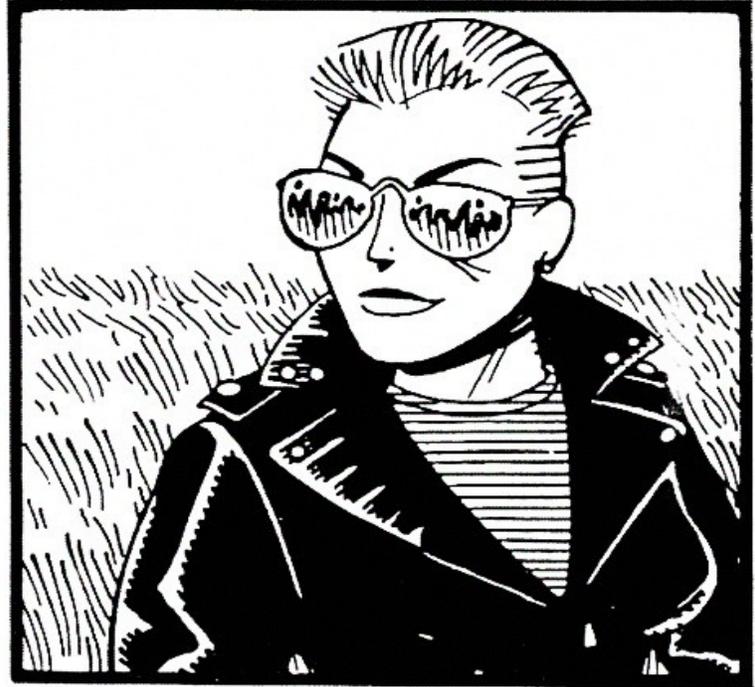
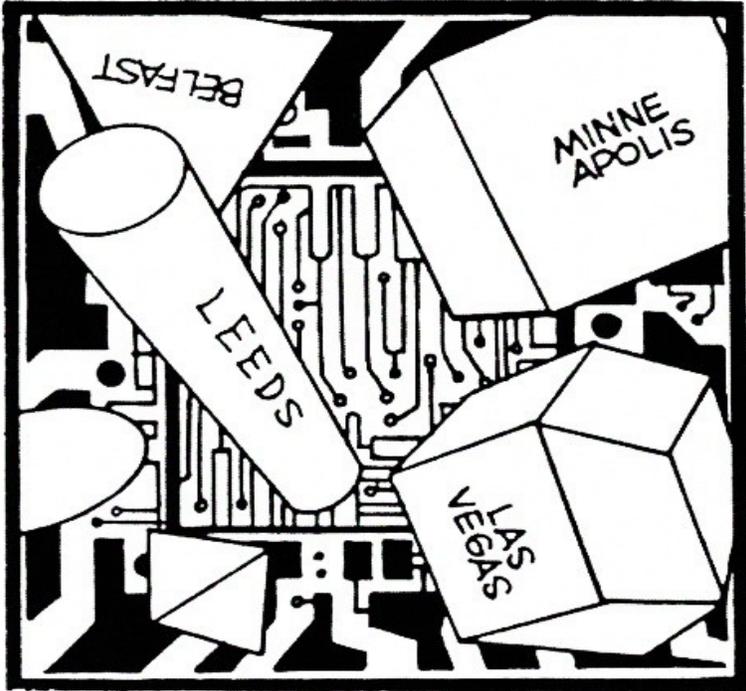


# THE REAFFIRMATION



ROB HANSEN

# **The Reaffirmation**

**Rob Hansen**

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## .I.

*This is a pseudo-sequel to The Enchanted Duplicator, the wonderful allegory written in the 1950s by Bob Shaw & Walt Willis and now available online. Finding this is left for the reader as an exercise in how to use a search engine. Appreciating either allegorical tale requires a working knowledge of SF fandom, I'm afraid. Them's the breaks. This tale was first published in Blat #4, edited by Ted White and Dan Steffan, Falls Church, USA, 1995.*

The sky outside is the colour of mimeo, printed with the ink turned way down. Its greyness is an appropriate backdrop to my unease about what I intend to do and of the effect it may have on fandom. Momentarily I pause, the fanspace deck on my lap humming expectantly. Running my fingers over the smooth planes of its bond-quality housing I idly trace the bold, block letters of the corporate logo impressed on its surface and run through the deck's specs. A dual-operator rig, the BLAT-4 is configured as a compartmentalized, multi-ply unit. It's sleek and beautiful, a top of the line rig to be sure, and more than adequate for my purposes. When you've been a zinejockey as long as I have you're no longer seduced by large and outwardly impressive units, no longer confuse size with effectiveness, but though I'm perfectly happy with the more basic decks it's really nice to have access to one of the top-end jobs occasionally. Enough of this; with a single smooth motion, a hand pass over the surface of the deck, I phase into fanspace ...

