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THE NASFIC PROBLEM

As any of you who received the Torcon II Progress Report #3 are aware, there is an interesting situation now with regard to the NASFIC, or North American Science Fiction Convention. Since this writer first proposed the NASFIC in 1964, in a motion at Pacificon II, and opposed it when it was finally adopted, I feel in a particular position to comment and make some suggestions on it.

The idea of a North American Science Fiction Convention, which would essentially be the Worldcon, was born out of selfish motives when it became apparent that I would not be able to travel to London in 1965, and it was seen as such and rejected. My intense feeling that I had to get to every worldcon made me want to keep it within some sort of range.

However, as I grew up and time went on, I realized that this was a ridiculous position--that what I wanted was a Worldcon, not a NASFIC, and that any attempt to corner the market--particularly since we almost have a monopoly now--was selfish and ridiculous, not to mention patently unfair to a large number of deserving and interested fans in many other countries. While I outgrew this attitude, it is plain that a large amount of fandom has not, for the NASFIC got written into the rules in 1971 at Noreascon, and I have certainly encountered this view in my capacity as eastern U.S. representative for Australia in 1975.

The only motive for NASFIC as presently constituted is to keep the actuality, although not the title, of the worldcon in North America. It has no other reason or rationale in the worldcon constitution.

In 1970 the Parliamentarian at Heicon, Phil Rogers, was presented an ammendment to the WSFS, UInc., Constitution to charter the Eurocon, to be a biyearly rotating convention awarded by competitive bid and to travel around the various countries of Europe. Mr. Rogers quite correctly threw the damned thing out, stating that the Constitution stated that the sole purpose for WSFS was to award, provide for the continuity of, and run the World Science Fiction Convention.

In other words, we of WSFS had no business chartering regional conventions, didn't charter any others, and there was no justification, legal or otherwise, to do so with Eurocon. So Rogers threw the Eurocon Ammendment out, then immediately accepted a motion that the stage be offered to Eurocon to hold its bidding, if it wanted, and the Business Meeting passed a resolution unanimously wishing Eurocon well.

The precedent was clear--you can run any regional under any name you would like, but the World Science Fiction Society, Unincorporated, has no business being involved in it.

Unfortunately, while the Constitution says that Roberts Rules of Order (Revised) shall be used, the fact is that no minutes are taken of business

meetings--indeed, most of the business from prior cons that's taken up at business meetings depends primarily on the memories of the Secret Masters of Fandom who always struggle in at 9 A.M. Monday to make those decisions. The legal point of the Torcon lawyer that because no minutes were tabled from meeting to meeting the items were invalid is a weak one from a strong legal point of view--since a lot of additional legislation is retained--but potentially an important one. I believe that Torcon II will provide those minutes for Washington, and that D.C. will provide them for Melbourne. It's a good step.

Of far more import is the ignoring of precedent, something done with abandon by these business meetings in direct violation of its established rules and procedures. It is a slap in the face to those fifty or so individuals who consider worldcons their personal property, and I am glad of it.

And, of course, Worldcon doesn't have any business chartering or sponsoring a regional convention--which, on a world scale, NASFIC certainly is. If we do charter regionals, then why haven't we chartered Balticon, Marcon, Boskone, Disclave, Westercon, and all those others? And what's the penalty for being unchartered.

No, NASFIC in the worldcon constitution and rules is a fake and a phoney, an attempt to restrict Worldcons to Canadians and Americans and to pass on only an empty title abroad--sort of like when they tried to restrict the Hugos to North American and English conventions. Thank heavens that not all Canadians and Americans felt this way, and thanks to the courageous Canadians for taking this step. I'm glad it was done in North America. Since the bidding takes place before the business meeting, NASFIC is dead at worldcon this year.

But NASFIC, of course, need not die if enough people want it. There is not one thing that stops a group, board, or whatever from organizing a NASFIC exactly as it was originally done, and running it--independently. It could even hold its votes at worldcons--I once ran the Westercon bidding at Baycon, and Eurocon was formed at Heicon, so it's perfectly reasonable. But it doesn't belong in the Worldcon rules, procedures, etc.

This situation also brings up two related points which must now be made: (1) THERE IS NO OBLIGATION ON THE PART OF ANY SUCCESSFUL WORLDCON BIDDER TO HONOR ANY OF THE RULES OF THE PREVIOUS CONVENTIONS. Or, in other words, what are you going to do if they don't? (2) PRACTICAL PROBLEM: WHAT DOES THIS DO TO THE BIDDERS FOR 1976 and 1977, both announced?

