

VITCHER

For Apa-V 35
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GHOD KNOWS the world is imperfect. Thus it is that my experiences with Fandom have had their ups and downs as with most aspects of life; the concept of Fandom as a microcosm is therefore justified.

Uh, yeah, I guess that works for other people as well.

My fannish life has been relatively tangential to the mundane compared with many fans to whom FIAWOL is a given, not a concept. I've probably wiped its worst incursions on my psyche from my mind; and the best times have been so diffused that it's difficult to narrow them down to any specific moments.

I remember periods of self doubt so heavy that I would make a New York subway trip all the way to the place where a fannish gathering was taking place, stand outside thinking why would anyone want me to mess up their good times by intruding on them, and return home. (And that was before I even discovered the delights and downsides of cannabic inhalation. What fed my paranoia then I'm not sure.) Yet I've had egoboo moments (before and after that milestone/millstone) that made everything I've done in and for fandom worth every hassle. I've had more of the latter since I came to Las Vegas than

I ever did in the many years prior to that domain transition, though that is not to demean those I had before, some of which meant and mean a great deal to me.

The fan conventions here have helped with the positive aspects of that area of my life. At Toner this was buoyed by sharing the badge concession with Williams Rotsler and Kunkel and feeling comfortable about that, where at one time I'd've been more than usually diffident about it. Then, I'd have worried about deserving the honor. Now I realize it's not a question of honor or "place," it's a question of sharing the fun. Maybe I'm not a neo any more, at last...

Now, if I could just do something about this ego problem.

Toner was fun, even if it did share with many fan conventions a hotel problem. We've had many discussions lately of how fandom has evolved (or devolved) over the years, but it does seem that the problem of the fan/mundane interface has remained something close to a constant. Yes, I'm sure there have been great conventions where the hotel ran non-interference, and no, sorry, I can't name two. In the general run of con-going fans, I'm talking as something closer to a non-participant than anything else, but these are the impressions I get. I've only been to two out-of-town (from my perspective) conventions in my 32-year fannish life--sorry, three, if you count a NonCon in Philadelphia in the 60s--and one of those was the notorious (Hotel-interface-wise) SaintLouisCon. The other was the

Noreascon in Boston somewhere around 1980 (and I don't know why I always lose track of the year); I don't remember that there were problems with that one. Of course, the mind doth blur from time to time to... (I wasn't smoking then, either. Unh...well, not much. And certainly not at the con.)

My point, however, is a tad loose with the Noreascon, since I wasn't staying at the hotel. Joy-Lynd was living in Greater Metropolitan Boston at the time, and I did not stick around much for the fan parties. Yeah, yeah, fakefan...

My sincerest appreciation to the Fab Four, and I'm not talking about the CD comeback kids. Tom, Tammy, Ben, Cathi, some of my fave folk 'round yere, knocked themselves out to make it great, and succeeded. I, who am a lazy sh—son of a gun, marveled at this from the comfy chairs I occupied most of the time in the hospitality sweet (sic) as I got to talk to (okay, be talked to) by the likes of Rotsler, Alyson and Hope. I did get up once in a while to acquire another bowl of soup during that particular sequence...

I have to acknowledge that while I enjoyed making labels for the Toner Wines, my general appreciation for wine of any kind tends to be less than positive. I tasted a couple of the Toner variety, but with all the best will in the world was unable to appreciate their finer qualities. Sorry, Ben...

But if somebody proposed that Toner should be a continuing thing... Well, with a sidelong look at the propagators of Toner

One, I'd go for a "yes" vote and trust they won't hit me.

RECENTLY I started a new, part-time job through a temp agency, AppleOne. I had included in my job outline that I had no sales experience and didn't feel I'd be good at that kind of work, but my rep at AppleOne suggested I try this one even though the job title there was Catalog Sales Associate. "It isn't really sales," she assured me. "You take phone orders, and sometimes there are specials you tell the customers about. For each one they take, you get an extra dollar added to your paycheck. In any case, you get a week's paid training, eight to five for five days."

So I applied. Here's what I wrote about it after the first day:

My first day at the training classes at Williams-Sonoma was an eye-opener for sure... Have you ever called in an order to an upscale mail-order outfit? I'm going to be one of those guys and gals. Dedicated to politeness and graciousness and service to the customer (Who Is Always Right). I have to tell you that upon first reading of the booklet on the Ethics of being a Williams-Sonoma associate (employees are "associates") I became considerably depressed.

