

LANGUAGE OF SCIENCE FICTION FANDOM

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Science fiction fandom, in the broad sense, is made up of those people who are interested in science fiction (SF) or fantasy. In a narrower sense, it is the amorphous group of those who do something because of that interest: attend SF conventions, correspond with other fans, publish or collect fanzines. Fandom in the narrow sense -- the Microcosm -- has developed its own vocabulary, like any in-group, and this particularly rich jargon is the subject of this article.

Fans may be classified according to the type of fan activity (fanac) they engage in, though there is a great deal of overlap (some fans being active in all fields), so that it should not be considered a very strict classification. Club fans belong to local clubs devoted to such aims as discussing SF, holding conventions, and partying; they often produce club fanzines. Letterhacks devote themselves to writing letters: originally to professional magazines (prozines) but now, with the disappearance of most prozine letter columns, to fanzines. Convention fans appear mainly at the annual World Science Fiction Convention (Worldcon) or at the many regional conventions. All of these have added to the vocabulary, but by far the greatest contribution has come from the producers of fanzines. Fanzines are the most characteristic feature of fandom, its most enduring products, and the most constant means of communication among geographically far-flung fans.

The average fanzine is privately printed -- usually typed, mimeographed, collated, stapled and mailed by the editor-publisher, and often largely or wholly written by him as well. Most fanzines are published irregularly, and a majority do not last through their first year. A very few may go on for decades. A rather large number of people last as fanzine publishers, producing a series of fanzines as their goals, interests, and amount of free time change, or as contributors and letter-writers to others' fanzines. These people, who may remain in fandom for much of their lives, provide continuity. One reason for the richness of fandom's vocabulary is that few expressions die forever; a term may slip into disuse, but as long as there are old-time fans (often with widely-read fanzines) who remember it, it always has a chance of being revived if need or nostalgia requires. The fanzines themselves, being avidly collected and preserved by fans, help even more to preserve the memory of old expressions and to stabilize the vocabulary. Sometimes, of course, there is distortion. For example, 'sercon', from 'Serious Constructive', originally had a pejorative meaning; Tucker states that 'the label was applied to any ...

boob who launched a crusade to clean up fandom, or who named himself protector of our misguided lives.' As time passed and the original SerConFan was forgotten, the term came to be used by newer fans in the non-ironic sense it bears today.

Glossaries of fan terminology also serve to maintain and stabilize the vocabulary. The latest Neo-Fan's Guide contains much current information, but it also includes a history of fandom and quotes noted fannish catch-phrases dating back 20 years and more. These glossaries are probably one of the primary means of introducing neofans to the lingo.

Fanzine editors (faneds) would seem to fit Labov's conception of 'lamers' rather well. Fans have always been an introverted group, marked off by their liking for 'that crazy Buck Rogers stuff', though this has decreased somewhat with the greater respectability of SF in recent times. Putting out a fanzine can be a very time-consuming process, further isolating the teenage faned. Since fans are also above-average in intelligence, it is not surprising that much playing with language goes on in the fanzines. (If we consider fandom as a community, matters are not so clear; the Fancylopedia II data seem to indicate that innovations generally come from the Big Name Fans rather than the fringe-fans.)

Fan lingo has been called 'fanspeak' (after Orwell) but is basically a literary language. The vocabulary may be used in speech, but quirks of spelling, punctuation and style can exist only on the printed page.

A thoroughly colloquial style is characteristic of fan writing. Some of the large or sercon fanzines may use a more standard, formal written English, but the smaller fanzines, reflecting the personality of the editor, usually do not. Indeed, an attempt to become more formal and sercon is likely to be met with disfavor as eliminating the warmth and spontaneity characteristic of a 'personalzine'. Some such fanzines are even 'composed on stencil' -- typed as first drafts directly on the mimeo stencils from which the magazine will be produced. Intentional solecisms ('undoubtedly') and misspellings ('Lawr Dawgs' for 'police', 'Yer Humble Editor') are frequent. Eney writes:

Characteristic of the usual colloquial style, as distinguished from the puristic handling of grammar of which fans are capable when necessary, are various practices of the Ackermanese type (varying from fan to fan); considerable use of words and phrases in and from foreign languages (and, anciently, Esperanto) whenever the writer feels like it; and a tone as if the writer were talking to himself, or at least determining how he shall say things primarily to suit himself.

Fan punctuation is probably a feature that sets fanspeak apart from all other jargons, so I will go into it in some detail. The two most characteristic fan punctuation marks are the 'quasi-quotemark' and type-written brackets, both of which answer particular needs of fan writers.

