



The Twenty Seventh issue of a sortof letter substitute, kinda thing, maybe weekly, maybe not, from:

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Available only via the net at the moment. Welcome to the new readers and see the colophon for the usual disclaimer. I wish all my readers a great year thanks for all your letters and comments, they have been very welcome. '98 here we come! Thanks also to Mark McCann for computer usage and computer advice. This issue dated, already, 5/1/98

"It's Fandom, Jim"

"I saw the Götterdämmerung home page listed on RASFF last night," Victor Gonzalez said.

"Excellent," I replied, "there's no such thing as bad publicity." Later that night, over drinks, I asked Victor exactly what RASFF was.

I knew of the rec.arts.sf.fandom newsgroup and had even subscribed to it in Toronto. After an initial fascination however it was never something that I religiously read or followed. True, there were lots of people who I knew from the UK posting to the group, and it would have been an easy way to keep in contact. There were even things they were saying that was interesting enough for me to consider replying. I never did, of course.

John Dallman in Attitude tried to explain how the discussion in a news group goes. One person posts a message (I deign to call them 'articles') and people then reply, with their answers being grouped into threads. This way the discussion remains on the topic concerned and interested parties can follow it without interrupting other messages posted on the main news group. In his article John explained that this was an excellent way of representing real conversations and was in ways better than real life conversations.

Not only did this strike me as quite absurd but also really scary. The levels and sub levels that are involved in threaded discussions like Ulrika's recent Taff trip itinerary thread are far too intricate to resemble conversation or to be even followed as if it was a real conversation. The newsgroup equivalent of 'sorry, I didn't quite catch that turns into a posting that is 20 lines long and is pointless to the on-going 'conversation.' You may be able to get away with this in a real life conversation with the aid of non-verbal communication skills, like nods, shrugs and hand gestures but it is just time consuming, wasteful and really annoying online. For anyone, especially someone involved in such a

wonderful fanzine as Attitude to espouse this nonsense does not bode well for the art of conversation.

The other problem I have with RASFF is that there is just way too much shite. Nobody says anything on the news group, certainly nothing I ever found remotely appealing. Here is Gary Farber as a prime candidate in this completely useless waste of time. Here's a recent example of a Farber post, I think it is the sig file which really has me reaching for the sick bag:

: Yes, I used to go to the Petards Banquets with Milt Stevens, hell'uva fella and ex-hubby.

Would you care to mention your Real Name, or do you prefer to be mysterious? (Though I believe I know who you are, unless Milt has more ex-wives than I'm aware of -- which is conceivable. ;-))

(Later in the same message I just have to edit he adds:)

Um, would it be Sylvia?

You're not reading the newsgroup very carefully, are you? -- Copyright 1997 by Gary Farber; Experienced Web Researcher; Nonfiction (sic) Writer, Fiction and Nonfiction Editor; gfarber@panix.com; B'klyn, NYC

It comes right down to a variation of Sturgeon's law: 90% of all Science Fiction is crap. The variation being of course that that 10% is a generous percentage when it comes to Rec.Arts.SF.Fandom. One recent poster (Nels E Satterlund NelsS@aol.com)

complained that he was being ignored:

Or aren't my posts going any where? Or at least not seen by most. They do show up in Deja news ... after a while. While I lurk often, I seldom post and when I do I don't get any comments, lately. That isn't a Bad thing but I did reply to the Mornington Crescent thread to a comment on Intel (where I work) by Doug Faunt (? I think) and was much more articulate than normal and it's like I was talking to my self (which I don't have to do as I have kids) So any comment?

'Any comment'? The prosecution rests, m'lord.

And now, you:

Steve Jeffrey Peverel@aol.com "Dear Tommy, Thanks for TW 24-6, and happy New Year to you and everyone. Sad Bastard Fandom as autism. I proposed this in Acnestis a couple of months back, as fandom/collecting as a mild form as Asperger's Syndrome. I was under a surfeit of Oliver Sacks (An Anthropologist on Mars) at the time, and there a couple of telling quotes and footnotes in that chapter in Sack's book that related more or less directly to SF and (more so) to a form of what I think as Gamer's Syndrome."

((Well Steve, what can I say? Lots actually. I've heard of this Asperger's syndrome and I agree that all fans, regardless, suffer from it at least a bit. Lesley Reece's dig at me in TW 25: "Bus Schedule Boy" is a case in point. In my defence knowing the times and routes of the two most 'oft used buses in Seattle is not something I'm entirely embarrassed about even though it took me all of ten minutes each; it's useful. However there are some fans of whom the same could not be said, especially media fans who, for example, know all the continuity errors in Babylon 5. Not something I would have thought as immediately relevant in anyone's life, let alone the real world.