... fanspace, feeling that same exhilarating rush I always feel. Realspace folds in on itself, replaced instantly by the shapes and forms of fanspace, the inner-spatial landscape that is a representation of the sum total of all fannish activity, the matrix. And not only current activity either. The input of those who have since either flatlined or gone gafia remains, their contributions forming part of the whole even if not consciously acknowledged by those who use fanspace now. The structures in fanspace are analogues of centres of activity in realspace, constructs representing their place in the scheme of fandom. Those glowing spheres to my right are apas, virtual alephs that each contain fanspaces of their own and are tricky to access, while every unit in that stream of tracers rushing by to my left is a LoC, each one only accessible via the rig its aimed at but each still a part of the sum total of all the data that

makes up fanspace. Up ahead are some of the largest structures in all the matrix: the fangroups. That glowing white pyramid represents the fan-activity of the Madison group, that golden cube the Minneapolis group, and that silver column the Leeds group. Las Vegas fandom is that crimson dodecahedron, Glasgow that azure torus, while Belfast is the emerald triangle. There are many more.

The way distance works in fanspace is odd. While it brings groups in America, Australia, and Britain as close to each other as to those in the next city, it also has a distorting effect. Seen from a distance those fangroup structures seem monolithic and seamless, yet up close sub-divisions become apparent and what appeared to be a representation of stability might even be revealed as being composed of warring factions. This is certainly true of my city – has been for many years – and any impression of a single, citywide fandom is largely illusory. Yet, from a distance, we too look to some as a unified structure, a pale pink obelisk, tall and impressive, on the firmament of fanspace. Distance distorts and distance lies, what seems self-evident from afar being anything but when you get up close. This is true for groups, and it's true for people.

Fanspace is a wondrous construct, a consensus-reality, and there are times when it's easy to confuse the construct and the reality. For in fanspace there are structures that are not only analogues of fangroups but those that are analogues of individual fans. These constructs too are part of the consensus, their realspace counterparts providing most of the input from which they're formed. Most, but not all. Riding the zinestream I'm aware of the currents of data that drive it. The one formed by LoCs I've already described but there are others, the most important being gossip. Easy to access for data about others it is next to impossible to access for data about you and yours, and the data it carries is always suspect at best. Nevertheless, it too adds to the constructs of the matrix because however dubious its data they are still taken account of. This is, after all, a *consensus* reality.

The part of fanspace that sees most activity these days is the region known as conspace, one that has long since eclipsed that through which the zinestream flows. I can see some of the often ridiculously ornate structures of conspace on the horizon but for the moment I want to remain here in the decaying inner city of fanspace, in those areas where the zinestream still reaches. Dark and brooding are the myriad smaller structures that form the group analogue of my city's fandom as I descend among them. Levelling out,

I finally find what I seek, a level area containing the constructs that represent most of the city's active fans. Some of these bear little relation to the real person I know as the result of that person wishing to establish a particular image in the matrix, while others bear little relation to the real person for different reasons. Alighting next to the analogue of a close friend, I barely recognise it. It may represent a consensus, but the accretion of false data about it has added up to a distorted image, one I can't see in its entirety thanks to not being able to fully access the current of gossip that flows through the zinestream. Someone has been busy, it seems, and I have a battle on my hands.

I've prepared a file in an attempt to get through the compacted assumptions, the false data, though it may be too late to do much good. In realspace I slide the disk into place, reviewing it as I do so. It's a quantum package of data designed as a direct assault on the matrix. There's too much ice compacted around the fanspace representation of my friend to attack it directly with a viral program so this way will have to suffice, even though it's going to stir up an immense amount of trouble. Since I still can't access all the data that make up this construct I can't grapple directly with every false input, but have to have faith that it will make itself known with time. Finishing my review of the file it takes no more than a simple pass of my hand to bring it up for insertion into the zinestream, and before my eyes in fanspace, in blazing letters, the title I've given it leaps into being ... and just as suddenly vanishes in a blinding flash of light that seems to fill all fanspace in an instant. My vision soon returns, and with it comes the realisation that I am no longer in fanspace.