Under the currently used rules, 1976 will be a western zone bid, 1977 a midwestern zone bid, instead of midwest (which has 2 announced bidders for 1976) and east (which has 2 announced bidders for 1977).

Now, admittedly this is a sticky point, but many of these groups are serious and have undertaken hotel negotiations, etc., as well as gone to some expense to promote bids suddenly undertaken in the wrong years.

The answer is something we obviously need to do and can do at the Torcon II business meeting: change the rules to read that if a bid is awarded outside of North America it replaces the rotational slot for that year. LA will yell that this is unfair, but you were only going to get a NASFIC anyway and you can still hold it, right?

THE MIRAGE PRESS WHAT?

The Mirage Press, Ltd., is what. Like John Brunner and Gordie Dickson I am now a corporation. It's a rather interesting thing, but does allow me to do some nice things, like deduct all my convention expenses, and also allowed for some legal protection for the Mirage Press, which is growing too fast for me to really comprehend it, let alone keep up with it. We have five titles in the works by June, and a possible 4 or 5 more before the end of the year, and we're still growing.

So are the problems, not the least of which is how on earth I can possibly mail all the stuff in any reasonable amount of time. I'm getting backed up about every two weeks now. Also, of course, there are the authors. We have almost 500 backorders on a chapbook called THE FANTASTIC ART OF CLARK ASHTON SMITH, and we have been ready to print since April of 1972--but Gahan Wilson said he'd do the introduction, and he's had the photos for the book since last April--and still no intro or book. We can't even go without him, since he has all the photos. Then THE REVISED H.P. LOVECRAFT BIBLIOGRAPHY came in from Mark Owings, and it was a mess. I'm still straightening it out--it was on unnumbered legal pad sheets in longhand, and had lots of blanks, mysterious strikeouts, memos to Owings from Owings, etc. Gads. We won't even mention the fact that Harlan Ellison put a self-imposed deadline of December 1, 1969, on THE HARLAN ELLISON HORNBOOK.... And, of course, the letters roll in demanding to know why such and so isn't out. August Derleth, at least, did this full time. It has its rewards but sometimes I yearn for a nice little mimeographed booklet business....

This commercial has more to run, folks.

Now in stock are A GUIDE TO MIDDLE-EARTH (6000 sold!), THE CONAN GRIMOIRE, H.G. WELLS: CRITIC OF PROGRESS, by Jack Williamson, ASIMOV ANALYZED, by Neil Goble, PHANTOMS AND FANCIES, by L. Sprague deCamp, and PLANETS AND DIMENSIONS--Collected Essays of Clark Ashton Smith, in cloth and paper. In the works are REVISED HPL BIBLIO and FANTASTIC ART OF CAS (see above) and THE ROOTS OF HORROR IN THE FICTION OF H.P. LOVECRAFT in cloth and paper sometime around June.

We're also now working on AN ATLAS OF FANTASY, by the way--a huge 8 1/2 X 11 volume of fantasy maps and an anthology of maps like you wouldn't believe.

By the way--I've been asked why I brought out ASIMOV ANALYZED. The answer is that the libraries love it, and that's where the money is. It's amazing how fans seem to think that they are the primary customers for specialty publishers, but the truth is that fans would be a sure way to bankruptcy. Most fans are simply too cheap to pay the money to buy good quality books, and fandom accounts for about 15% of our sales--certainly enough to pay for the cons, but little else. Another 40% goes to book dealers and book services (jobbers, for example) while the remaining 45% goes to the only folks with the money and the interest in hardcovers these days--the public and university libraries of the world.

It's amazingly easy to sell books, by the way. We promoted GUIDE with only \$180 in advertising and it's still going strong, and items like the GRIMOIRE are steady sellers, often to people and places you wouldn't believe. My customers in Wanganarui, New Zealand, know, though.

Anybody seen our ad in MYTHPRINT? I'm getting some nice response from it. Only trouble is, I didn't put an ad in MYTHPRINT....

IRVIN BINKIN MEETS H.P. LOVECRAFT

It was a day like all days, filled with events that alter and illuminate our times, and I was relaxing with an afternoon cup of coffee, when the phone rang. The guy on the other end of the phone sounded like a stereotyped Jewish clothes merchant from Brooklyn who was partly deaf.

