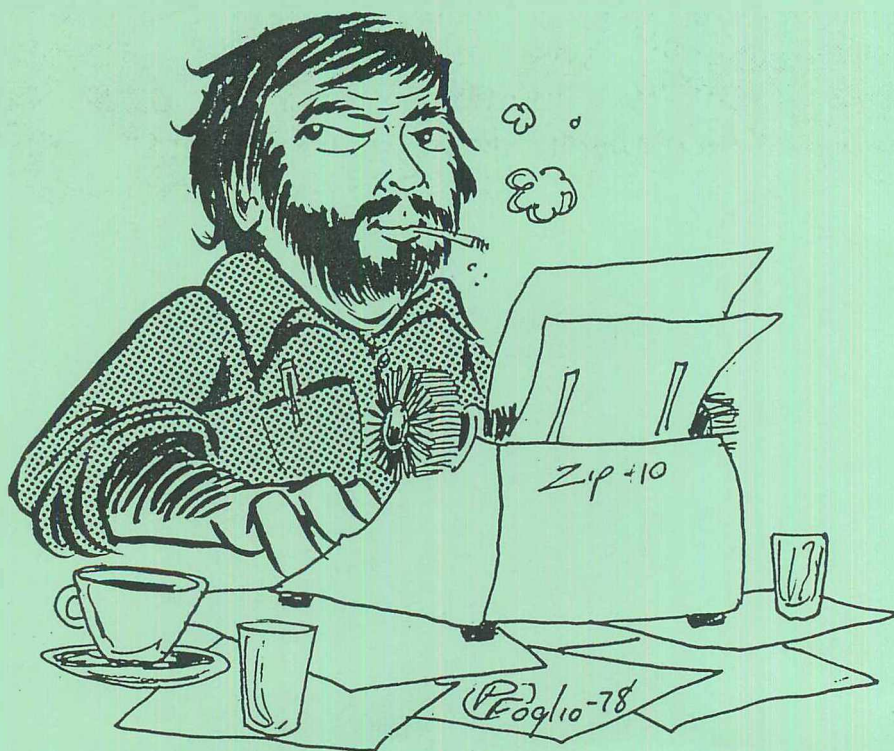
Just when you thought  
it was **safe**...



Ben'Zine 4



## Your Faned, then....



## And now.

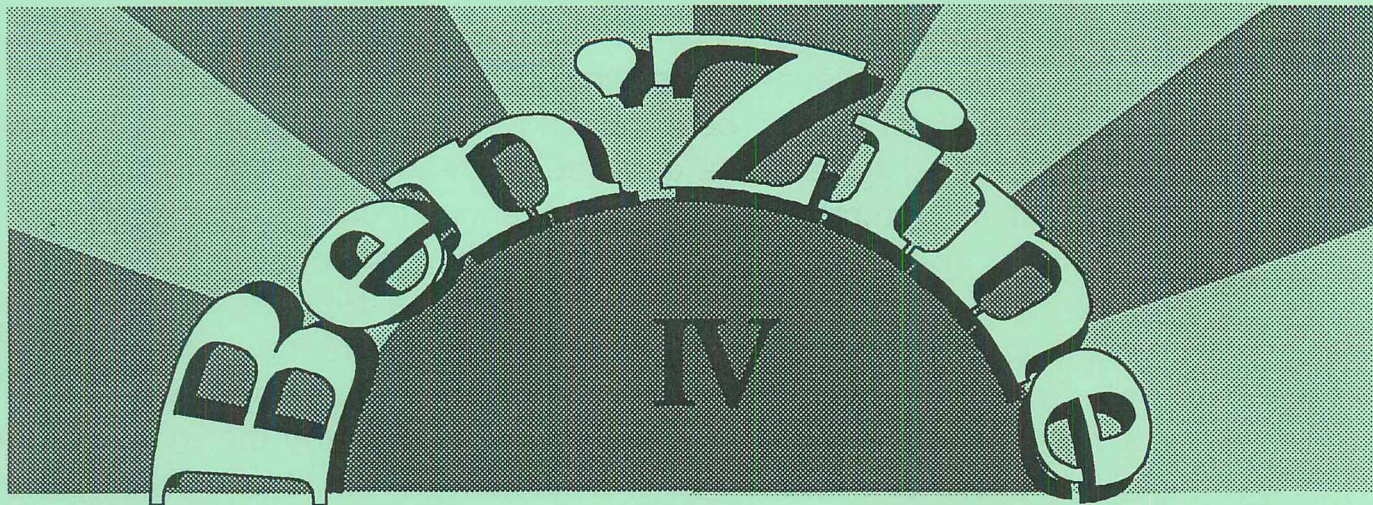
Well, there **are** a few differences between the me Phil Foglio depicts above and the me of today. The hair is a bit shorter, and the belly bigger. A pipe has replaced the cigarette. My computer, Ghodfrey, is sitting in front of me instead of an old manual typewriter. Sundry papers are still strewn about, but now they are in neatly labeled folders.

Note the knowing look in the eyes, the red pencil, the coffee and other glasses (it almost looks like I'm in my cups), all indicative of a faned pubbing a zine, active in two APAs, and writing for other zines. All are absent these days. Today, the look in the eyes is one that has seen only one fanzine pubbed in the last ten years--STET. The drink is now Diet Coke. And technology has replaced the red pencil.

I remember the look and feel of then, like an early summer weekend, full of activity and laughter. And this was made even better by fanac, the feeling of belonging and of being connected to like souls around the country and the world.

I liked the Ben'Zines of those bygone days. I hope you like this run of the zine and that it gives you occasional flashes of summer days.





## A RISING SUN PUBLICATION

Vol 2 Number 1

October 1994

Ben'Zine is a Science Fiction Fanzine. It is a genzine, meaning that nothing is ruled out of bounds. Even unusual and arcane topics such as science fiction may be broached. Cameo mentions of fantasy should be expected. Gems of faan fiction may get a 'earring. And even the occasional jewel of a pun may gleam within these pages.

Ben'Zine will appear in mailboxes at various intervals--none as long as the last one. Expect 3 to 5 of them in the next year.

B'Z is available for fanzine trade or a show of interest. Interest can be shown by contributing articles, artwork, letters of comment, old fanzines (6th Fandom era preferred) or large cash endowments.

Ben'Zine is produced electronically on Ghodfrey, my 386 DX 40 PC, using Word for Windows 6.0, Paintbrush + and Arts and Letters Draw. The resultant files are printed at 600 D.P.I. Non-electronic artwork is painstakingly laid out by ye olde editor to give the most pleasing effect. It is then copied which keeps my fingers clean and pockets empty.

Ben'Zine 4 is published by

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**Falls Church, VA 22046**

I can be reached on America On Line as BenZ7  
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### **The Legal Stuff:**

All opinions herein are those of the contributors--all the typos and other mistakes belong to me.

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## Howdy Folk!

Hello, again fen! My name is Ben Zuhl. In case the name doesn't start numerous association trees waving in your memory, here's a bit of personal history. I've been fanning since the early 70's (and are my arms tired!) I began as a dedicated con-goer but, having no overriding interest in Central Africa, I soon branched out. Leaving New Jersey behind, I roamed the midwest and finally put down roots in Chicago. The move quickly bore fruit as I became a regular Thursday Nighter, went to more cons, learned to juggle and made appearances with Moebius Theater and Cosmos and Chaos. Oh, yes, I managed to find time to put out 3 issues of Ben'Zine. And to marry the wonderful Lowry Taylor. We soon moved to Washington, D.C. and Lowry was accepted by the Foreign Service. In the last 10 years we've had 2 sons (Matthew 9 and William 3 years old), lived in places like Krakow, Poland, Manila, and Belgrade, Yugoslavia, er, Serbia and had the experience of being evacuated from the latter. Now we have an assignment at the State Department. This puts us in the States for another 2 years and allows us to return to our roots in fandom.