## .II.

I was lying in a cornfield. How I came to be there, I had no idea. Sitting up I breathed in deeply, savouring the warm and gentle breeze that caressed my hair and smelled of springtime. It was then that I saw her. She was beautiful, her long black hair framing a pale oval face, eyes concealed behind a pair of aviator-style mirrorshades. Dressed entirely in black leather, her only concession to colour lay in the green jewels hanging from her belt. She smiled at me as I got to my feet, amused by my confusion.

“Who are you?” I asked, “And where the hell am I?”

“If you don’t know who I am, I can’t tell you,” she replied, her voice every bit as thrilling as the woman herself, “and I’m sure you’ll soon figure out where you are.”

She smiled again, obviously still amused, but somehow I knew that she was not laughing at me, that she wished only the best for me. Her presence was strangely calming, and I began to study my surroundings more closely, seeking an answer to the puzzle.

“The sky is too blue, the grass too green,” I began, “and the air hasn’t smelled this good since I was a kid. Everything is too sharply defined, too perfect. It all lacks ‘gritty realism’. That means this is a simulation, and that I’ve somehow swapped the virtual reality of fanspace for another, more detailed one.”

“Very good. Fanspace is a consensus reality, a construct filled with representations of real fan groups and real fans but it’s not the only analogue of fandom and certainly not the oldest. Dig beneath the smooth and shiny surfaces of fanspace and you’ll discover an older, and in many ways *truer* fannish landscape. Enter it and you enter the realm of myth and archetype, of potent symbols that still carry great power and continue to influence fans to this day. Years ago, a pair of talented fans explored that realm, imposing order on it in a brilliantly written tale that became a legend in its own right. You know that realm; you’ve always known it. Know it now.”

“My Ghod!” I whispered, trembling in awe, “This is the land described in *The Enchanted Duplicator!*”

“Yes. What you see around you was created from images formed in your mind when you first read *The Enchanted Duplicator*. You may not

consciously remember every detail after all this time, but it was all there in your subconscious. Now it's all around you."

"But why? What's going on? What am I doing here?"

"That's for you to discover," she said, popping a stick of gum into her mouth, "but I can tell you that only by reaching the Tower of Trufandom – the tower where the Enchanted Duplicator resides – will you be able to return to fanspace."

"Look," I protested, "I don't need to make the journey described in *The Enchanted Duplicator*. I'm no longer a neofan."

"I never said you were. But you *do* need to travel your own path through this land. Not only is there no other way of you returning to fanspace but, trufan though you be, there are yet new lessons for you to learn along the way and, in some cases, old ones to relearn."

"Okay, okay," I said, sighing in resignation, "I know when I'm beaten. So now what?"

"So now you start on your journey. But first take up your Shield of Umor, and always be careful to keep it brightly polished. There is no surer protection against the perils you will soon face."

Nearby in the corn, where she had pointed, lay a glistening shield. I picked it up, marvelling at its lightness and was suddenly filled with joy. I turned to thank the mysterious woman but she had vanished completely, only the hint of her perfume lingering on the breeze to show that she had ever been there at all.



### .III.

Within a few hours I'd reached the great arterial road that ran to the capital city of Mundane. Pausing while waiting for an opportunity to cross, I noticed other travellers boarding luxurious coaches bound for supposedly fabulous destinations such as Wealth, Success, and Respectability. Not surprisingly, none of them were going in the direction of Fandom. Crossing the road during a lull in the traffic, I marched confidently towards the Forest of Stupidity which, I remembered, grew all around the country of Mundane and sheltered it from the searching winds that blew out of fandom. I pondered this as I headed for the narrow path that led through the forest.

The path was no longer the narrow and overgrown track described in *The Enchanted Duplicator* but a full-fledged highway. I stared at it in some confusion, gradually becoming aware of something strange. The path might now have become a highway but no-one was using it. A short way along the highway, just before the first bend in the road, was a large and attractive building. I ambled over to it, curious about the flashing lights and strange noises that were emanating from it. The closer I got, the more fascinating it became. Mesmerised, I entered the mall.

On either side of the covered way were shops filled with the sort of books that had filled my mind with wonder when I was young. These days I rarely found a book that could fire my imagination as those of my youth had, a loss I had once regretted but was now resigned to. Next to the book stores were picture-houses featuring dazzling light-shows that retold the stories in the books using sights and sounds designed to delight and stun. Still further on was an arcade on which were an amazing array of screens displaying games and words, every one of them having Neofans in front of them, their fingers running over the keyboards. At the end of the arcade there was a vacant terminal and I somehow found myself sitting down in front of the screen, my fingers beginning to caress the keyboard. What harm could it do to play with the terminal for a short time before continuing? I began tapping the keys.