"Jack Chalker?" he shouted, pronouncing it "Chaukah".

I admitted that I was.

"You write that bibliography of H.P. Lovecraft?"

I admitted that I had indeed done so.

"Well, I got everything in it plus 50%."

At that point I spilled the coffee.

The man on the phone was Irvin Binkin, a legend in his own time, who was not quite a stereotyped Jewish clothes merchant from Brooklyn who was partly deaf.

He was a stereotyped Jewish book dealer from Brooklyn who was partly deaf.

Quickly I followed up the rather astounding statement he'd just made, and discovered that it was true. This fellow had the largest collection of H.P. Lovecraft and Lovecraftiana in the entire world.

Irvin Binkin is a legend in his own time. For over 40 years he's run Irvin Binkin Books just off Red Hook in Brooklyn, always over the counter, never by mail. But if there were a Gutenberg Bible around in somebody's trash dump, Binkin would be carting his own trash down to the dump that day and spot it. He has the incredible knack to always be where the fabulous buys are--and his off-the-street clientele for a dingy little bookstore in a rotten ghetto neighborhood is composed not only of the usual drifters but some of the most astute book collectors, scholars, and social types in New York and vicinity. He is known to the book buyer for Parke-Bernet/Southby's, and many others--indeed, he has dinner with them in a little Arabian restaurant every Friday. He is, I would judge, in his mid-70s, divorced, living with an astounding collection of stray cats and dogs both at home and in his store.

One day he happened to note an auction sale of miscellaneous stuff, including books, and so he wandered down. There, sitting in this old Brooklyn house, were hundreds of cartons of No-Cal soft drink--although the cans had been replaced with books and papers. He bid \$269.00 for the lot after glancing through it. The lawyer handling the auction for the estate had listed the bulk of the collection as being on "Love and Lovecraft", not exactly in Binkin's line, but after a few minutes of looking through the stuff Binkin discovered that it wasn't sex stuff but a collection based on somebody named Lovecraft--and he knew that anyone worth collecting this much stuff about must be somebody important, even if he personally hadn't heard of him.

The lawyer wasn't anxious to sell after seeing such an eager client, but he

sold most of the collection. There were a few boxes of photos and letters which the lawyer wouldn't release, however, figuring that they were personal effects of the deceased and should be held, at least until an heir could be located. The fellow who'd died was like the old fabled hermits you hear about--living in squalor under tons of rotting newspaper, only to find thousand dollar bills between each sheet after he died. Only this fellow had stacks of No-Cal boxes, and it wasn't money, but Lovecraftiana. I have seen this enormous set of boxes and can only conclude that, if the boxes were full when he started, he must have died of malnutrition.

The man's name was Phillip Grill, known to fandom as Jack Grill, and he was by far the world's greatest collector of H.P. Lovecraft. His collection is far larger than Derleth's, and, indeed, is larger than Derleth's and Brown University's put together. It was to Grill that Derleth came for letters, for the old glassine photographs and negatives of the baby HPL for MARGINALIA and the like. If my bibliography listed 3 copies of a book hand bound in sharkskin by R.H. Barlow, two out of the three were there. There were 4 copies of THE OUTSIDER AND OTHERS, 3 of them in excellent shape with jackets, the other near-mint but without.

As Binkin poured over the contents of each box, he suddenly came across a photo of Lovecraft--and recognized him! When living in Brooklyn during his marriage, Lovecraft had often dropped by Binkin's shop. Binkin remembered him clearly--even what he bought, although Binkin keeps no real records and the visits were 40 years gone--"because of the odd name," he says, "and that jaw--longest jaw I ever saw, Chalker, honest to god."

As Binkin unloaded, he started to read some of the things in the collection--including Grill's own correspondence with other Lovecraftians. He was astounded. He knew he had an incredibly important collection. He went back to the lawyer, and, after upping the price a bit, got the other photos and the letters the lawyer had filed--they weren't Grill's, they were Lovecraft's!

Soon Binkin was reading the whole collection, calling up and trying to reach Lovecraft fans as he came across their names or publications, which is how he reached me. Also, Binkin became fascinated with Lovecraft. He didn't care for the stories all that much, but, as Derleth found to his profit, Lovecraft was a tremendously fascinating man in and of himself.