Our first convention since returning to the States was MidWestCon '94. We approached it with a mixture of anticipation and trepidation, and two carsick children. We looked forward to seeing good friends, good conversations and good parties. On the other hand, after a ten year absence, we could be neofans again. New BNFs and fan groups could be holding parties, talking about 'fringefans ruining good conventions'. And, we could end up walking the halls wondering, 'where's the action?'

We needn't have worried. It was a wonderfully relaxed relaxacon, thanks to the concom, people like Pat and Roger Sims, and all the friends who attended. Amazingly, we were able to pick up right where we left off a decade ago. Many of the same fans were there giving us the impression that we were continuing a conversation from just a few hours, instead of years, ago. Mike Glicksohn, short, hairy and brilliant as ever was accompanied by his new (to us) wife. Susan, for those unfortunates who haven't met her, is only slightly taller than Mike, soft spoken with a mischievous smile and quick wit. Bill and Alexia Hebel were there ensuring that parties would be lively and the halls monitored. Jackie Causgrove dragged the entire poker game into ANF (All Night Fandom). Jon and Joni Stopa, exuding hospitality and interesting conversation, set the tone for the whole convention. It gave us a warm, 'coming home again' feeling.



### Why Leah was right

It was at one of the con-suite parties that Leah Zeldes Smith commented to me that she expected my fanzine production to pick up when we went overseas -- as a means of keeping in touch with fandom. I told her I wanted to but it was just too difficult in the places we've been. We weren't GAFIA (Getting Away From It All), or even FAFIA (Forced Away From It All), in these places we were simply AFIA (Away From It All). The lines of communication were too long and full of potholes to keep in touch with all the people needed to produce Ben'Zine. And, while there were problems along the dispatch ways, the means weren't at hand either. *You* try finding a Kinkos in Krakow, Poland during martial law. In those years the Polish government kept a tight reign on all means of communication, including methods of mass production. (I almost said '...including methods of reproduction', but the Pope is more influential than the government in that province.)

Two weeks after I put these points to Leah I was in our basement looking for something. I glanced at a pile of boxes that arrived from the storage warehouse where some of our belongings awaited us for 10 years. Something in that small mountain caught my attention. It was something that shouldn't be there--a blue label.

When we left for our first post we had movers come to our apartment to take 3 separate shipments. The Department allowed an airfreight, seafreight, and storage shipment. We had prepared for the move by putting boxes we packed

into 3 rooms, a room for each type of shipment. We had even put color-coded labels on each box, red for airfreight, blue for seafreight, and white for storage.

So seeing a blue label in a pile of supposed storage boxes caught my attention. The inscription on the label moved me to feverish box-shifting and drove the reason I had come down to the basement in the first place, right out of my mind. (I still don't remember it.) On the label was one word--FANZINES.

Inside the clearly labeled, "Seafreight to Krakow" box were fanzines, and folders of material for future Ben'Zines. There even was a box of stencils and some dried up corflu. Memories flooded back to me. Leah was right! I had intended to increase my fanzine production while overseas. I even remembered getting my wife to cable back to the department asking about the whereabouts of some of our seafreight.

The resultant disappointment, the imminent birth of our first son, and the feeling that we were AFIA, gradually diminished my enthusiasm to the vanishing point.

### It's back!

So, here I am, recharged by a fine convention, electrified by the willingness of friends to contribute, and richer by a long lost box containing a battery of fanzine material. It has given me a never say diode attitude.

### What to expect

When I decided to re-embark on the good ship fanac, I sat back and thought

about what course to set. To keep off the many reefs let me say a few words about what to expect in Ben'Zine. The articles will cover many varied topics, even the IDS Building in Minneapolis. I like fan history and stories about fans, the trend started in this issue will continue. In short, if you like to read, or if you can write, amusingly about anything that interests you, what I like to call 'writing with a twinkle in the eye', then Ben'Zine is the place for you.

I like lettercols and plan to have one next ish. But that is up to you, dear reader. Chatty LOCs are my favorites and will have the best chance of being printed. I'm unashamedly looking to emulate the lettercols I liked so much in Cry of the Nameless and Mota.

### The Home Stretch

I hope you find Ben'Zine filled with amusing and interesting material. To that end I asked Mike Glicksohn, Ro Nagey, and Larry Tucker (all with veritable flashlights in the eye) to write for this ish. Then I dipped into the fanzine box and found Ron Legro's article on some of the things that awaken our sense of wonder. I took a chance that he still lives in Milwaukee and called the number that directory assistance gave me. Ron was there and, though 'mostly gaffed', remembered the article and blessed its publication in B'Z 4.

This issue of Ben'Zine is a homecoming for me. Home from overseas, yes, but more importantly, home again in fandom. Of course, it's just a coincidence that the setting of Mike's article, a trip home, recurs in Ron's article. Synchronicity

strikes again when you realize that homecoming is also the theme of Ro's article. Larry Tucker chimes in with a fine piece of science fiction, full of extrapolations that ring true. And, unbelievably, he wrote it at home.

### Back To The Future

Next issue the archaeological expedition continues and I find a short, hairy article. I also have a couple of articles by your friendly neighborhood editor that didn't fit into thish. And, a surprise or two if there is some response to this issue. So, stay tuned for the winter issue of B'Z.

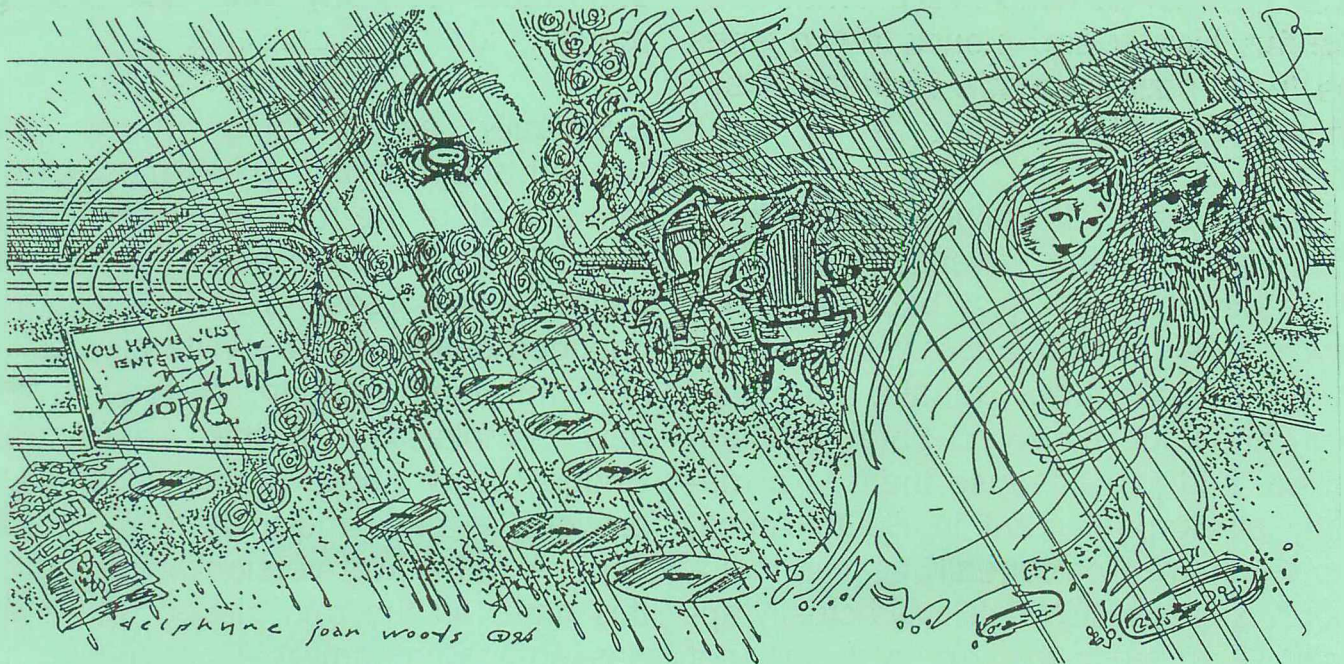
### And Finally

Let me take this space to say a big THANK YOU, first to the fans who contributed without question and only a little prodding. Second, to Thom Moore, a new fan artist who cheerfully put his talent and sense of humor at my disposal. And, finally to you, dear reader, who patiently waited the 14 years between B'Z 3 and 4.