An indeterminate amount of time later my concentration was abruptly interrupted by the screen going blank. Irritated, I shook myself and gazed around me at the other terminals, where the Neofans still worked away. I

frowned, feeling oddly empty. Some sort of malfunction had obviously knocked out the screen, but how long had I been here? Judging by the length of my beard, I must have been in the arcade for weeks. Shocked by this discovery and suddenly filled with new resolve, I rose to my feet and strode purposefully out of the arcade and the mall itself, not looking back once. The mall was a bauble designed to entrap the unwary, one of many perils that undoubtedly lay ahead. Only good fortune had saved me this time. I vowed that I would not be so careless again. Ah, sweet idiocy!



## .IV.

Beyond the bend in the road the path became the overgrown track I'd expected, and in several places I had to cut my way through brush and thickets. By mid-afternoon I'd made my way to the place where I hoped to rest before continuing the journey. The clearing was not what I expected. There was supposed to be an aerodrome here containing the fat and prosperous Swift and his beautiful silver flying machine, the Aeroplanograph, but there was no sign of either. In fact the clearing was almost entirely filled by a low, sleek, futuristic-looking building. After locating a door I entered, and was immediately greeted by a tall, thin man with wild hair, who wore thick glasses and a white lab-coat. He looked so much like everyone's image of a mad scientist that I found it hard to suppress a smile. At his feet was a small dog that seemed strangely docile.

"Come in, young man, come in!" he said enthusiastically. "My name is Zerocks. And what can I do for you, eh?"

"Umm, I need to get over the mountains and was hoping you might be able to help."

"And so you shall!" said Zerocks, looking at my backpack. "But my dear young man, surely you're not thinking of *climbing* those mountains? Why my dog, Orijnl, knows a tunnel that will take you under the mountains! With his help, and that of my wondrous copier, we'll have you in Fandom in no time!"

"Your ... copier?"

"Why, yes. Follow me and I'll show you!"

He led me into the next room, Orijnl trotting alongside him, and gestured expansively towards the gleaming metal and glass machine it contained.

"Well, what do you think of my copier? Isn't it the most wonderful machine you've ever seen?"

"It certainly is impressive," I replied and it was, but my attention was elsewhere.

Two scantily-clad young women had just entered the room through a door on the opposite wall and I couldn't take my eye off them. With their jet-black hair and clear white skins they were the most beautiful creatures I'd

ever seen. Their seductive smiles and come-hither looks produced strong feelings of desire, feelings I would have succumbed to had Zerrock's not rushed over and herded the young women out of the room.

"Who were they?" I asked, still burning with desire.

"My daughters Litho and Ophset," replied Zerrock's irritably. "They're very beautiful, but also very expensive. They'll bleed you dry and then you'll never get to Fandom. No, no, young man, you're far better off sticking with Zerrock's."

The old scientist picked up Orijnl and began smoothing the small dog. I couldn't help noticing there was something odd about that animal. Orijnl had an attractive coat, with clearly defined patches of black and white, but that was not all. On the white areas words had been tattooed, words that appeared to be some sort of dictionary of fannish terms and which had letters composed not of lines but rather patterns of dots.

"Ah, I see you are admiring Orijnl's tattoos!" observed Zerrock's. "They were done by a talented woman who uses nine needles at once. Her name is Dorothy-May Trixton but she prefers the shortened version, Dot-May Trix." Placing Orijnl carefully in the machine and closing the lid over him, Zerrock's explained: "I'm far too fond of my dog to part with him, of course, but my copier will produce a perfect twin of him to lead you under the mountains and into Fandom!"

Zerrock's pressed a button on the copier and there was a whirring sound followed by a flash of brilliant light from under the lid. When the process was finished he lifted two dogs out of the copier, Orijnl and the copy, but though Zerrock's had claimed they would be identical I knew instantly which was the copy. Some of the black areas of its coat were greyer than Orijnl's while others seemed more evenly dark yet fuzzier around the edges. The dots making up the tattoos on the white area had run together somewhat, making the words easier to read, but it was when I looked into the copy's eyes that I got my biggest shock.