Quasi-quotemarks are made by typing a hyphen under quote-marks 'like this'. They are used, according to Tucker, 'to indicate that the quote is not an exact one, but an honest summation of a speaker's remarks. Care must be taken not to distort the original meaning, intention, or implications made by the speaker.' There are also used to fit a quotation into a sentence: 'I'll defend my position', but 'He said 'he'd defend his position''. Since fans constantly need to quote imperfectly remembered phrases from conversations (as at conventions) or from fanzines read long ago, quasi-quotemarks are extensively used. Such a compromise form, guaranteeing greater closeness to the original than indirect quotation but less than direct quotation, is so useful that it is surprising it has not spread beyond fandom.

Faneds often need brackets, particularly for inserting their remarks in the letters of comment (LOC's) they publish. Since few typewriters even today have them, typable substitutes had to be devised. The variety of solutions reflects the need felt: ((double parentheses a half space apart)); † Gregg shorthand parentheses †; † crossed virgules †; /brackets with underlining/ made with the virgule, the underlining being omitted by some; and /a simpler version of this last/ have been used. I have seen /this/ myself, but simple double parentheses ((like this)) were long the favorite, and seem to have won out almost completely.

Asterisks are used instead of quotes to set off sound effects in text: *clang*, *grunt*, and particularly *sigh*. This bit of whimsy has even appeared in the editorials of the prozines Amazing and Fantastic. They are sometimes also used in the style of H*Y*M*A*N K*A*P*_L*A*N for emphatic and honorific effect, as with the fannish god R*o*s*c*o*e.

The reverse of an honorific effect was achieved in some mock feuds, such as that between the Ghughuist and FooFooist religions, by typing the names of the enemy uncapitalized. Says Eney, 'another use for (capitalization) is as an implied apology for using stock phrases or, conversely, to pretend that a phrase is stock; e.g. Real Artistic Writer.'

Semi-cancellation is the ingenuous practice of striking out material with virgules as if correcting a mistake, but leaving it (intentionally) legible: 'The chairman called for ~~stocker's~~ volunteers to head the committee.'

Insertion of the letter H after the first consonant of a word implies 'pertaining to fandom' according to Eney. It appears most often in 'ghod' (referring either to God or to one of the fannish deities) and 'bheer', but can be used anywhere that whimsey dictates.

Finally, some of the eccentricities of 'Ackermanese' should be mentioned. This style of writing was used by Forrest J. Ackerman, particularly in the early 1940s, and continues to influence fan writing to this day. Simplifyd spelng, an idiosyncratic and inconsistently applied spelling reform, is little imitated, though some simplifications like 'tho' and 'thru' are still popular. Other characteristics were, quoting Eney,

... nonstopagraphing, a colloquial style with plenty of scientific combinations, and punnery wherever the opportunity presented itself. Quotes were rendered with all their typing peculiarities and errors; only one set of quotemarks was used on a series of consecutive words or phrases from various sources; the native names were used for geographic locations ("Moskva, Deutsch, Ceskoslovensk", etc -- and the use of quotemarks here illustrates the preceding point). Syntactical oddities like omission of "of" in "another th fans", and placing modifiers outside verb phrases as in "He undoubtedly'd say so" instead of "He'd undoubtedly say so", should be noted.

Nonstopagraphing, exemplified above, is the practice of spacing down for a new paragraph without returning the carriage. Scientific combinations are made by merging two adjacent words when they have matching letters: majority ofans, wothell. Besides nonce-formations, a number of standard terms (such as 'nonstopagraphing') have been produced this way.

Of course, fandom also has an extensive specialized vocabulary. If this differs from others in any way, it is probably in the method of formation of so many of the terms. For instance, fans compound clipped forms of words with an abandon unmatched outside the U. S. Navy. The frequent scientific combinations may be regarded as a marginal case of this.

Fanzines are the primary activity of fandom, so it is natural that an extensive vocabulary should have grown up for them largely using the combining form -zine. The following terms are taken from Eney, Tucker, Warner and Wertham. The commonest classifications are according to writers and contents. Generalzines, or genzines (sometimes multizines), have articles on a variety of subjects (not always including SF) from a variety of authors. Individzines, or personalzines, are largely written by the editor on whatever interests him. Specialized content is indicated by such transparent terms as newszine and reviewzine. Other, less frequent, terms are: articlezine, satirezine, discussionzine, opinionzine, gabzine, letterzine, adzine, artzine, Tolkienzine and rockzine. The evaluative term 'crudzine' also fits in this class. Method of reproduction is given in: carbonzine, dittozine, and mimeozine. Method of circulation is given by: apazine, chalzine, OO, and subzine. An apazine is distributed through an APA (amateur press association), in which each member's fanzine is distributed free to all other members. Chainzines have an even smaller circulation; each recipient in a designated list adds to it and mails it to the next person. An OO (official organ), or clubzine, is sent to all members of a club, society, or apa, and sometimes to others as well. A subzine is one available by subscription. There are a few miscellaneous compounds, such as Gerzine for German fanzine, and innumerable ephemeral coinages.