# Getting There Was All The Fun



*by Mike Glicksohn*

"Don't forget," said The Wife, as I concentrated on steering our little Escort through the traditional downpour and the inevitable I-75 re-construction near Dayton, "Ben wants you to write something for his new issue."

I thought back to the MidWestCon we'd reluctantly dragged ourselves away from an hour earlier. Despite a certain consuite-induced fuzziness to the edges of my memories, the 1994 version of Cincinnati's annual relaxacon stood out remarkably sharply as a superior and delightful gathering, due entirely, of course, to its attendees.

Eric Lindsay, the peripatetic Aussie, had

been there, looking at least an hour and a half older than when we'd last waved good-bye to him two and a half years earlier. The new and improved (by Shelley) Elessar had been there, frenetically spreading the Gospel According to Wizard. And, wonder of wonders, Ben and Lowry had miraculously risen from the fannish dead, mysteriously dragging with them a large chunk of Chicago fandom long believed to be extinct. (When they do the mini-series of that con it will undoubtedly be subtitled "Revenge of the Revenants.")

"Honey," I said to the Wife, desperately trying to see the orange lane-marking barrels that appear to be the state sym-

bol of Ohio, "you're new to this fandom stuff so it's understandable that you tend to take things at face value. But in the Real Soon Now time frame of fanzine fans Things Are Not Always What They Seem. If we ever get back to two lanes and I can pass the buttwipe in the RV I'll fill you in..."

"You see, dear," I continued, miles (or, if you live in the twentieth century, "kilometres") later, "just because Communism has miraculously collapsed, allowing Ben and Lowry to take a breather from Keeping The World Safe For Capitalism, and just because there is a majority black parliament in South Africa, there is no reason to really believe that a fourth issue of BENZINE will actually appear. It's deaths that run in threes, not miracles."

"But he's so *nice*," said The Wife. "And he seemed so *sincere*!"

"Oh, Ben is both those things and much more. But the initial enthusiasm of most degafiating fans rarely survives their re-immersion in the Real World. I think I can safely forget about having to write for BENZINE 4. After all, it's been almost fifteen years since Ben last did a fanzine. I'd guess the Cubs have more chance of winning a World Series than fans have of getting a new issue from Ben! Besides, I can't think of a single damn thing to write about."

And I concentrated once more on threading through the single lane of I-75 near Lima.

Had I thought back to The Great God

Zuhl who lived in Sigourney Weaver's fridge in GHOSTBUSTERS, I would have been a lot more careful in what I said, he wrote, foreshadowing in the way that made Stephen King rich and famous...

Eventually, as all things must, Ohio passed away, taking with it most of the rain and all of the road repairs, although certainly not all of the *need* for road repairs. Just past Toledo, we had changed drivers so The Wife steered us ably through Michigan, negotiated the new complexities of the Ambassador Bridge Duty Free concession and brought us once more back to civilization. A rather wet version of civilization this time, as the rain picked up as we passed by Chatham.

I was dozing as we approached London, nearing midnight in a steady downpour, the dense blackness of the night interrupted only by our headlights and those of the few other drivers still on the road. "Uh, oh," said Susan.

Unless one is dead, the sound of "Uh, oh" while being driven through a dark and stormy night will wrench one back to consciousness in a split second. It was as if The Great God Zuhl had reached out and tweaked my short and curlies. Hard.

"What is it?" I asked, peering around at the almost-deserted highway.

"I was passing that van back there and I lost all power. But I can't pull over because I'm still in the passing lane and the damn van is pacing me."



Quickly I mentally solved several simultaneous differential equations and told The Wife that in 13.6 seconds the van would pass us in the slow lane and since there was no other traffic in sight we'd be able to pull over to the broad Canadian shoulders (a feature common among fans and roads of the Great White North and thanks, Zuhl, for waiting until we'd cleared Ohio!) And sure enough, it came to pass.

As did all the traffic while we sat there.

"Don't fret, honey, " I said reassuringly, as we sat there with the hood up, the emergency flashers doing their emergency flashing and the interior lights on so passing motorists would see us sitting forlornly out of the rain. "In no time at all a Provincial Police car will stop and offer us aid."

For the record, "no time at all" is longer than an hour.

"Never fear, my dear," I soothed. "One of these many passing truck drivers will report our situation to the authorities on his C.B. radio and help will be on the way."

For the record, the myth of the helpful truck driver is exactly that.

"Stay calm, beloved," I urged. "It's probably just a temporary fuel line blockage and the car will start if we just leave it sit for a while before trying to re-start it."

For the record, I know jack shit about engines.

Well into Monday, with the rain easing down to a drizzle and understanding that Zuhl had somehow managed to cloud the eyes of all the motorists who'd passed us as we sat on the shoulder, we agreed it was time to start walking. So we closed up the car and trusted our fates to the elements.

Huge twenty-two wheelers zoomed by us, hurling tidal waves of spray into the air as we picked our soggy way along the side of the highway. Cars passed, infrequently, but if they saw us or my outstretched thumb they weren't taking any chances on our being psychotic killers merely pretending to be lost, drenched and extremely pissed off at Ben Zuhl. So we walked. And walked.

"What's that?" said The Wife, highlighting something on the shoulder with her flashlight.

(The Wife is a cautious soul, coming from a cautious family. When she drives to the corner store she likes to have a full tank of gas. Just in case she gets caught in traffic. When she takes the car out of the neighbourhood she prepares for all emergencies. Even in July she likes to have a large bag of sand in the trunk, for traction in case of an unexpected blizzard. So in the car we usually have blankets, pillows, emergency rations, entrenching tools, umbrellas, a flashlight and numerous other items I tend to think of as "hedges against improbable bets." But I know I'll never hear the end of The Singular Time The Flashlight Was Marginally Useful. So it goes.)

'That' appeared to be a circular metallic flange, perhaps half a centimetre high, about seventeen centimetres in diameter with a three centimetre hole in the centre. There were various grooves in it. The Wife's flashlight had found it but I had no idea what it might be.

"look, there's another one!: she said as we continued walking. "And another! And there's two more right next to each other! And there are **three** more!!" Over a stretch of perhaps a kilometre of highway shoulder we spotted perhaps forty of the things, shiny, mysterious intruders into an already bizarre night. "What on earth can they be?" wondered The Wife.

"Perhaps they are **not** of this earth," I suggested. "We may be looking at the metal excrement of a race of robotic invaders who have chosen southern Ontario as the very height of Terran civilization for the beachhead of their invasion. Maybe they created some sort of field that would only cause the breakdown of cars driven by Science fiction fans with the Broad Mental Horizons sufficient to penetrate their nefarious schemes?"

"Or perhaps the metal plates are the **actual space invaders** themselves! Are any of the ones we just passed still where we first saw them?! Have they already crawled away to begin stealing the secrets of the Canadian Health Care plan? Did that one right there just **move**?! If only you'd packed a gas chromatograph so we could analyze them!"