And of course the first thing we all did was stand up and introduce ourselves to the rest of the class, and the next was to play a little tie-breaker game of Bingo in which we milled about the room and tried to find someone else who fit a

description in one of the boxes on a sheet of paper, like "Drives a red car" or "Has blue eyes" or "Knows where the headquarters of Williams-Sonoma is"... And of course the first one who got a line across or down or diagonally won and the game was over. Fortunately someone was a real-go-getter and got their line fast before I even had three random ones. The winner won a jar of the company's gourmet pasta sauce... Oh, and much applause from the rest of us (about 40 in our class alone; there were two other classrooms in session as well).

In my introduction, I told them I'd come to Las Vegas to write about video games and electronic entertainment, but that the magazine I'd come to work for had folded. I didn't attempt to explain about *Escapade*.) So at lunch this young guy comes up to me and asks me what's the latest word on *Street Fighter*. Gah! Fortunately his eyes glazed over when I told him I'd never gotten into it and had no idea, and he drifted off to talk to somebody else.

The company's computer system is so dedicated that while it's based on IBM PCs, the keyboards are a bit rearranged just to serve the system. They also have a dedicated phone system with buttons for contacting one's supervisor or Customer Service or the "Help" office (used to be called "Mission Control" but somebody decided it was too "Star Trek"...), and it even has a learning mode -- push a button and a voice walks you through about 20

minutes' worth of how to use the buttons on the phone... Oh, yeah.

Oh, and they lost about 250 computers due to the blackout last week. [Yeah, this was that week!]

Seems this is a new office for the company, which has been around since the mid-50s in San Francisco. Today (Monday, Aug. 19th), is in fact, the first day that any orders were being taken from these offices, located in Summerlin. (This was also my first visit to that community since we moved here.) The company has five divisions (they're called "concepts" -- oh, my!) -- Pottery Barn is one of them -- the only one I think I've heard of before -- and of course Williams-Sonoma, which sells all kinds of stuff for gourmet cooks (and Those Who Would Be), and there's Hold Everything, which is lots of things like closet organizers and carry-alls of all sorts. And there's Chambers, which is stuff for the bathroom and the bedroom, or vice versa. Probably furnishes that new TV series. I'm not sure I remember the last one exactly, but it's something like Garden Delight, which is everything for the home gardener. [Gardener's Eden is the name.] By this time tomorrow, I'll probably know more than I ever wanted to about them all. Lord help me, I wish I were into any of this stuff. It would help a lot.

Because I came in through the temp agency, AppleOne, my status with them is really as a "seasonal" part-timer, not even a regular. I still have no idea

just how much they're going to be using me in the near future, though I suspect they may be wanting me nearly full time when the holiday season gets under way. They do have working hours every day of the week, and are asking for people interested in working on Labor Day, normally a holiday even for them, to sign up. Those who do will get time-and-a-half... Know how long it's been since I worked at a job where one gets overtime? I might not qualify, though, as a "seasonal" temp. I may inquire tomorrow. [They actually closed for Labor Day.]

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As it turns out, after the first working week, in which I got about 19 hours there, I had 34 hours this week, and am scheduled for 31 next week. These are scattered over 7 days... This week, I worked 12-7 p.m. each weekday plus 9-5:30 today. Next week I work Monday-Wednesday, 12-5:30, then Saturday and Sunday 9-5:30 (work weeks begin on Mondays). The pay isn't high, but it's middling good for Las Vegas clerical work, and last week I got a bonus \$9 for what they call upsales...I expect only a little more from this week. In the training, they gave all kinds of sales pep talk stuff, but I just do what comes natural when it comes to telling customers about things that are available, and many are predisposed to add something to their orders. It may in fact be selling, but it doesn't feel like it, and I'm cool with that.

Does it sound like I'm enjoying myself? Actually, yes. There's a strange combination of pressure and relaxation, regimentation and freedom, and other dichotomies about the place. It's casually businesslike (no jeans, shorts, decorated tee-shirts, but ties aren't required). It's clean, the people are friendly and while there are heirarchies, nobody really seems to make much of it. The lunchroom only offers dry creamers for coffee, but the coffee is free, and there are vending machines—though the prices aren't especially low. Small bags of chips are 50¢, a Hostess pie 85¢, Reese's Peanut Butter Cups 65¢. There is a specialty coffee machine with coffee 25¢ for a small cup or 50¢ for a larger one. Snapple drinks are \$1.00 —etc.

The important thing is, though, that I find I enjoy talking to most of the people who call. So far I haven't had any real bitches or grouches, though I hear tales from others who have. I do get kinda numb toward the end of a day, and miss a number or two, though so far I've caught these in time to just say, "Just a moment, please," or "What was that again?" and fix it. But it's actually a drag waiting between calls.

We'll see how it starts to go come holiday time in earnest.

There's more I could write about, but it's 7:40 Saturday evening and I've got 20 minutes to run this off and get over to the Vegrants meeting... Take care all.