



The forty-sixth issue of a sortof letter substitute, kinda thing, maybe weekly, maybe not, from:

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Available only via the net. See the colophon for the usual disclaimer. Supporting Toronto in '03 for the 2003 WorldCon (as the new UK Agent, I would need to!), Seattle and then Belfast for the next Corflus, Andy Hooper for Duff and Paul Kincaid for GUFF. This issue dated, already, 16/3/99.

The Nova Awards

Novacon, the annual Science Fiction convention organised by the Birmingham SF Group, is notable for two things. One, the intense gossip and scandal. There are the raging debates of who was sleeping with whom, who wasn't speaking to whom and why there was no great beer until Sunday night. But these things are ever so in fandom. And Birmingham. So to the second notable aspect of Novacon, the Nova awards.

These are the awards for Best fanwriter, fanzine and fan artist, voted on by the members of Novacon. The rules of the award state:

"The Novas are awards for fanzines, fanwritings and fanart produced by science fiction fans--see rule 6--in the British Isles. It is the accolade of this specific peer-group, and committee rulings on eligibility should be made with this in mind."

Recently they have been awarded to whatever big general zine was published frequently that year and one of the writer or editors of that genzine and D West for best Artist. Strangely enough that was also the case last year and, frankly, it pisses me off.

In 1997, for example, Banana Wings and Mark Plummer, one of its editors, won the respective two awards (in a freak accident Sue Mason got best artist). Without a shadow of a doubt this was not the best fanzine of that year, nor was Mark the best fanwriter of that year. My only reasons for why they won was that they both published frequently, they were involved in other projects (conventions, BSFA) which got their name mentioned and were seen to be out and about doing stuff for fandom. For the record I believe that Mark McCann's writing that year was simply outstanding and perversely enough, Bob was the best fanzine. Oh, and D West..

Last year Banana Wings won the best fanzine again. This was three times in a row, and again I believe they weren't the best. This is an absolute travesty. It is not a great

fanzine by any stretch of the imagination. Looking at the voting form, itself not comprehensive, I can see half a dozen zines more worthy of the award and I'm not even including Götterdämmerung. Saliromania or International Revolutionary Gardner were my own particular choices. Both had sharp and incisive writing: Ashley acerbic, Joseph and Judith intelligent. Either of them would have made fine choices.

Also this year Maureen Kincaid Speller won best fanwriter. This is a vote I welcome, but it must be said not because she was the year's best fan writer. That accolade belongs to one of two people Michael Ashley or Lilian Edwards. Ashley once again shows by his disparaging remarks on Corflu UK that whilst he proclaims to be outside of fandom, his insights are vitally important to any of us willing to see beyond the social life it gives us. Lilian, of whom I'm no great fan, wrote an article in The Wrong Leggings 4 about the suicide of a friend, which had me choking back tears. It was powerful in its even toned approach, in its clear and unemotional details and I hope it is recognised as one of this year's better pieces of British fanwriting. That said, however, I was very happy indeed Maureen won. For many, many reasons beyond that she is a good writer.

I really do think it is time that every one involved in the awards, and that means every one attending Novacon, looked once again at the way in which the Novas are awarded. One thing that was noted last year was the criteria that a voter had to have read six of the fanzines listed on the reverse which put off a few people who could manage, say, four. They didn't realise, as Tony so eloquently pointed out on Sunday night that this was only if Mr. Berry did not know who you were. Mr. Berry is an authority not to be repudiated in my book, but others may not see it this way.

What to do? History presents an interesting suggestion of an awards panel. To avoid hassle, have the preceding Novacon's membership elect the panel to select the awards the following Novacon, rather than the award itself. Makeup, organisation etc. can be talked about if it is thought this idea is sensible. But I really do think it is time that an award of this importance is acknowledged as representing the best of the year's British fandom and is elevated beyond, what it states in the rules:

"The Nova Award is intended to provide a friendly pat on the back to the fanzine editor, fanwriter and fanartist whose efforts gave the greatest pleasure to the voters over the previous year. It has no vast cosmic significance. Should any difficulties of interpretation of these rules arise, those concerned are urged to follow the course most in keeping with this spirit."

'In keeping with the spirit,' and not about who gets theirs out most often. Then again, maybe Mark McCann would win after all.

Some of you may already know but I will not now be moving to Nottingham until the end of the month, 31 March to be precise. I was going to move the following day but that seemed to invite way too many inappropriate responses. At the moment I still have no idea where I'll be staying but you can reach me on my mobile number (and if you weren't paying attention earlier it is 0780 309 0598) if for some unknown reason you desperately need to contact me.

All of which means I'm going to be at Eastercon this year, if anyone wants to say hello. I'll see you all there. No time for the few comments I have received I didn't expect many to be honest. The next issue will contain a con report on the recent Mecon where I, once again, lived down to my reputation as ignorant beyond my years, but made up for it later at the quiz.

Talk to you soon.

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.