"On the other hand," I said, ploughing ahead through the damp darkness, "the

whole thing may just be a ploy by Ben to get me to write another damn article for another damn issue of BENZINE. Let's hope that he at least puts a fucking date on this issue so future fan historians can figure out when and why and how Things Happened!" And so we put it all behind us by the simple act of putting it all behind us.



(For those 'Inquiring Minds' who really 'Need To Know' I must report that, shortly after the events chronicled in this article, The Wife and I passed by the very same section on the highway between Detroit and Toronto and we actively looked for one of the mysterious metal disks that had caught our eyes that dark and stormy night. Apart from **one** battered, and dilapidated and obviously dead disk, **they were all gone!** Look around you, fanzine readers, and beware: the aliens are among us and I'm not sure Zuhl can protect us!)



On the night in question, another kilometre passed and evidently we passed out of the alien's field because a very tired traveler picked us up. (Three kilometres: that's not too many. In the rain.) We were only a short distance from London and the Samaritan took us to the exit ramp to that city. It was still a kilo into the services area (thanks, Ben) but we walked it happily with comfort and surcease within our grasp. Almost comforting, except that it was close to two in the morning. (Ben moves in mysterious ways.)

We found a gas station and someone willing to call the local Automobile Association but since it was (a) late and (b) stormy, we would have low priority for attention. Okay, I can wait. And there's a Ramada Inn **right next** to the gas station. So we walked over there, emulating the couple from the American Express commercial: dirty, wet, without luggage but **with** plastic. And sure enough, they gave us a room. And only about half a mile walk from the main lobby.

Sensing that the arrival of the tow-truck was less than imminent, I joined Susan in finding our room. "Oh, look," she said, as we entered: "it's a king-sized bed."

And it was. And a closer look at the condition of the mattress suggested that the first king who's slept on it was probably Charlemagne. Apparently, Zuhl is a jealous and spiteful god.

Later, after an hour wait in the aftermath of the storm until the tow-truck arrived and after finding the Escort and towing it

to a garage a mere klick from the hotel, I re-joined The Wife in our less-than-luxurious hotel room. She was watching the end of 'The Flying Wallendas'. Cute, I thought: A family that had tried to go too high and had been struck down. Zuhl may be spiteful but at least he has a sense of humour!

The next day involved dusty walks to the garage, impassioned pleas based on the forty bucks I'd already paid to be at the year-end staff party in Toronto later that same afternoon and discrete obeisance and promises to Zuhl. something worked. Half way through the afternoon and halfway through a grand, the Escort had a new fuel pump, better weather, and clear sailing to Toronto. There are some things fans are not meant to know, I thought as The Wife drove onto the highway.

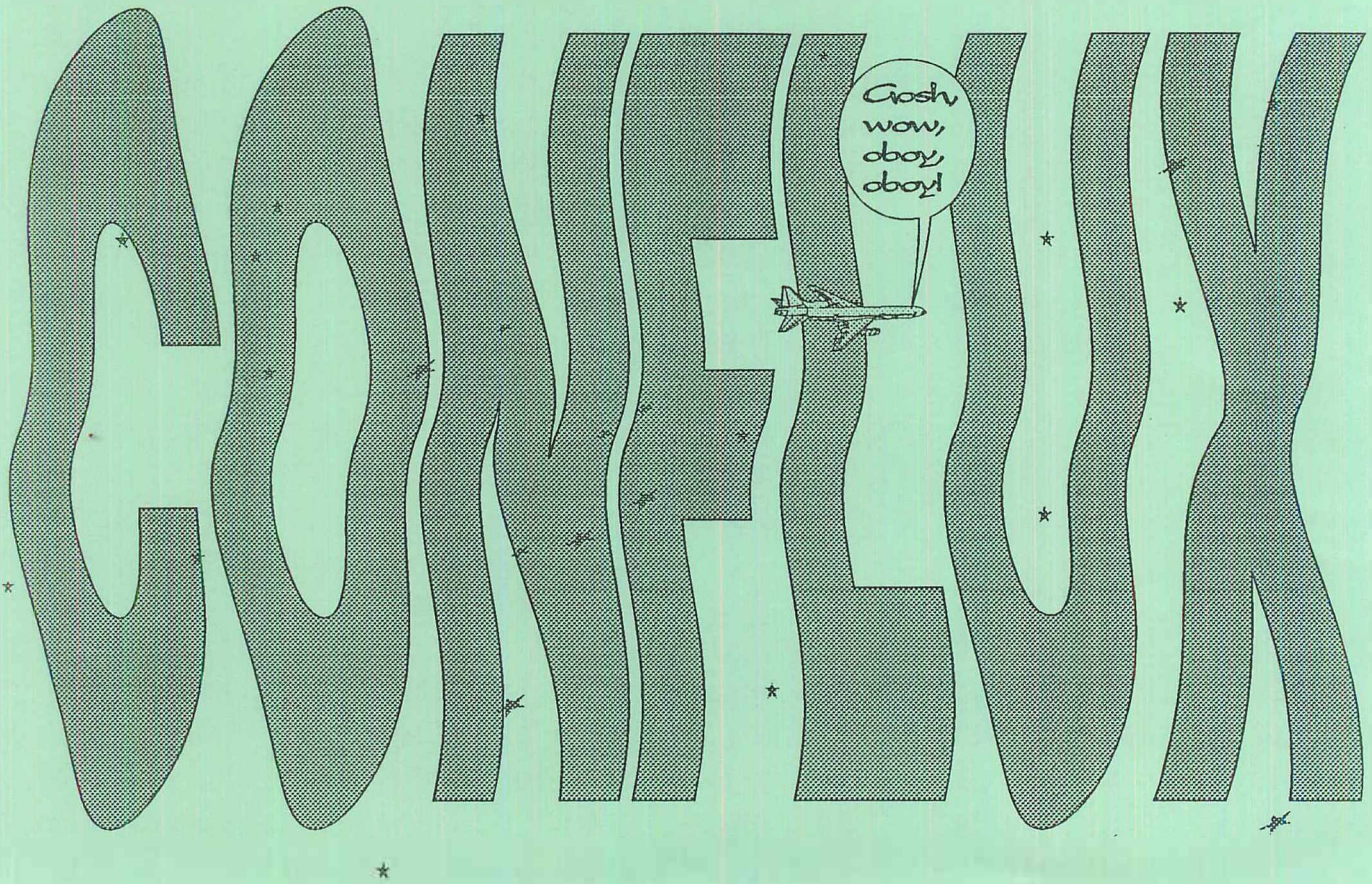
"Don't forget, dear," said The Wife. "Ben wants you to write something for his next issue."

And somehow, I thought, it won't really matter that I can't think of anything to write about. For Zuhl will provide.

Damn his cute little eyes and his fourth little issue.







*by Ron Legro*

The face of the sun broke out with freckles. Thereafter, the spotted solar disc gave rise to a flare, a wispy tendril of electromagnetic violence which wagged impolitely at the Earth.

Flung into space from that fiery finger, a stream of subatomic particles drove toward the home world of man. At hundreds of kilometers a second, the solar wind gust smashed into Earth's magnetic field. The planet's protective paunch warded off the blow, but the particles swarmed toward the polar underbelly and bit hungrily into the soft ionosphere there.

The subatomic assault was noted by earthly astronomers. Soon, WWV -- the

National Bureau of Standards radio station in Fort Collins, Colorado -- coolly transmitted a "geophysical alert." Solar activity was on the rise, came the report, and the planet 's magnetosphere would be "unsettled to active."

Of course, my three friends and I knew nothing of this as we left Minneapolis that afternoon of March 26, 1978. It was the end of Minicon XIII, which for us had been an enjoyable science fiction convention. But as we were to discover, what transpired at the Leamington Hotel that weekend was mere prelude to an awe inspiring evening on a lonely Wisconsin road.