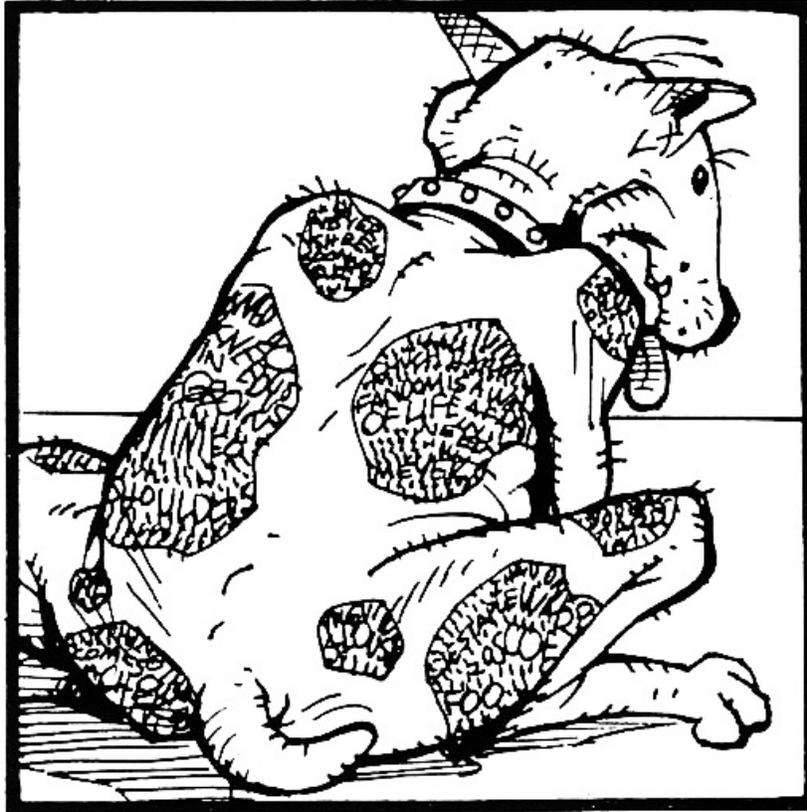
"This copy has no soul!" I cried, appalled. I backed away from the creature as Zerrock's, getting visibly agitated, tried to push it into my arms.

"You must take it," urged the old scientist, "it's the easiest way of getting into Fandom!"

"There are no easy ways!" I shouted, and turned, fleeing the building and crashing into the forest.

Soon the clearing was far behind me and as the trees began to thin out

and the ground to rise I knew that I'd finally arrived at the foothills of the Mountains of Inertia. Ahead of me was a battered sign on which could still just be discerned the words: *LETTERPRESS RAILROAD*. Shaking my head wistfully, I set off on the steep path up the mountain.



## .V.

The path was steeper than I'd expected, and soon I was near exhaustion. I felt like an old fan and tired, retracing a journey that, in my own way, I had already made once, long ago. Why then, despite the obstacles, had it seemed so much easier the first time? The Mountains of Inertia were well named, it seemed, and I no longer had the youth and enthusiasm to surmount them. Laying my Shield of Umor aside, I sat down on a rock to rest awhile. It was then that I heard the music, hauntingly familiar music. Intrigued, I got to my feet and followed the music to its source, a brightly lit cave just the other side of a nearby outcrop of rock. An elfin young woman in a garish costume noticed me and invited me in. The music, I noted, accompanied a movie being projected on a wall of the cave, and I knew where I'd heard it before. The movie and the music had been playing in the mall.

"Hi, I'm Meeja," said the girl, favouring me with a broad smile, "and I hope you'll join us."

"I'm on my way to Fandom," I said, "and I'm not entirely sure what exactly it is I'm looking for, though a strange man I met a few hours ago obviously thought I was seeking to publish the perfect fanzine."

"Why *this* is Fandom," she said, "and we publish fanzines here!"

I stared after her in surprise as she rushed over to one of the cave's costumed inhabitants and returned bearing a glossy publication, noticing for the first time that she was wearing pointed plastic ears.

"Here," she said, waving the magazine at me, "what better fanzine could there be than this?"

I flicked through the magazine, noticing with surprise that it was filled with photographs of the actors in the entertainment being projected on the cave wall, along with articles and fiction about them.

"But ... but this isn't a *real* fanzine!" I said, in a voice that did not hide my puzzlement and disappointment. Meeja reacted badly to this.

"Get out!" she screamed, "Get out! You're a snob just like the others of your kind!"

