

Implosion

Implosion #22 is the local monthly fanzine of Arnie Katz (330 S. Decatur, Suite 152, Las Vegas, NV 89107). It is produced for the 22nd Distribution of Apa V, the Las Vegas apa, which has as this month's theme "Heroes and Villains" Today is Aug. 5, 1995.

Implosion: The Fanzine that proves anyone can publish a fanzine.
Member, fwa.

A Vegas Garden of Fuggheads by Arnie Katz

The richness and variety of Las Vegas Fandom startles many the first time they encounter the Fandom of Good Cheer. A big city is expected to boast a few fans, but Vegas has sprouted one of the country's largest urban fandoms in the last four years.

When I tell people that Las Vegrants, the invitational, informal fanzine fan club hereabouts, has about two-dozen members, people ask how many of them are imaginary -- and there are many local fans who are totally outside the Vegrants orbit. The sight of 50 or more at a Social has rendered more than one visitor temporarily speechless.

Besides fanzine fans, Vegas has serious students of science fiction, sf gamers, media fans, filkers and just about every genus of the fan specials that breathes air. (We are developing an anaerobic fan out at Area 51. They'd be ideal for smoke-filled SMOF sessions.)

One type of fan is in noticeably short supply: fuggheads. We just haven't produced any who've carried the banner of stubborn stupidity across the stage of international fanzine fandom.

Before going further, I think it's important to differentiate between the unregenerate, dyed-in-the-wool fugghead and the person who says or does occasional fuggheaded things. We all make mistakes, after all, and we should be charitable when it's someone else's turn to step over the line into the land of fuggheadedness. We're talking permanent residents in this article, not daytrippers.

Also out of bounds this time are the merely bumptious and improperly socialized. Bad manners and body odor are common enough in fandom that it's impossible to chronicle overachievers in those areas in any feasible number of pages.

I thought David Whitman had promise as Las Vegas Fandom's first fugghead of stature. Alas, as I explained in "The Call," in Rant, he has bolted back under the rock from which he sprang.

I still believe David's "The Proposal" will, when published, enshrine him among the wrongheaded immortals. Alas, reading "The Proposal" will be like viewing a supernova hundreds of lightyears away. By the time you see the blinding glare, he'll already be long gone. Fandom-at-large will never actually experience Whitmania.

Vegas Fandom's fuggheads have all been local villains, though a few have reached out and inflicted themselves on one or more non-Vegas fans when the opportunity arose. While none of the national known fans, including me, is free of the taint of occasional stupidity, none of the folks known outside Glitter City has made a fan career of it. One or more of them may develop sporadic fuggheadedness into a full-blown case of the disease, but that hasn't happened yet.

We've had our local fools, though. We've got a few modern-day Ackermans who'd like to project a nicey-nice image, and it seems like a good time to shoot that illusion to pieces. Like many families, we've kept our more frightening relations stashed away in the attic during your visits. They've escaped into public a few times, with uniformly disastrous results, but few out-of-towners experienced the full effect of our local fuggheads.

In truth, our local fuggheads were like our local fandom itself. If the newly minted Vegas fans were still too inexperienced in the ways of fandom to cope with true villains, then the city's

fuggheads were equally incapable of inflicted much real damage.

They're like first-level monsters in fantasy RPG campaign. They strut around, look menacing and expire readily in the party's first assault.

Ben Brown, her husband Alan and their two children moved to Las Vegas from the Deep South, where they were evidently minor wheels in Star Trek convention fandom in that region.

Her boundless power hunger showed right from the start. In a group noted for its absence of fan politics, she tried to create factions by setting people against each other. Joyce and I weren't directly involved, because we always gave Beth a wide berth, but I lost count of the overwrought phone calls her handiwork inspired.

The calls all followed the same pattern. The person would wail about what some close friend of theirs was doing to them. I'd ask how they came by all this information. The answer was invariable, "I just got off the phone with Beth" or the equivalent.

Beth was a "total immersion" roleplaying. She believed she was a dragon named Eldred. I suppose she also participated in various RPGs, but this round-the-clock posturing was a way of life rather than a pastime.

After attending a single SNAFFU meeting, she started a club called Fairytales Are Us which met at the same time. When the club held a party at Westercolt 45, she not only reneged on her promise to help with the event (like all the other Vegas fans at the con, she threw a competing party! These may seem like small things, but they are indicative of the attitude Beth took toward the rest of us.