For us, the convention segued into a conflagration in the light of which the Minneapolis events simply paled. We found ourselves standing on the sodden floor of a 600 mile high arena, watching an Easter parade of sub-atomic particles -- God finger-painting in the cool night sky.

Our date with this grand design was still hours away as we cruised homeward to Milwaukee on Interstate 94. David, Mary Pat, Paula and I chatted about what would prove to be the relatively mundane happenings of the weekend:

- \* Of how someone at the art auction had bid the celestial sum of \$200 for a well executed but unremarkable unicorn painting;

- \* Of the cracklingly funny "Star Wars" spoof;<sup>1</sup>

- \* Of the good company and the crummy banquet food.

At Black River Falls, 170 miles into the trip, we stopped for Easter supper. Barely had we returned to the road when Paula looked northeast into the cloudless evening sky. "It doesn't look right," she said.

Over the treetops, a pulsing luminescence was evident despite the scattering of light along the busy freeway. "Aurora Borealis?" I suggested, briefly glancing from the wheel. But I quickly changed my mind and ventured we were seeing smoke from a forest fire or steam from a factory.

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<sup>1</sup> Performed by Chicago fandom's Moeblus Theater, the company of which included a certain fanzine editor named Zuhl.

After another minute, however, the four of us concluded that we indeed had spotted an auroral display. Chattering with expectation, we left the freeway and followed a quiet, county trunk highway several miles into the Black River State Forest. I parked at a clearing by a tiny creek. Minus our coats, we tumbled into the brisk air and stood on the two lane blacktop, craning our necks.

Adjusting to the dark, our eyes soon discerned a titanic curtain throbbing in the firmament.

How can I describe our spontaneous excitement? Perhaps our conversations had primed in us some intellectual trigger. It was one of those moments when even everyday occurrences are attended by a lucidity of perception that leaves the mind agape.

I remembered the last time I observed the northern lights, as a child growing up in northern Wisconsin. At that higher latitude, the aurorae sometimes glowed golden and shimmered spectrally. This blue-white plasma I now watched had less intensity, but to one who had been blinded by the big city glow, to one who had traded the sugary soda pop of childhood for the fine wine of adulthood, this aurora's subtle etheriality was breathtaking.

It was as if someone had plugged in some cosmic lava lamp. Gobbules formed and broke, dissolved into each other and flowed into new shapes. A separate tendril of green-white energy grew across the zenith. Meanwhile, an ectoplasmic hand stretched its fingers,

then dissipated. Paula imagined the hand was the Biblical Angel of Death, which had visited the final plague on ancient Egypt.

"Ohh, look at it. Omigod," Mary Pat said as a series of flat ribbons emerged very distinctly. The dimensional effect was dramatic.

"Don't look straight at them, try looking into the black spaces between," I suggested as more bursts appeared. The others tried this with good result; peripheral images are seen best at night.

Now we realized we were shivering and dove for coats. A crazy thought occurred and I scrambled in the car until I found a certain tape cassette. I plugged it into the stereo system, turned the volume up full and opened doors and windows. Thereafter we watched the aurora move to music, the soundtrack from "Star Wars."

At home I have a color box, the lights of which flash randomly. I've observed that the flashing seems to complement any musical meter. Similarly, the cosmic lightbox we were watching seemed to flow in patterns consistent with John Williams' heroic film score. We heard a boom of tympani and saw variegated bursts of energy. To my excited mind the forms appeared as explosions from some great space battle. The throne room march filled the night air and a trumpet fanfare was punctuated by a flashing meteor. Soon after, David picked out an earth satellite passing to the east. And then, a minute later, we spotted another satellite, this one in po-

lar orbit. An airliner passed, and suddenly space seemed very busy.

"I wonder if he can see it?" Mary Pat asked, referring to the airline pilot and the sky show. David inferred the pilot's reaction: "And on your right, ladies and gentlemen..."

The music reached its climax and the reprise accompanying the title credits took over. We could almost see the words rolling into infinity overhead: "Long ago, in a galaxy far, far away..." This spectacle, I realized was produced by a higher authority than George Lucas.

The music ended and we ran out of superlatives to shout into heaven. The northern lights were spread over perhaps half the celestial canvas now, and their glow was stirring the forest. Chirping birds joined a pair of conversant owls and the gurgling stream.

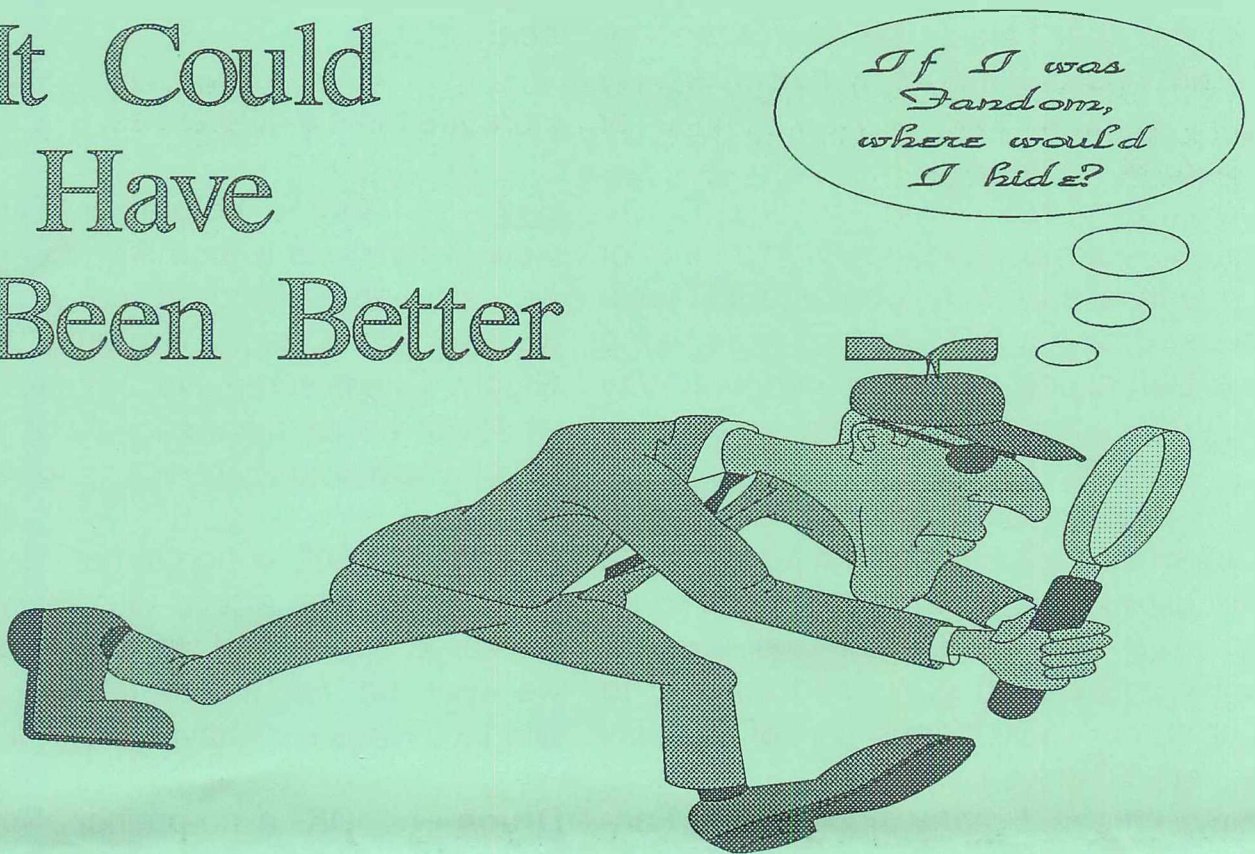
Gradually, the display faded, and with it our stupor.