Sighing, I shouldered my pack, picked up my shield, and headed out of the cave. I had nothing against Meeja and her friends, and the magazine she had shown me had been perfectly all right for what it was. Unfortunately

what it, and Meeja's little group, were just wasn't what I was looking for. Strangely, though the encounter had not been a pleasant one, I felt invigorated enough by it to tackle the rest of the climb, and in a few hours I had climbed over the mountains and was heading down into the gently sloping foothills that marked the edge of the most beautiful country I had ever seen ... Fandom!

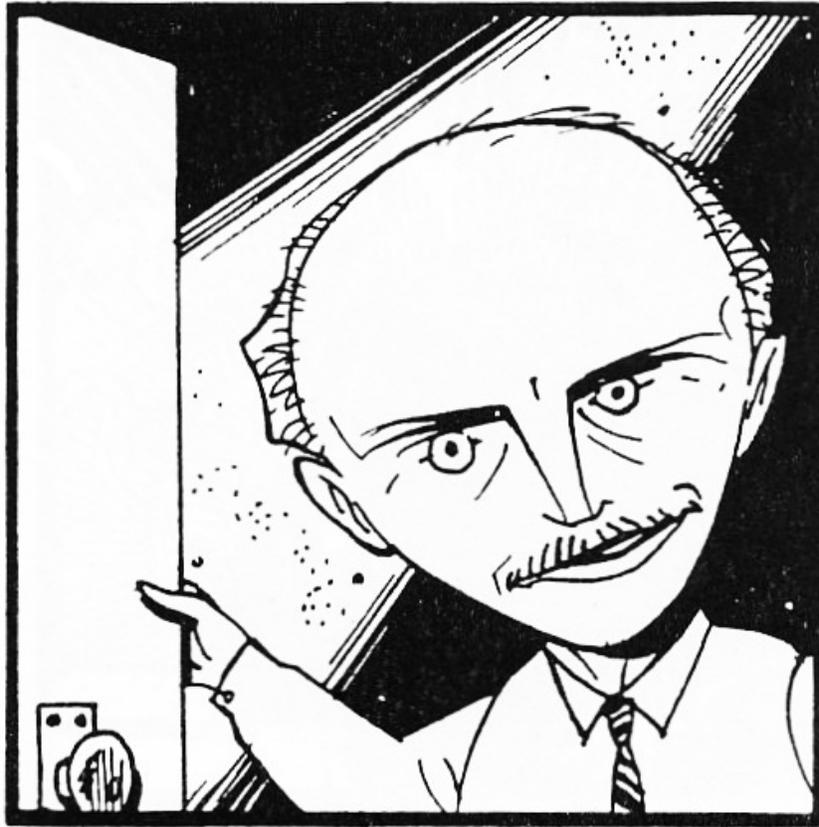
## **.VI.**

It was a land of streams and meadows and valleys, over which ran meandering roads, dotted here and there with cheerful cottages. Beyond all this, in the mists of distance, I saw yet another peak, though it was too far away to make out any details clearly. It seemed to have a golden radiance about its summit and I realised, with a gasp of wonderment, that this must be the Tower of Trufandom. Traversing the land between the tower and where I now stood looked to be a daunting task, but it was one I was determined I would be up to. First, I would have to cross the stretch of land that lay immediately before me.

I had expected to face the dangers of the Hekto Swamp at this point, but the land was dry and firm. Any swamp that had been here had long since been drained. This unexpected good fortune put a spring in my step and I was soon covering the ground at a healthy pace. Then it happened. One moment I was striding purposefully ahead; the next the earth had caved in beneath me and I was falling. Reacting at once, without conscious thought, I reached out blindly and grabbed hold of the far edge of the newly-opened crevice, my fall being halted at the cost of my arms almost being wrenched from their sockets. Painfully, I dragged myself to safety and lay there for some minutes, wild-eyed and panting. When I'd recovered somewhat, I crawled to the edge of the rift and peered over it. My nose was instantly assailed by the fetid odour of decay, and I sensed rather than saw that something was stirring in the depths of the pit, something dangerous that would only return to its slumbers if I left this place immediately. That was all the prompting I needed. In no time at all the rift was far behind me.