Conventions (cons), the number two interest of fandom, are likewise responsible for a good number of coinages. Almost all conven-

tions are given names that are compounds of the location with -con or -vention (NYCon I, ChiCon I, DenVention, Pacificcon, PhilCon I, TorCon, CinVention, NorWesCon, NOLaCon, Chiccon II). Sometimes -clave is also used.

The word 'fan' naturally appears in many coinages; we have already seen 'faned' and 'neofan'. Place of origin is indicated by: Anglofan, Aussiefan, Kiwifan (from New Zealand), and Michifan (from Michigan). Attitude is shown by: actifan and its opposite passifan; fakefan (one who enjoys associating with fans but is little interested in SF); serconfan and its rarer opposite voldesfan (volatile destructive fan); and trufan, the ideal, all-around fan. The femmefan (also femfan or fanne) should also be mentioned, along with the faaaan, the goshwowboyoboy type (pronounced with a bleat in the middle to indicate the sheeplike follow-the-leader qualities of this fan type).

Turning from fan types to fan preoccupations, we have the ubiquitous term fanac (fan activity), anything from collecting SF to arranging cons. The finest fanac is called crifanac (critical fan activity). A scientifcombination is fanarchist, for one who believes that national, or even regional, fan groups cannot accomplish much worthwhile. Fantheology is 'the ghod-lore of fandom', the creation and worship of such gods as Ghughu (who turns the souls of his followers purple -- to hear or read his name is to have one's soul turn purple and be saved), FooFoo (a later heresy), Roscoe (a giant beaver whose holy day is Labor Day in honor of his birth, and who rides a giant rocket through the sky on the Fourth of July), Bheer, and Money.

Outside of these three groups (magazines, conventions, fans) there are no very productive combinations, so it will be more worthwhile to consider the words in terms of how they were formed. Clipped forms contribute many words to fanspeak: ama-writer (amateur writer) and other 'ama-' compounds; annish (anniversary issue of a fanzine); corflu (correction fluid for mimeo stencils); duper (duplicator of any sort); egoboo (whatever boosts the ego -- the primary reward of fandom); heesh (he or she) and hisser (his or her), both Ackermanisms in use for decades; illo (illustration); ish (issue); lettercol (letter column); pub (publish); quover (quote-cover), a cover consisting of interesting quotes from fans; typo (a typographical error) and its equivalent from tape-recorder correspondence, the tapo; and many others.

Closely related are the scientifcombinations: bacover, fillo (filler illustration), lacktivity (lack of activity, a cause for expulsion from an apa), pename, pseulcide (a well-known suicide hoax), regalength (8 1/2 by 14 inch paper), thish (this issue), welcommittee (a committee for welcoming fans to fandom), and wiresponding (corresponding by wire recorder).

Acronyms and abbreviations also abound. There are innumerable abbreviations for magazines', organizations', and fans' names, but we will not consider them here. At least one fannish coinage -- BEM

for bug-eyed monster -- is in fairly wide circulation outside fandom. Self-explanatory terms are BNF (Big Name Fan), FIAWOL (Fandom Is A Way Of Life -- a faaaanish motto), FIJAGH (Fandom Is Just A Goddam Hobby), fmz (fan magazines), ktp (*kaj tiel plu*, Esperanto for et cetera), LMJ (Loud Mouth Jackass), LNF (Little Known Fan), and LOC (letter of comment). DNQ (do not quote) is sometimes put on LOC's to faneds, who otherwise assume the right to print any they receive. Gafia (Get Away From It All) originally meant 'escaping from the Macrocosm into fanac' according to Eney, but around 1949 it came to be used in some fannish circles, unaware of the old meaning, for the exact opposite: escaping from the overwhelming demands of fanac. One ordinarily goes or is in gafia, by the way; the verb is 'gafiate'. One returns by degafiating. Fafia (Forced Away From It All) is a later variant. Wahf (We Also Heard From) is used at the end of lettercols by those lucky faneds who get more LOC's than they can print. Finally, yhos (your humble and obedient servant) is an avoidism, a way of avoiding the use of 'I', like 'we' or 'yours truly'.