"It sure beats an \$8 seat at a Jefferson Starship concert," I said as we got back into the car. I turned on the heater as Mary Pat nursed her near-frozen feet. She had stood enraptured throughout the 45 minute display, wearing sandals.

We returned to the freeway, cruising east into the eye of the rising moon. It was a big, round Dreamsicle and in its warm light we wondered aloud how many other people might have stopped to watch. "That," David commented, "was a gift to us from Science Fiction."



# It Could Have Been Better



by Ro Nagey

Gee, thanks.

No, really.

There I was – doing a slow fade into total anonymity. A cross dissolve from the tried and true trivia status: “Gee, whatever happened to...” to the dark and dismal “Hmmm, is he still alive?”

Suddenly, a call. A request. A new deadline to abuse. What the hell, why not?

So, semi-somnambulant, it's up and at 'em, connecting the crank to the old diesel typewriter, brewing a fresh cup of instant double decaf espresso. One quick crack of the knuckles.

And, s-t-r-e-t-c-hhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh...

OK, chillun, gather 'round. This isn't going to be easy. I can't talk as loud as I used to and my eyesight ain't so good. But, let me tell you about The Way It Was Supposed To Be and What Went Terribly Awry

## The Way It Was Supposed To Be

The last time we were all together, lessee, how many years ago was that, Lil Ben? That many? Hmmm...had I known, I would have taken better care of my past.

It wasn't quite the same past that I thought I had. Perhaps, somehow, over

the years, I put it up on the shelf and forgot to dust it once too often.

I figured that I would be one of the Unseen Kings of Fandom by now. Certainly nothing lower than a Dark Prince of Convention Planning.

Instead, I am barely in the wading end of the fannish swimming pool and all I have to show for it is 247 words of pure vamp and Ben sitting around wondering "Why did I ever ask him to write for me again?"

I got into fandom back when I lived in Ann Arbor. I fell into it with a fervor only a true fanatic can. I remember once reading how Claude Degler gaffiated for something like 20 years and thinking to myself, seriously: "What sort of stupidity is that? Why would anyone let that happen?" I mean, I *really* thought that! Fandom was a Way of Life.

Meanwhile, whilst I was whiling away the carefree days of my youth, the evil Dr. Reality was sharpening that Briss knife over in that corner over there.

Whack!

With a snicker-snack, I was one quick move to Cleveland and a lifetime away from fandom. With ne'er so much as a paddy whack, I was left without a bone.

And somehow, the psychic connection between me and fandom was severed and I've been over a decade finding the way back.

And me without a map. So, here I am,

peering out from the woods<sup>2</sup>, wondering if this pastoral setting is the fandom of today. And, if so, how the hell did it happen.

Here are the big differences:

**Sex** OK, a no-brainer. But, like, wow! There was a time that this was all we cared about. And, at many cons, all we ever did. Often. Frequently. Noisily. Giggly. Things sure have changed ... but whoever would have thought a rubber fetish would actually be a survival skill?

**Booze** OK, a no-brainer. But, like, wow! There was a time that this was all we cared about. And, at many cons, all we ever did. Often. Frequently. Noisily. Giggly. Things sure have changed ...

**Drugs** OK, a no-brainer. But, like, wow! There was a time that this was all we cared about. And, at many cons, all we ever did. Often. Frequently. Noisily. Giggly. Things sure have changed ... like, ever notice, how your mind lets you cut and paste the same paragraph over and over again?

### **Us Against the No-Brainers**

Fandom has a long, tried-and-true history as a lightning rod for the disaffected. The only difference between us and a motorcycle gang is that literacy is more important in fandom - the creative use of leather is more of a draw. But, the literacy key opened a lot of great doors. My first con was a home-becoming for me - *the family that I had always wanted*

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<sup>2</sup> Wait a minute...wasn't I in the metaphorical swimming pool just a few short sentences ago? Sheesh!



**but never thought I'd find** sort of thing.

It was OK to be literate. Intelligent. Polymathic. A creative abuser of alcohol, drugs, and sex. And it didn't hurt if you looked good in black Levi's and black T-shirts.

The be-bop cool cats that had preceded us had given way to the laid-back hippies. The jazz riff of first fandom had given way to the free-form drum solo of what I used to jokingly refer to as Last Fandom.



And, when I moved to Cleveland, fandom was a real thing, but it fade away<sup>3</sup>. Other than occasional forays into fandom, I was entering what I not-so-fondly have come to call the Dark Years. I was busy living the dreams of others and living in fear that my own dreams were sick. It wasn't fun. I recommend it to those that think they're strong enough to never commit suicide. It's humbling, thank you.

By the time I had gotten my act together and back on the road, I had lost the map to fandom.

So, with amazement, I was asked to be a special guest at ConFusion this year. Twenty years of a convention I was at the center of in the beginning.

### The Last Secret of Fandom

Start a con. Don't die. Make sure the concom has your address.

### What went terribly awry

For starters, why the hell hasn't the dress code changed? I mean, really. The look we had back then wasn't that cool - now, it's been institutionalized. I don't know why we have made the hippie look a uniform, a badge. Why not try, oh, I don't know, lime-colored polyester 3-piece suits, neon coon-skin caps or spandex bicycle shorts with cod-pieces? Anything. The point is: change. The disaffected can't have a uniform. If you are truly disaffected, you are rejecting What Came Before. Take my past. Please.

<sup>3</sup> OK, you listen to it. I swear Buddy couldn't conjugate verbs properly.

Apparently, marketing has had as much an impact on fandom as anywhere else. Reading SF no longer plays a major role in fandom. Stuffed dragons, dulled pewter swords, holograms and inside-joke buttons - the things of mass production and no-brains - have taken over the valuable real estate in the huckster room. Even the name takes on new meaning. A huckster used to be an almost joking term for the place where people too poor to go to cons were selling their books to underwrite going to the convention. Nowadays, it appears, they are just that - hucksters.

Since reading is no longer necessary, panels are not the same, either. They used to be about literature. Now, they are about tools. Computers. Graphics. BBS. Not the product ... tools to make the product. Seemingly, everyone is anxiously awaiting the one final development that will change their tool into a multi-user, interactive, pan-dimensional publishing machine. Of course, when that happens, the fact that no one has read anything other than user manuals for the last ten years will present certain problems.

I feel old - I remember Mae Strelkov doing one of the most amazing zines I've ever seen using hectography.

### **It's better than that?**

Among the most amazing changes in my life is that I don't drink, I don't smoke, I don't drug and I am monogamous.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> In this politically correct era, let me hasten to add that I absolutely don't care what *you* do. After all, I had to do everything I did to get to where I am today.

Which meant that I was more than a little afraid of partying at a con that had been founded back when I was the opposite of all of the above. Quite frankly, I couldn't imagine how incredibly dull it might be.

It wasn't. Really.

Well, OK, there was that one conversation where we talked about major appliances and whether all-temperature Cheer™ really did brighten as it whitens, but other than that we had a great time.

We talked.

And I had forgotten what a pleasure that was.

Talking with people with Epicurean tastes for life. Not having to hold back. Listening to proper grammar being clearly enunciated.<sup>5</sup> Laughing.

God, I missed that. I really, really missed that.

And, it's possible to talk until 4 in the morning and not be drunk! Who knew?

I actually remembered conversations the next day.

I had some friends come up, looking hurt, asking why I had skipped their party the night before. I smiled and said that I had quit my drugging ways and didn't need to be around it anymore. They laughed and said they had too - in fact,

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<sup>5</sup> Trust me, ask Diane sometime to imitate a Florida cracker. It's hilarious and frightening. Join her on her Hunt for the Missing Adverb as she navigates the Swamp of the Misconjugated Verb.



their room was non-smoking.