## **.VII.**

Soon, as anticipated, I had arrived at the Jungle of Inexperience, which stretched all around Fandom. Confident that it presented no dangers to one as experienced as I, I plunged into the thick of it, determined to forge ahead as swiftly as possible. Forcing my way through a particularly dense thicket I burst out the other side and lost my footing on the slippery ground. Before I could do anything about it, I had slid down the short, steep slope and plunged into a mighty river which roared through the jungle and whose waters were as black as pitch. I had fallen into the Torrent of Overinking and was being borne away by a flood far beyond my powers to fight. I would surely have been lost then had not a thrown line landed in the water within my reach. I grasped the line, which was made of knotted sheets (called “slip-sheets”, I dimly recalled), and was slowly pulled to the bank by a figure I could only barely make out through the churning waters. Then I glimpsed the tell-tale gleam of a Shield of Umor. Was my rescuer another pilgrim, one in search of the Enchanted Duplicator, I wondered as I finally reached the bank? I lay there for a few minutes, panting and cursing my carelessness, which had almost doomed me again. By the time I had my breath back and raised my head to thank my rescuer, I was alone. My mysterious benefactor was nowhere to be seen.



## .VIII.

At length, I left the jungle and almost immediately came upon a large and imposing structure. I was greeted at the door by its guardian, a kindly-looking figure with a round head from which most of the hair had long since fled and a wispy grey moustache perched atop large lips about which played a knowing smile.

“What is this place and who are you?” I asked.

“Why, this is the Museum of Fantiquities,” he replied, “and I am its Keeper. Come in, why don’t you, and I’ll show you its wonders.”

And what wonders they were! There, in pristine condition and full working order, were examples of every type of duplicator ever made, while one vast room was filled with shelf after shelf of fanzines.

“Every fanzine that has ever been published,” said the Keeper, beaming proprietorially at the part of the Museum that was clearly his pride and joy, “or that ever will be. All fully indexed and cross-referenced.”

One room contained a tower of beer cans that rose up through a portal in the roof and reached all the way to the moon, while another – the largest of all – contained a complete hotel with the name “TUCKER’S” over the main entrance. Yet another contained Swift’s wonderful Aeroplanograph, mounted on a pedestal and suitably labelled, and a fenced off section of bare swampy ground, stained purple.

“All that’s left of the Hekto Swamp that once covered all of this area not covered by the Jungle of Inexperience,” explained the Keeper. “As the popularity of hekto waned so the swamp gradually drained away. The same, sadly, cannot be said of the Torrent of Overinking. As the duplicators owned by those fans who still use them get ever older so the torrent’s flow gets ever fiercer.”

I wandered the Museum’s halls for hours, the genial Keeper filling me in on the story behind any item – and there were many of them – that piqued my curiosity. At length, we came to a locked room, the only room I’d seen in the whole Museum that wasn’t freely accessible.

“Why is this room locked when none of the others are?” I asked. The Keeper looked uncomfortable and was clearly reluctant to answer me but, at length, he sighed and took a key from his pocket.

“This room is locked because what’s inside is dangerous and still has the potential to cause great suffering in Fandom,” he explained as he unlocked the door.

We entered the room, which was small and airless. It was empty save for a number of shields hanging on the rear wall. They looked like Shields of Umor, but instead of gleaming the surface of each and every one was a dull and featureless black that reflected no light whatsoever.

“What are they?” I whispered, unaccountably chilled.

“Fandom’s shame,” replied the Keeper. “If you really wish to know more there is a way, but be warned: learning their secret will not be a pleasant experience.”

“Maybe not, but I’m as sure as I can be that it’s an experience I’m supposed to have.”

“Very well,” said the Keeper, taking my hand in his and taking a firm hold of one of the shields with his other, “grasp the other edge of this shield and all will be revealed.”

I did as he asked and almost at once images of Fandom past flooded into my mind. The sky was dark and filled with thunder, and I was looking at a broad plain on which two opposing groups, their Shields of Umor as dark as night, were hurling crackling bolts of energy at each other. When a bolt thrown by one side hit someone on the other that person would wince, grit their teeth, and hurl their own bolts with twice the force and twice the passion they had previously. Where the bolts fell to the ground, great cracks would appear and the earth would shake. The sound and fury of the conflict was such that I almost failed to notice the columns of people in the distance, marching into the Glades of Gafia.

“What’s going on?” I yelled above the din, appalled at what I was witnessing.

