



The Twenty Eighth 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. The web site has all the back issues in HTML format and please see the colophon for the usual disclaimer. Thanks to Mark McCann for computer usage, and Eugene Doherty for stuff he doesn't know about yet (but has just found out) This issue dated, already, 12/1/98

News

Well it is time for that Corflu thing again, the FAAn awards. As Corflu is now in the UK we can all chip in our little bits for the British fans, editors and publishers; of course I wouldn't presume to suggest anyone. If you want to vote in this years' awards (to be given out at Corflu UK, Leeds, 14-16 March, 1998 <http://www.imi.gla.ac.uk/corflu/>) then you can access a ballot at Victor Gonzalez's Web site, (<http://www.galaxy-7.net/squib/>). You don't have to be a member of Corflu to vote, just an active fan. Remember, the more people who vote, the more representative the whole thing will be.

This is also true for the next TAFF race. Details of all the candidates, and a voting form can be found at the TAFF web site (<http://crete.dcs.gla.ac.uk/SF-Archives/Taff/taff1998.html>). My personal opinion is that, like the US to UK race, the candidates are all worthy. However, like my opinion on the last race, I do have a preference and think that Maureen Kincaid Speller would make an exceptional candidate, is extremely likely to publish a report and I urge you all to support her by voting and sending a whole bunch of cash.

My web site continues to attract a large number of hits (Ha!) If you look in over the next few weeks though you will see some new animations, and some flash bastard tricks with the 'new kid on the web block' Dynamic HTML which does all sorts of really cool things. I'm not sure how these will work with Tripod (the free web site service that I use) but I'm going to give it a go. Any feedback on the bits and pieces will be more than welcome and do as I do, rip off the code for your own page

On a more personal note I continue in my quest for some kind of employment to tide me over. The last time I was unemployed was nearly eight years ago and practices and morals in the job market have completely changed. Everyone is going through an agency, the employers tend to use recruiting firms a lot more and the basic decencies of replying to people have gone right out the window. A sign of the times I suppose.

The Social Services on the other hand have become a lot more strict with the wads of cash they dole out. I'm a 'Job Seeker,' and have a 'Job Seekers Agreement' (JSA) to look for work. So the last time I was called for an interview with the Department I was amazed that the woman was surprised by my efforts to find work. My JSA states that I agree to apply for one job a week something that I've been exceeding by 1000s of percent each week and which annoyed the woman as she couldn't tick me off for not doing enough. And to think I used to like working for the Civil Service.

But enough of me for this week, here's you

Kate Schaeffer (kate@scn.org) "RASFF isn't to everyone's taste, certainly. I think it enriches the microcosm of fandom rather than impoverishes it, but I'm not interested in dragging anyone into it who finds it dull. There are writers I've encountered there and nowhere else who I find extremely entertaining, like Ray Radlein and Phil Chee, people I've known for years who I can touch base with every once in a while, and a number of current British fanwriters and publishers in whose fanzines I've become interested as a result of reading their stuff online. I loc more fanzines now than I have in years because I'm continually reminded -- when I see their writing online -- that people have sent me the product of their labor, while fanzines by other editors may get put at the bottom of the stack."

Richard Brandt (rsbrandt@cris.com) "Yes, topic drift is certainly a problem in r.a.s.f.f., but there are those of us who view that as part of Usenet's own quaint charm... It certainly helps if, like me, you have a kind of built-in shite-filter; in my case, the judicious use of a scroll-down key, which lets me skim through postings quite rapidly. I generally zip right past *any* quoted material from a previous post...if I need reminding what the current author is replying to, I can always peek back. I can skip right over an entire post if the first glance at it is unrewarding. And I can zap an entire thread if I don't care for it, although I tend to save that for threads cross-posted from another, irrelevant newsgroup. (Actually I found folks perhaps more to my liking on alt.folklore.urban...well-read, educated folks who banter wittily on any number of topics. Just like you'd imagine on-line fandom to be when you eventually found it...)" ((If that is the case why aren't these people in RASFF, where they're supposed to be? See, the whole Usenet thing is a disgrace to proper minded people like me. There is no centralised organisation, no committees and where are all the Focus Groups? Really, it is the Nineties, you know No, you'll need more than a pinch to aid the digestion of that))