So, I guess, it's like this. Those of us who survive change enough that our inbred instincts for dancing a jig at the precipice of the Cliffs of Self-Destruction keep moving us one-step back as the ground beneath us erodes. And, we begin to enjoy watching the new 'uns take their turn, pointing out how we danced

faster and funnier and with more fervor when it was our turn.

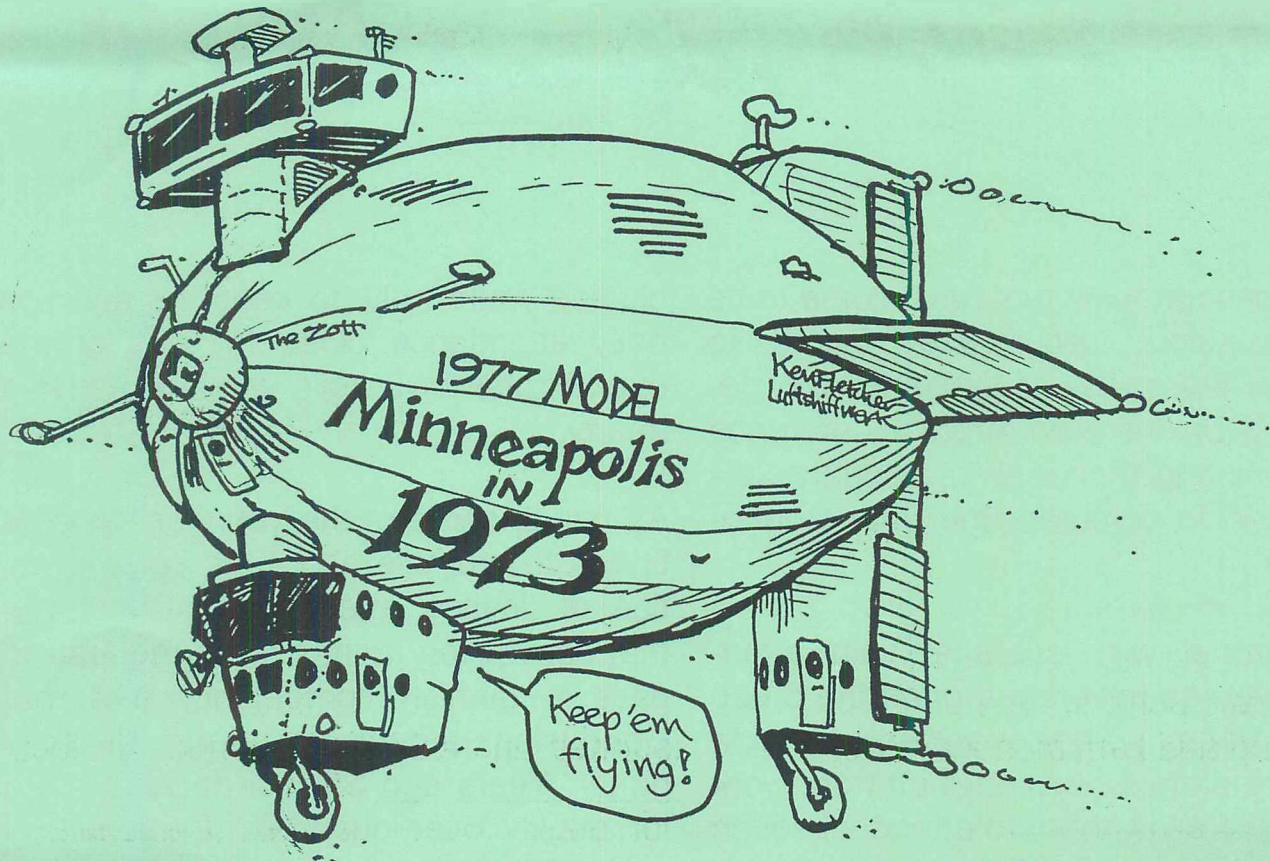
I am sorry I missed the years in between.

I am glad I got back. Thanks for being there.

Keep dancing.

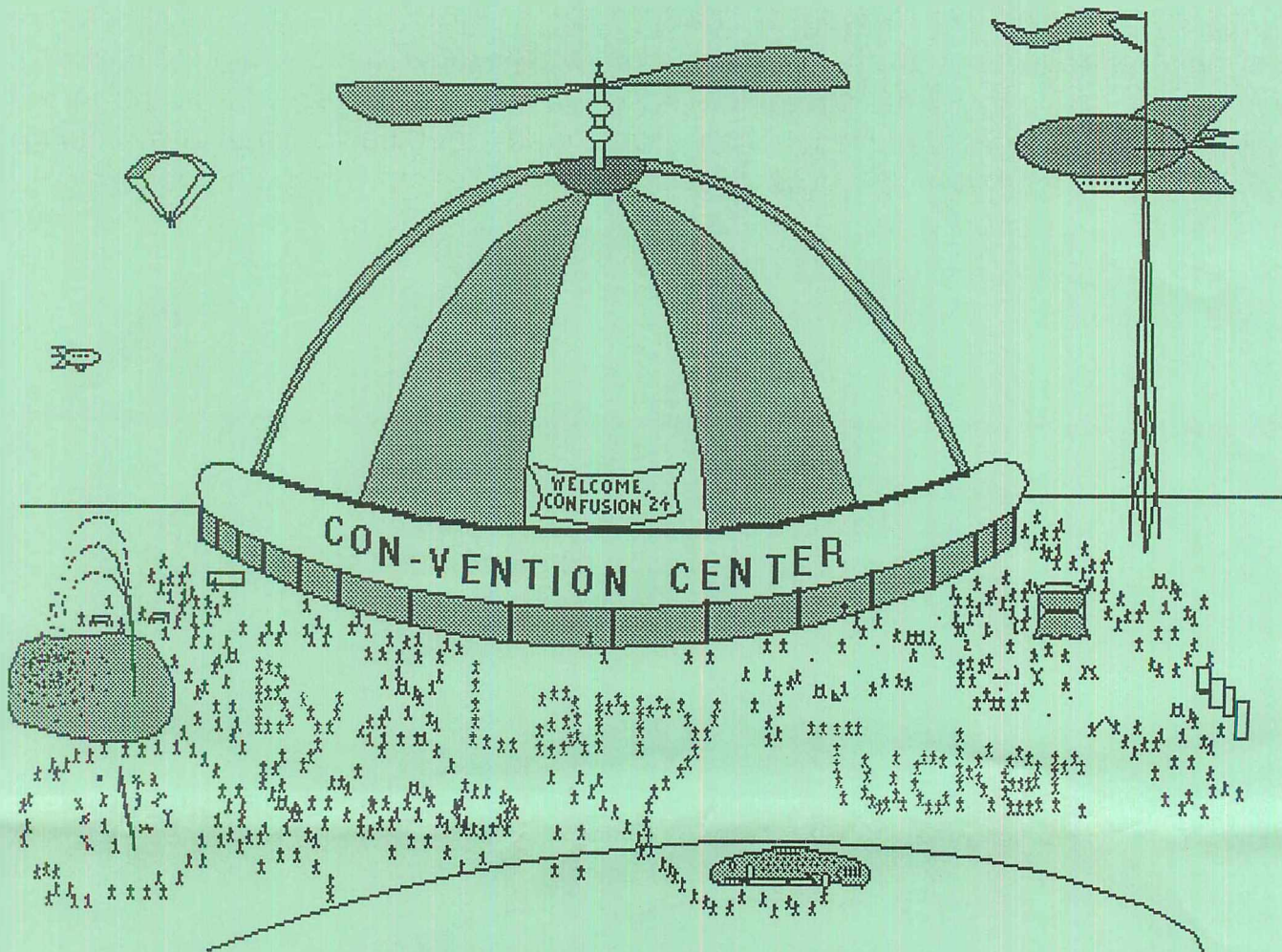
*Ro*

*In a bold and courageous move in 1977, Ben'Zine # 1  
endorsed the Minneapolis In '73 bid.  
There has been a plug for it in each succeeding issue.  
I see no reason to stop now,  
so here is my favorite by Ken Fletcher*





# CONFUSION 50



The monsoon rains that have come to be an expected occurrence failed to dampen the spirits of the fans who descended on the Ann Arbor Conference Center during the week of January 20 - 27, 2024, to celebrate the 50th ConFusion.