Maybe I'm wrong here in thinking that Asperger's syndrome is not as debilitating as I think. I was under the impression that it was simply a nerdy thing, not something that is clinically recognised. This is important because I draw the distinction between people who know a lot about stuff (be it books, music or fanzines) and those who know a lot about stuff (be it books, music or fanzines) and NOTHING ELSE. I think that when your obsession (Hi bug!) becomes your life then that is something different from what I perceive Asperger's to be. Maybe I'm wrong but, if not, then these people are just fucking sad, mad and dangerous to know. Steve agrees:))

"It's not just us - though there are times when SF criticism in apas feels like worrying the last bit of marrow from a well-gnawed bone. Almost everybody has a bit of the collecting and cataloguing bug at some degree (films, music, sport, cars, transport, dolls, fanzines...) Almost everybody has a trainspotter gene at some level, and it's the people who have no interests or enthusiasms at all who strike me as a little bit weird and worrying."

((Steve follows on with more details. See if this description rings true with anyone. Eugene, you out there mate..?))

"Sacks mentions the house of another autistic family, "the huge library of science fiction, the strange cartoons pinned to the bathroom wall", and footnoting the SF goes on: "Many high-functioning autistic people describe a great fondness for, almost an addiction to, alternative worlds, imaginary worlds such as those of C.S. Lewis and Tolkien, or worlds they imagine themselves. Thus both the B.s and their older son have spent years constructing an imaginary world with its own landscapes and geography (endlessly mapped and drawn), its own languages, currencies, laws and customs - a world in which fantasy and rigidity play equal parts. Thus days might be spent computing the grain

production or silver reserves in Leutheria, or designing a new flag, or calculating the complex factors determining the value of a thog.."

[And you thought Thog was a simple no-nonsense fellow, Dave [Langford]. He has complex factors working under that rough exterior.] "I was reminded at this point of the Brontes and their imaginary land, but there's something else here, and it's the last sentence that fixes it. This is gamesmaster's syndrome, a sort of regression into the minutiae of rules and codifications: a sort of frightening precision applied to the imagination and fantasy."

((Now, before anyone starts quoting history at me, I used to be a gamesmaster. In my defence paltry though it is I GMed Paranoia, a SF role playing game (RPG) with the emphasis on humour and killing the participants. Yeah, made for me. Having been involved in that world though, I do know of the people to whom Steve and Sack's are referring and they really scary. There is a couple (God they may breed) in Belfast, whom everyone knows, who are so atypical of this behaviour pattern they could be case studies. Their personal lives and, in her case, fantasy life, is so wrapped up in the RPGs they are involved in that the real world where they live, work and interact with others suffers dramatically. This is not what I consider an obsession, or Asppenger's Syndrome this is clinically dangerous behaviour.))

"Yuk. Beetroot (but Vikki {Lee France} loves it, and mushy peas. I have made a resolution never to eat a vegetable that actually glows). However, she dislikes olives, mushrooms (not a Real Fan, then), courgettes, aubergines and strange non-English (and hence Not Quite Right) vegetables... My only food aversion used to be cooked cheese (and that horrible dessert they used to serve at school as Gypsy Tart. Never seen it before or since). Steve"

John D. Berry jdb@seanet.com "Tommy -- Did I miss something, or did you just jump right into "Harris" without a word of explanation? What the fuck *is* Harris, and why are you (or were you) there? Sounds like a prison, but I gather you've volunteered for some sort of medical study, and that you've done it before. I hope they paid you well. (It's hard to imagine the pay for something like that being significant, though maybe for such an intensive take-over-your-life affair they have to offer a decent chunk of change.) What are they testing on you, anyway? John."

((TW 26 contained the second part of my Harris experiences, the first part was in TW 25. Email if anyone didn't get either part and would like to. Harris is, indeed, a medical research facility, where they have clinical trials of drugs about to be released in a different format or for the first time. Generally these are not the scary trials you hear about in Tomorrow's World or similar science programmes on the Discovery channel. Usually it is where the effects of one well known drug on another, newly released, drug are unknown; e.g. an anti-blood clotting agent and paracetamol. And the pay well for

one week in there it would average out at £550-£600 (which works out at US\$800-850 and Cdn\$1200-1300.) A tidy little sum to someone as broke as me.)

A Happy New Year to everyone. This month will have fanzine reviews, more personal stuff and the first of my contributors will be launching in. I'm looking forward to it already.

This is being distributed to a whole bunch of friends on the net, if you received this and would NOT like to be on the mailing list please accept my apologies for this intrusion and let me know so that you will not be bothered by further ramblings. If you know someone who would like to be on the mailing drop me a line.