"Ah, the gameplayers can be a scary lot indeed. We have our share in El Paso, some of whom were a little disconnected from reality to start with. One woman changed her name to Alex, which she said was her name as a Frenchman in a previous life, and would discuss what prophecies her dreams were trying to give her for our future. A nice enough person, but eventually with a start I would realize we just didn't inhabit the

same universe." ((Yeah, that is quite similar to the couple I referred to in the last issue. Although they didn't even have the 'nice person otherwise' defence, they just weren't even in the same ball park. In fact they were playing Kabaddi))

Ulrika O'Brien (UAOBRIEN@uci.edu) "But since you've decided to talk about The Stuff Of Life Itself, namely Usenet and the stfnal denizens thereof, I feel compelled to stick in my two shekels. You speak of holy RASFF. Oh, my. If I 'deigned' to call -TommyWorld- the Proceedings of the American Psyciatric Association, I don't think I'd be making a much more unfortunate category error than you do, when you 'deign' to call Usenet posts 'articles'. It seems very much as if your objections to them proceed from that mistake, so let me address the root of your discontent. The trouble with calling a post to RASFF (or any other Usenet group) an article, is that saddles that post with intentions, aspirations, and frame of reference that were no part of the context of its making. Surely we must judge a work by what it aspires to be, not by the standards of some wholly other sort of thing?" ((That is one of the problems yes, I do have this penchant for reading things which have a structure and organisation that corresponds with the English Language. Hey, call me picky about this, but it is just the way I'm wired.))

"While you object to the analogy to conversation, I think you must surely admit that the points of analogy between Usenet and conversation are more numerous and more compelling than the points of analogy between Usenet and -The Times-. Like conversational utterances, Usenet posts are **not** self-contained. They depend on the utterances around them to supply meaning and background and context. Deprive them of that context, and they are bound to seem vacuous, meaningless, or insipid, much of the time, as do your rather unfair selection of "edited" (read, decontextualized) post quotes. Do you imagine that one couldn't go through an issue of a fanzine and snip two- or three-sentence fragments out and produce results that are equally vapid? That's what happens when you pull statements out of context and try to make them stand up to scrutiny they were not designed for." ((Whoa there, good citizen. The sample from Gary Farber is taken out of context, I agree, but It was extremely hard to find anything in the week I examined that wasn't a snippet in itself. It was like someone had said something once, and the rest of the messages were just 'I agree,' or, 'I disagree' but usually just 'Oh, that reminds me' of something inane. The quote from that Nels guy well, really, I ask you?))

A certain proportion of inanity is part and parcel of most dialectical exchange -- it's a form of social lubricant, which an article does not need, not being fundamentally a social endeavor. And Usenet threads are, like conversations, and unlike articles, extended in time, and naturally prone to topic drift. An article that wanders around haphazardly like a topical game of Mornington Crescent, without ever setting or accounting for a unifying and underlying theme is a very poor article. Not so Usenet threads. When you comment that the TAFF itinerary thread is too complex to be followed like a conversation, I suspect that this is because you are taking the thread to be a single, co-ordinated, ordered, and essentially simultaneous event, like an article is intended to be, rather than

as a series of exchanges and interjections and apropos-of-nothing asides over time, like a conversation. In other words, the reason you find Usenet non-conversational, is because you're treating it as a non-conversational object to begin with. But whatever. The unstated, but indubitable fact remains that Usenet, even if fully understood for what it is, is not for everyone. If it isn't for you that's all right, too. We get to know each other by other means." ((The problem with the Usenet discussions is not that I think they are conversations, they aren't, but that the layout and organisation that Usenet uses decrees these posts will have a hideously complex representation. If I wanted to find out what was going on in the TAFF itinerary thing, coming new to the thread as it exists, I'd be horrified. Actually, I am horrified. Ted White puts it a lot better than I ever could:))

Ted White (twhite@logotel.com) "I find myself nodding in agreement with virtually everything you said in this issue. I no longer have web-access here at work (someone in the company did something they shouldn't have done and we ALL lost our access rights...) but your description of RASFF rings true to me. Years ago people tried to interest me in fandom-on-line via Genie, and I was sent reams of printouts. It was like a transcription of ALL the conversations at a room party, with nothing edited out for dullness, redundancy, etc. Tedious, with only the occasional worth-while bit (usually by Teresa NH) standing out. I was in Timebinders (before that apparently disappeared), and while some of the topics prodded an interesting exchange, Gary Farber was his usual self there, nit-picking others, rejecting nit-picking of himself, and generally passing judgement on the rest of us from his position high above. (I say this despite a long-standing friendship with Gary; he IS guilty as charged by you....)"