The turnout was average, with attendance figures hovering around the 5,000 mark. Naturally, not everyone was able to take the one or two days off from work that would allow them to attend all seven days of the con. But there were enough diehard ConFusion veterans around, in-

cluding yours truly, to keep the average daily attendance close to 80% of the overall total for a solid week of partying hearty.

As usual, some of the younger fen continued to grumble about the con's practice of limiting attendance by insisting that convention members be required to pass a fannish competency test, but ConFusion organizers stuck to their guns. Years ago Stilyagi decided to go for quality over quantity. Personally, I prefer the intimacy of conventions like this where, over the course of a week,



you have a better chance of being able to meet with all of the people you know. Tha's really difficult to do at the larger regionals, like Chicago or Columbus, in a crowd of 30,000 or more. Besides, if the fringe-fans don't like the way it's done at ConFusion, they can start their own conventions.

Monday Live at ConFusion, the con's traditional opening ceremonies, got things off to a gosh-wow start, with the usual pyrotechnics staged by Spare Chaynge Multimedia Productions. The con-com was happy to announce that there were fewer cases of sensory overload than usual, and the handful who were still experiencing difficulties after the con were reported to be responding well to treatment. Some of the casualties of the Masquerade Ball, which also featured effects by Spare Chaynge, may not have fared as well. Personally, I feel that anyone with a predisposition towards schizophrenia who insists on standing in the middle of the dance floor wearing inadequate shielding -- well, hell, what did they expect? Despite the release forms, all the warnings posted at the entrances and in the program book, there are still some fools who can't seem to get it into their heads that a good psychedelic lightshow can be a hazardous experience for some people. Those with fragile egos should keep their distance. That's why the con set up the alternate dance area, the Bubblegummer Section with the cheesy disco light, on the other side of the ballroom.

The handful of burnouts and brainwipes among the Masquerade revelers seems to be part of a disturbing trend we have

been noticing at other cons -- an anachronistic tendency towards machismo being demonstrated by a growing number of younger fans. Another indication of this disturbing trend can be found in the costumes themselves that have been showing up at convention masquerades.

Call me old fashioned, but I miss the days when costumers were content to demonstrate their skills with imaginative programming of personal holo projectors. Actual surgical alteration still strikes me as an extreme alternative. Besides, there is an element of originality that is lacking in surgical costuming. You're not really demonstrating your own costuming skills, but your doctor's. Any fool who has enough money can have their body altered by somebody else.

At the First Fandom meeting, President-for-life-and-beyond Ray Beam announced (via cryonic channeling) that the group was introducing yet another membership category: Patronized Sustainer. To qualify for a PS membership applicants should be able to read, verify that they have known of the existence of SF fandom for at least the last six months, and prove that they can come up with at least fifty cents for annual dues (or know someone who will loan them the money). Patronized Sustainers are entitled to receive all First Fandom publications, an official T-shirt and secret decoder ring, and are afforded full voting privileges. They will not, however, be eligible to receive the First Fandom Lifetime Achievement Award until they have hung around the fringes of fandom for at least one year.

For the third consecutive year, the ConFusion Virtual Fantasy Room continued to be a popular draw. Some attendees remained in the room all week, sustained by intravenous con dog feedings, imagining themselves to be such fanciful things as drivers of internal combustion vehicles, hunters of endangered or extinct species, spouses in monogamous marriages, Republicans and the like. Said one participant, "Hey, it's just a harmless form of escapism. It's not like we'd actually want to do these bizarre things in real life." Putting in my own two cents worth, I can only add that some of us still consider fandom as a means for escaping *to* values, not *from* them. But those who view it the other way around -- the "Don't be it, dream it" crowd, as I tend to think of them -- have been hanging out on the fannish fringes for as long as any of us can remember. And I find their point of view just as lame and impossible to personally embrace as I ever did.

One of the more popular items on the fannish programming track was the panel "Selling Your Blood, Your Body and Anything Else You May Have to Raise Money for Postage." Another well attended, and hotly debated, panel addressed the controversial topic of "Should We Seriously Consider Abandoning Mimeo as the Traditional Form of Fanzine Repro?" The Consensus, as reported by participant Dick Smith, seemed to be, "No, let's not rush into doing anything rash until we've had a chance to see if these newfangled media are going to be around a while longer. We know that forcing inks through wax stencils to produce low resolution text and graphics works. I don't see that

there's any advantage to be gained by using 10,000 d.p.i. resolution, or instantaneous transmission of three dimensional images with full color and sound, or any of that other nonsense. Besides, your typical fan artist, equipped with a felt tip marker, can't draw anything that's that detailed. And fan writers will never be capable of constructing coherent thoughts, let alone complete sentences, at the speed of light. Besides, we fear change."

ConFusion's traditional day-long Fan Guest of Honor panels were also well attended. Fully half of the people in the audience at most of the panels were *not* previous ConFusion Fan GoHs, putting the lie to the decades-long sentiment that the practice of having all of the previous Fan GoHs who are in attendance introduce one another would be come a pointlessly narcissistic exercise. Some people *do* care about tradition. And there continues to be an abiding interest in fan history. This was underscored by the enthusiastic audience response to co-Fan GoHs Megan Leigh and Bob "Wilson" Nagey when, as an appropriate finale to the day's activities, they performed the nostalgic Cosmos and Chaos, Jr. Juggling Exhibition, an homage to their famous fannish forebears. And it was a real hoot watching old-timers Frank Johnson and Ben Zuhl reprising their roles as Cosmos and Chaos stage assistants, as creaky and arthritic as their performance may have been.

It was unfortunate that the pro writers' track of programming was not as well attended as the fannish track. ConFusion should be congratulated for their



stubborn determination to continue to present pro skiffy programming, a practice long abandoned by most of the other regional cons. But I suggest they could have chosen a more upbeat subtitle for the track, rather than "Remember US? We Write the Stuff."

The debate over whether or not to admit tobacco users into the smoking con suite continued. An informal poll conducted in the smoking room throughout the convention resulted in a fairly even split between those who responded "I don't care" and those who apparently didn't understand the question. The question strikes me as being something of a tempest in a teapot, since many of the people who seem to object to tobacco use never went within two floors of the room. In fact, the overwhelming majority of complaints were anonymous phone-ins

who, as far as anyone has been able to discern, have never attended the convention.

After the dust had finally settled -- the last dead-doggers lapsed into blissful unconsciousness, the police went away, the truck convoy wheeled away the convention hardware and supplies and the construction crew arrived to begin repairing the convention center -- we who survived all agreed: the 50th really had turned out to be one of the best of all possible ConFusions.

\* \* \* \* \*

*Did you notice in artist, Thom Moore's, title illo that there are several faanish activities going on outside the Convention Center? For example, there is the large team Ghoodminton game. Or, the Smoooth Fountain spewing Beam's Choice into the Tucker Pond. Can you find the others?*

# Art Credits

Thom Moore-----Cover, 3, 10, 20  
 Phil Foglio-----2  
 delphynne joan woods-----7  
 Doug Rice-----11, 17  
 Ken Fletcher-----19  
 Ben Zuhl-----6, 12, 15

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