Binkin became, in one reading, one of the world's greatest authorities on H.P. Lovecraft.

Binkin offered me the job of cataloging the collection, something which geography and job prohibited, but I immediately thought of my old partner, Mark Owings, now working in New York. The next weekend, Mark and I went up to Binkin's to see what the fabulous collection really looked like.

It was unbelievable. First, Binkin's shop is in the middle of the dingiest, slummiest section of Brooklyn, on a tiny little side street which, by conspiracy or accident, you just can't get to--all the streets run the wrong way. Once you thread the maze, you find yourself outside a 4-story shop with huge iron grates on the outside, and, upon entering after telling Binkin who you are (he is perpetually closed, it seems, except to his friends--a minor mystery) he swings open the gate and four dogs start a racket. Binkin picks up strays--he once was written up for having 44 of them once--and those 4 are the ones he kept.

The building's other stories contain large amounts of old books, magazines, and the like, in no order, rhyme or reason, as well as a separate batch of stray cats.

Walking back, we were introduced first to a huge quantity of No-Cal boxes containing the bulk of the collection, and, in a hidden dumbwaiter, a huge number of pages of Lovecraft's letters and some manuscripts--including the original handwritten manuscript for "The Cats of Ulthar"! Reaching into the boxes was like going into a time machine--copies of HOME BREW, a 1918-1919 pulp, so crisp and new--and white--that they looked as if they'd just been picked off the newsstand. It is doubtful whether more than six or seven HOME BREWS survive in any condition--here was the set, mint. Right at the beginning it revised a bibliography entry--"Herbert West--Reanimator" was not Lovecraft's title for the HOME BREW series, but ran as "Gruesome Stories I," "Gruesome Stories II," etc.

If my bibliography said that there were only two copies of something, at least one was in there. Fanzines--almost a complete file of Lovecraft's THE CONSERVATIVE, plus many other fabled fanzines of the teens and twenties. From 1912 was Lovecraft's earliest fanzine, THE RHODE ISLAND JOURNAL OF ASTRONOMY, a little hektographed quarter-sized zine which must, surely, be the only such left in the world. All but one of the books were there, some in duplicates, triplicates, add even 5 OUTSIDERS. Only one book was curiously missing, something which I am certain is the fault of the lawyer not finding all the stuff rather than Grill not having it--the 1936 Visionary Press SHADOW OVER INNSMOUTH wasn't there. Binkin will pay an enormous price if you have one to get rid of, by the way.

Binkin then took Mark and me out to dinner--"It's on H.P. Lovecraft," he said, and then we got to talking about cataloging and publication. A deal was struck in which Mark would catalog and I would publish the catalog under the Mirage Press imprint.

Over the months, and particularly through the summer and into the fall, Mark and Binkin cataloged the collection. During that time they also received a large number of visitors from colleges and universities, a lot of fans and dealers, and even L. Sprague deCamp, who wanted to go over the collection for the biography of HPL he's writing for Doubleday. Binkin gave him access--for a price. The catalog will have an introduction by L. Sprague deCamp.

Binkin has a great deal of admiration for Mark Owings, the only man he ever met who was more fanatical about books than he was. At one point he just about offered Mark a share in the business, but Mark turned it down. On the other hand, Mark prowled through the store and through the collection. He's so single-minded on some things that Binkin still likes to relate the almost 100° day when Mark showed up for some cataloging and went down into the cellar, which must have been about 120° and started working for hours. Mark also went with Binkin to meetings and dinners with NYC bookmen, and made a lot of acquaintances and contacts.

But there's so much fuss been made by so many people over the collection, and Binkin has achieved such overwhelming noteriety that, in the past year, he has started adding to the collection himself and building it up. The result is that, at a dinner meeting with me a few weeks ago, he told me that the catalog will be just a catalog of the world's largest collection of Lovecraft--he's decided that owning the world's largest collection of Lovecraft is better than collecting the huge sums he could sell it for (he's already turned down \$30,000).

So I have seen and Mark has cataloged the largest collection of Lovecraftiana ever. It's still there and in tact, and it might not be sold until Binkin himself is dead. One wonders what provisions are there if he did die--his ambition is to eventually see it in tact in some university library under the combined Grill and Binkin names. The catalog will be out in a few months, and it will contain a lot of material--RHODE ISLAND JOURNAL OF ASTRONOMY, possibly a previously unknown Lovecraft article, photos of HOME BREWS and the like. But the Irvin Binkin Collection is still where it was, and is not for sale.