Her undoing came after Silvercon 2. Beth bullied her way onto the Silvercon 2 committee, forced a minor writer friend of hers on the committee as a special honored guest, and then did almost nothing for the con before, during or after. Well, she did throw a tantrum on Friday, prior to the official start of the convention, but the histrionics happened before too many people arrived.

Joyce and I weren't officially part of the

Silvercon 2 committee, because we resigned rather than put up with her rumor campaign. It had little to do with our actual contribution of work, but she stopped talking about us once we made it obvious to her that we had no aspiration to Run Things.

So I wasn't at the meeting when Vegas Fandom abruptly decided it had had enough of Beth Brown. Beth didn't attend the meeting, either, but she had her husband Alan, whom Ken dubbed "the flying monkey boy," deliver a sealed envelopes to each committee member.

It was a jubilant session up to that point. Silvercon 2 had drawn raves from attendees like Robert Lichtman and Bill Rotsler, and it hadn't gone into the red like the first try.

Beth's letter, which she signed "Eldred," told off the con committee in the strongest terms. Everything was wrong, and they were all awful people. She mentioned, in her fuzzy-minded screed, that she felt compelled to share this wisdom with everyone she knew in fandom.

Carol Kern, by comparison, was simply a very mundane person bewildered by every contact with any aspect of fandom -- and hostile to any such experience. She briefly took over SNAFFU's newsletter and ran several issues in which she aired her disgruntlement about everything within reach. When her bid to become president failed, she went back to her tent to sulk. Apart from an appearance at the last Halloween party, she has not been seen again.

So here we sit, temporarily bereft of inflammatory local fuggheads.

Yet we do not despair, for we know that Fandom Will Provide.

My favorite on-line activity of late is a multi-way electronic gabfest called Timebinders. Organized and administered by Dick Smith, this group discusses fanhistorical topics until they are properly and fully beaten into the ground.

Participation is voluminous and growing. Sometimes the flood of daily e-mail is overwhelming. A few members have opted out of the loop, because they didn't have time to go through it all. I'm enjoying the discussions and getting to know fans like Garth Spencer.

When fans gather, projects bloom.

Timebinders is no exception. Besides considerable conversation about John Hartz's Fancyclopedia III, Moshe Feder has gotten a lot of support for a Who's Who of Fandom. (That's what prompted republication of Laney's "I Am A Great Big Man" in Wild Heirs #8.5.) A Fandom website and electronic publication of fanhistorically significant books are other possibilities.

Efforts to fix the scope of various projects raises anew the question: What is a Fan? Should a Who's Who profile 200 fans -- or 20,000?

This essay is just the usual half-assed opinion, but this is my fanzine. Well, 1/24 of this is my fanzine. That means nothing short of a mutiny by the other 23 co-editors can stop my philosophizing. Our excursion into hairsplitting starts with questions. A lot of question -- and I'm not sure I can provide satisfactory answers to all of them. Let's watch...

What is a fan, anyway? Are the thousands who annually attend the worldcon fans? How about the tens of thousands who flock to Creation Cons? Is everyone who buys SF or fantasy paperbacks a fan? How about if they alphabetize those paperbacks on a shelf? Are Deep Space Nine viewers fans? Does their status change if they video tape the episodes?

English is a dynamic language, despite the efforts of grammarians and Jack Speer. Words mean whatever literate people agree they mean at the instant the question is asked. When people decide that "cool" means "alluringly desirable" as well as "of lower-than-average temperature," then that's one of the meanings of "cool."

Sometimes the process seems like a hideous debasement of the language. That's change for you; it continues despite anyone's opinion. So to define "fan," and by expansion "fandom," we must jettison arguments which begin, "Well, we used to take it to mean..." That's interesting historical information, but it doesn't bring us one step closer to what "fan" means right now.

Language reflects a society's concerns. Eskimos have many words for specific states of snow, and American English has sixteen hundred ways to say "breast."

Fandom has its own lingo. Lack of a

dictionary and creeping Mundania have cut back its use, but fanspeak is handy shorthand for conversation about fannish subjects.

Fanspeak is a young language, and not yet a highly developed one. There are some luminously expressive words -- "gafia," "fugghead," and "egoboo" -- but also a lot of weak spots. Among fanspeak's limitations is that it lacks specialized terms to denote each of the possible relationships between an individual and the group known as fandom.