Borrowings from SF are naturally numerous, but most would have little significance except to the long-time SF reader. A few examples will suffice. Blowup, the term for a civilization-smashing atomic war, was applied to one or two organization-smashing feuds and troubles. Slan, a story of telepathic mutants (slans) with tendrils in their hair, contributed several words. Fans identified with its young slan hero, superior but persecuted, and the cry 'Fans are slans!' became popular. This led to 'Auslans' for Aussiefans, 'tendrilsessions' for fannish gabfests, and names like 'Slan Shack' and 'Tendrill Towers' for houses and apartments inhabited by fans. H.G. Wells' 'star-begotten' was sometimes used with the same connotations. Two acronyms are also worth mentioning: myob (mind your own business) and TANSTAAFL (There Ain't No Such Thing As A Free Lunch), the latter a Heinleinism much favored by libertarians.

Other sources than SF have added their share of words. Policeman's slang provided 'aka' (also known as), a boon in a field filled with pen names. Mad Magazine contributed the nonsense words 'potrzebie' and 'ferschlugginer'. General Semantics added 'null-A' and 'time-binding' by way of SF authors' use of the terms. Other odd words seem to have been adopted just for their obscurity, as: kteic (pertaining to the female genitalia), lustrum (five years), and neotric (receptive to new ideas, but applied by fans to any novelty for novelty's sake). Faunch comes from the phrase 'faunching at the bit', which, according to Eney, 'refers to the way a horse champs at the bit, impatient to prance away as soon as the reins are loosened'. It has expanded in fandom to mean any sort of impatient desire; one can faunch to read a fanzine, for example. 'Goshwowboyoboy', an indispensable term for the overenthusiastic attitude of neofans, comes from a Time Magazine article that was rather contemptuous of fandom.

A curious group of words is those that arise from typos. 'Poetsarcd' is a fannish term for postcard which arose this way. So did 'silp',

which is now etymologized as a combination of sip and gulp, and is the standard way of drinking a Nuclear Fizz. 'Filk songs' have come to mean fannish songs, either written by fans or adapted from folk songs.

Many words for fannish things do not fall into any of these categories. Having nothing to say on them, I will simply list a few to show the sort of thing that gets named, with definitions from Fancylopedia II.

- beanie brigade - the segment of fandom that acts, at cons, like all the fuggheaded teenagers that ever lived, thereby lending those gatherings some of their disenchantment
- burned out - sort of a synonym for gafia, brought on when a fan takes on more obligations than he can handle and withdraws from fandom, his enthusiasm boiled dry
- one-shot - a fanzine produced (perhaps imagined and cut, perhaps just run and assembled) at a single session ... originally it meant a publication intended to have only the one issue, as distinguished from 'periodicals' which fold after one issue
- snearyisms - tho overtly accidental, a good many of the typos of Rick Sneary were so dazzlingly appropriate as to seem deliberate, or so eccentric that they staggered the beholder; such constructions became known by their creator's name

Finally, there are the simply outlandish creations that one might expect from readers of SF. Nothing can be added to the definitions themselves; some samples are given below.

- blog and crottled greeps - nectar and ambrosia; a spiritous liquor and a snack greatly favored in the British Isles
- eyetracks - when you read a new book you get eyetracks all over it -- then it isn't mint any more
- fout - an all-purpose nonsense word, like later 'vombic' or 'kipple'
- grotch - acutely irritable (usually passive); Speer suggests that this useful word is a transitive form of grouch
- tower to the moon - a project of the Berkeley Bhoys to build a tower to the moon out of empty beer cans
- Twonk's disease - the ultimate in afflictions of any nature, possibly synonymous with falling of the armpits

Those who wish to learn more about SF fandom language should consult Dick Eney's Fancylopedia II, Operation Crifanac CXLIV (Alexandria, Va., 1959) which includes the 1960 addenda The Rejected Canon (Operation Crifanac CLXVII) and Additions and Corrections (Operation Crifanac CLXXVII), and Bob Tucker's The Neo-Fan's Guide to Science Fiction Fandom (Third Edition, 1973), revised by Linda Bushyager and Linda Lounsberry. More general treatments of the subject can be found in Harry Warner's All Our Yesterdays (Chicago: Advent, 1969) and Fredric Wertham's The World of Fanzines: A Special Form of Communication (Southern Illinois University Press, 1973).