But Binkin now basks in the notoreity he's never before had, and will have the only thing that he's wanted to have--a certain amount of immortality in the catalog. Now he'll have something to show the Parke-Bernet man when they go to dinner....

I'D LIKE TO BE A NONCONFORMIST BUT

I CAN'T AFFORD THE UNIFORM...

I have been under attack somewhat of late from a number of sources who complain about the way I live and the way I dress. The way I live can't be helped, but my appearance is something that might be worth a little discourse.

Women spend millions of dollars a year on what I like to call the "fashion conspiracy". Mostly they think they are trying to please the men, but really they primarily dress to please each other--rather, to create envy. Most men, I think, don't consider the clothes first when looking at a woman, although they sometimes consider the lack of them.

The fashion conspiracy is a simple and direct one--an age-old method of making perfectly serviceable clothing and other outerwear obsolete and unwearable by changing the fashion trends of the day. Lately this has been extended more and more to men as well--the lapels on the sports coats, the patches, the ties--type and width--the colors, the shirt patterns, etc. The bell-bottom look is one good example.

Now, of course, just as some girls look great in miniskirts and others should never think of wearing them, so, too, some men look great in the newer fashions and others look plain silly. But a couple of facts stand out: (1) peer group pressure insists that one should always be in fashion, and (2) all peer groups believe that they are nonconformists and bucking the trend.

Tdday's youth--or any day's youth--are a good example. By their standards I look positively "straight" and if I walked into a commune of some kind I would be an instant weirdo in their nonconformist culture--because I would be the only one there who didn't dress, talk, and act like they do.

Somehow, my English-language definition of nonconformity has failed me.

A few girls I know have been pressuring me to get more into fashion and dress more along with everyone else. Unfortunately, if I do that I not only get into the vicious cycle of being forced to discard decent clothes every year or two but I also become a general part of the herd. I wear something that may be uncomfortable, expensive, and look ridiculous--to please who?

So I continue to dress to please myself, in whatever's comfortable and convenient, and I keep getting weird looks from everyone because I'm not in fashion with anyone.

If one chooses to be dictated to only by his own conscience, and gets along rather well, he's "straight?" I once had a friend who didn't like his hair long--too much bother. But when he went back to grad school at the University of Colorado he found that he was an outcast, that nobody would talk to him or give him the time of day. He grew his hair as long as he could, and dressed a little scragglier, so that he looked like anybody else on campus--and suddenly he was rather popular.

There's got to be a lesson there somewhere.

SOME CONVENTION NOTES

Went to something called Infinitycon a few weeks ago in New York, which was the first convention run by a small group of young fans (oldest: 21) none of whom had ever put on a convention before.

I'll admit I was pessimistic about the whole thing--inexperience plus an overwhelming comic book orientation to a lot of New York's stuff--and most of it turned out just about the way I expected.

It felt like a large con being put on by people who'd never run one before.

I'm told that about 1500 people attended, but it was hard to tell because of the spreading out of the activities over so large an area, the enormous amount of parallel programming, and set-ups like having a floor of small suites be the huckster room--with about a dozen tables jammed into each room which would reasonably hold about 5 tables. On the other hand I understand that much of the program was good, the parties were pretty good, the conversation excellent, and I enjoyed myself despite the failures of the con structure itself.

I hear that they lost about \$3000. Too bad--they have promise. There was certainly a good deal of creativity inside the superimposed imitation worldcon they put on, and I'd like to see them grow. Certainly as dull and uninspired as the Lunacons have become it would be a welcome change in New York to wed creativity and experience.

Well, I'll be seeing you at a number of cons this year, and will try and give my impression of some of them here as they occur. I expect to be making Balticon, Boskone, Marcon, Lunacon, Disclave, Midwestcon, Westercon, Torcon II, Octocon, and Phillycon, at least, and perhaps a few more. Mayhaps most of us will meet there.

I think I'm going to run Mirage Press catalogs through this mailing--they won't be the best quality, since the only ones left after a mass mailing are the ones that have minor defects, but it'll give you a chance to see what we're doing.

In the meantime, my thanks and best to ye all until next time,

2/4/73

JACK CHALKER