This article won't fill those blank dictionary pages. Attempts to consciously invent words, such as occurred around the time of Eney's Fancyclopedia II, often yield words like "Voldesfan," which turn out not to fill any real need and quickly migrate to Andy Hooper's trivia quizzes.

Poverty of expression forces one word, "fan" to cover acres of territory. It is short, easy to say and pleases the ear. "Fan" covers too much territory, it often seems, to allow rational discussion.

See if this scenario doesn't sound familiar. A well-meaning Fan A writes a little article about the definition of "fan." Immediately, everyone who doesn't fit that definition assumes that Fan A wants to drive them out of the tribe. "He says we're not fans, and we know we are!" they wail just before they turn nasty and attack Fan A like a pack of mad dogs. (If they had a sense of fanhistory, they would knee Fan A in the groin, but they don't, so they settle for round-the-clock harassment and cheapshot insults.

Fan A's friends, mostly people who liked his definition or at least understand his altruistic intent, rush to the front lines. They're all writers and publishers, of course, so they can churn out quite a lot of material when motivated.

All Fandom is Plunged into War. This ends the debate, since no one has time to ponder fan philosophical questions, but it doesn't settle the issue.

This article won't settle anything, either. I'm hoping that it can forward Fanzine fandom's efforts to redefine itself for the next millennium.

The problem began the day someone called participants in fandom "fans." It probably seemed logical, but it caused confusion that persists today. There's a grand canyon of semantic confusion between what society as a whole means by "fan" and what the same word

means to people within the subculture.

Is a "fan" anyone who evinces an interest in a topic? "Baseball fan" carries no implication that every roofer is connected to a subculture. Some baseball fans belong to clubs, publish newsletters and so forth, but most are fans by virtue of an expressed interest in the subject -- and nothing more.

That's the way North Americans use "fan." Someone will describe themselves as "a fan of science fiction" and mean nothing more than that they watch some on TV or read an occasional book. The Mundane definition of "fan," therefore, embraces everyone from Greg Benford to the most benighted trekkie.

Now Funk & Wagnalls can go to press with the latest edition without fear. Unfortunately, that doesn't settle the meaning of the term in fandom. Granting that "fan," means "an enthusiast," and nothing more. in Mundania, what does it mean to us?

To discover the meaning of "fan" within fandom demands study of the subculture. What is fandom? Is it merely the liking of science fiction in various media -- or is it something more?

Some may cheerfully accept the Mundane definition of "fan." If that is the definition of "fan," then "fandom" is little different from a bunch of fans who buy courtside season tickets for the Knicks. Fandom, in this view, is an audience united by a common interest, period.

People have every right to use that definition of "fandom." It probably won't please fans who've invested decades -- all right, Grandfather Tucker, "centuries" -- in this hobby. Let's try to create a definition more to our liking -- and more descriptive of reality.

Numerous fanspeak words reflect the concept that fandom is an entity distinct from

the society as a whole. The best example is "gafia," the act of withdrawing from fandom and concentrating on other, non-fannish pursuits. Its very existence implies that there is a separation between someone who is a "fan" in the Mundane sense and one who carries the appellation inside fandom.

The subcultural context is what says "fandom" to me. When someone gafiates, that's the "all" they're "getting away from." If fandomites meant "anyone who likes some aspect of science fiction or fantasy" when they say "fan," there'd be nothing to get away from.

Fandom is a nation without geography, like the Jews before the creation of Israel. Fandom has a language, literature, history, personalities and mores that create a tribal bond among its citizens and distinguish them from the rest of the population.

Without this context, nothing much separates a college fraternity mixer from a party in the Corflu Nashville consuite. I am not saying that a fannish beer bash is superior to a fraternity beer bust (though the former is more to my taste), but one occurs within a context that the other lacks.. (The practical difference is that someone will Write It Down for Wild Heirs.)

If context is what identifies fandom, it follows that a "fan" as someone who is knowledgeable about, and connected to, that context (This definition says nothing about how well the fan knows or understands the context; in this era of Special Fandoms, many are only aware of the facet of the context that applies to their special interest..) An active fan, whether filker, fanzine fan or sword-toting cretin, has that relationship to the subculture; people who buy a ticket to the worldcon as they might for the Auto Show are *Not*.