Alison Scott (plokta@fuggles.demon.co.uk) "Well, of course I will lurch in and defend rec.arts.sf.fandom. I doubt I'll be the only one, but of course it's not for everybody. Few pleasures are universally shared. I will even defend John Dallman. I think he's right that there are advantages to the threaded system of articles. There are plenty of disadvantages, too, and I doubt he'd deny that either. It's a different form of communication, and one, moreover, that works when voice simply isn't available. To criticise it for not being more like vocal communication is similar to the person who, on being told all the advantages of ASL as a language, comments that it would be much more fruitful just to talk. Each to his own, of course, but I find a discrepancy between 'There were even things they were saying that was interesting enough for me to consider replying.' and 'Nobody says anything on the news group, certainly nothing I ever found remotely appealing.' And I've certainly had Friday nights in the pub with friends that reminded me of the second of those statements."

((The point is that I think RASFF has the potential to be an excellent forum for fans to communicate. It has the value of immediacy, lack of censorship and the potential to communicate with people on the other side of the planet. There are some really interesting people posting to RASFF my point on being tempted to post but, as Ted said above, there is just way too much dull and insipid material to wade through. The second of my points being that what topics do interest me are not necessarily well written

about. Richard Brandt may have a shite filter, but I'm not willing to let my own filter system accumulate that much mush.))

"On a different track, Asperger's syndrome can certainly be debilitating. Many sufferers are poor learners, disruptive and antisocial, and are often not diagnosed for many years. At least one fan has a son who is diagnosed as having Asperger's syndrome; his condition has had a profound effect on her life. Families of sufferers tend to get extremely riled at the suggestion that it's just like trainspotting." ((Yeah, that was my fault last time. I was under the impression corrected by many, most notably Eugene Doherty that it was a name for what we consider the 'trainspotting phenomenon.' "A mild form of Autism," seems to be the generally held viewpoint, which is clinically recognised as such. It is an interesting area that I hope to return in a few issues time. More feedback on this topic (which was discussed in Sad Bastard Fandom, in issue 26 of TommyWorld) would be extremely welcome.))

Cheryl Morgan (cmorgan@ceres.wallis.com) "Um, did I miss 26 somewhere? Download no worry, though I guess I may notice something if I had to do it without ISDN. Layout: personally I thought the font changes in the letter column were rather messy, especially mixing proportional and non-proportional fonts."

Ian Sorenson (ian@soren.demon.co.uk) "Hi Tomboy, Got the latest TommyWorld and spent the usual inordinate amount of time descrambling it. Hope I'm not in a grandmother and egg yolk extraction situation here but.... a) I don't have Word, and so I have to chuck the UUdecoded text file into a text editor which doesn't retain the formatting, and all the codes show up as garbage. Not a major problem. b) Word is crap programming. All Microsoft programming is, at best, bad. Word is simply diabolically crap. Every time you change something it saves the whole section (usually a paragraph) so you can "undo" it. Of course, it hides all this from you but it's still there in the file. So, you sent out 104k file containing 20k of actual TommyWorld, and 80k of corrections. c) I think the cure for b) is to save the file under a new name and all the saved corrections are left behind. Then send it out all over the world. d) Can I just get a text or RTF version anyway? Keep up the good work, just don't make so many mistakes... Happy Hols etc."

((Yeah, there have been a number of problems with the distribution, layout and formatting. I'm currently tempted to take on board Ansible's distribution ideas a text only issue, with a notice that the full graphic version is available at the web site. For the moment the hideous Word '97 list is no more. After getting Ian's email I checked out exactly what was going on in the system and what Word was doing to get all the nice formatting and WordArt title. It was horrible. So what do y'all think? IAHF: Victor Gonzalez, Julia Daly, Christina Lake, Eugene Doherty, Seamus McKenna, Vicki Rosenzweig. Next week the family and Holidays article, with some reviews the following week and a guest bit at the end of the month. I can hardly wait.))

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.