“It’s a feud,” said the Keeper, his voice filled with a deep sadness, “perhaps the worst Fandom has ever suffered. It began when two fans disagreed over what they saw as a point of principle, and soon they were throwing Bolts of Bile at each other. Only the strongest Shields of Umor can withstand such a bombardment, and theirs quickly lost all their shine and ability to protect. Soon others took sides and the dispute escalated, plunging all of Fandom into war. The damage done to Fandom was immense and the bile unleashed created great rifts, some of which to this day are only lightly crusted over, as you yourself had the misfortune to discover on your way

here. There were those who had no interest in the conflict, those for whom it had irreparably poisoned Fandom, and they were the ones who departed for the Glades of Gafia. Few of them ever returned.”

“What was the point of principle that started the feud?” I asked tears welling at the carnage I was witnessing, at the wilful disregard of the combatants for the damage they were doing to the beautiful land of Fandom.

“No one knows,” said the Keeper, gently breaking our contact with the shield and returning us to the present, “but as bad as the feud was and despite all the grief it caused, Fandom recovered. True, the rifts remain, and they’re a hidden danger that could always be reopened by the unwary, but Fandom is very resilient. That it’s renewed itself in the past is cause to believe that it can do so again if it needs to. Also, and this is a point that should never be forgotten, though the havoc it wreaks is good reason never to enter into a feud lightly, nevertheless there are occasions on which you *have* to take a stand. If you do, however, don’t make the mistake made by those we just viewed: always keep your Shield of Umor brightly polished.”

We chatted for a while after that, and I marvelled at all the wonderful artwork adorning the walls of the final gallery in the Museum. Then it was time to go, but I found that I didn’t want to.

“No, no, you must continue on your way,” said the Keeper when I told him. “There are dangers in losing the past, which is why I run the Museum, but there is also a danger of losing yourself *in* the past. You’re welcome to return here at any time, but it’s important that you engage with Fandom in the present.”

“You’re probably right,” I agreed, wistfully, “but it sure is tempting.”

Soon, with the fresh supplies the Keeper had given me, I bid him a fond farewell and set off on the next leg of my journey, towards the beckoning city I could see in the distance.



## .IX.

It was only as I got close to the city that I realised how enormous it was; a vast, sprawling metropolis. A sign on the outskirts identified it: *SERCON, THE CITY OF SERIOUS CONSTRUCTIVISM, WELCOMES CAREFUL READERS*. So this was the city of Sercon, I thought to myself, wondering just when it had got so *big*! In a daze I wandered among the buildings of the city, most of which were hugely imposing and not at all the ramshackle affairs I'd been expecting. And yet there was something distinctly odd about many of them. Their complicated geometries and over-ornate surfaces seemed to defy sense and logic and I found that contemplating one of them for more than a few seconds made my head hurt. Strangely, some of them had no way in that I could find.

Sercon was a bustling hive of activity, with new construction underway everywhere and also extensions to existing structures, which usually meant adding layers of elaboration. Most of the buildings appeared to have been built using the same formidable-looking material, and I watched with interest as a group of builders poured a new foundation. Two of their number carried a large vat brimming over with steaming brown stuff which was giving off an incredibly foul smell, though they seemed not to notice. As they poured the horrible stuff into the hole they had prepared, the rest of their fellows rushed forward and dropped flexible hoses into it. Puffing themselves up alarmingly they then began to blow furiously into the hoses, causing the brown stuff to bubble and boil. At length, they withdrew the hoses and the surface of the substance calmed, setting rigidly to become the same material that so much of Sercon seemed to be made of. Curious, I examined it more closely, noting that it was impossible to scratch or chip and that it had no smell to indicate what it was composed of.

“Amazing substance, isn't it?” said a voice behind me.

“Indeed it is,” I said as I turned, wondering who this newcomer might be. He was tall and stoutly built, with neatly trimmed hair and beard, and was puffing on a meerschaum pipe.

“It's astoundingly dense and totally impervious, y'know,” he said, “nothing can make a dent in it. It's composed in equal parts of bovine by-product and hot air and can be moulded into any shape, no matter how

ludicrous.”

“I wasn’t expecting Sercon to be this large,” I told him, “or the residents to be quite so busy and industrious.”

“That’s the Akadeem for you. They’ve moved into Sercon in ever increasing numbers over the years and quite transformed the place. It’s been wholesale gentrification, really. I only wish I could make more sense of most of the structures they throw up. Some are very elegant, even illuminating, but all too many seem to exist for no other reason than to call attention to their architect. There are even one or two based on my own writings but, flattered though I was, I can’t say that I actually understood them.”

“Who are you, by the way?” I asked, somewhat awkwardly.

“Forgive me. I was forgetting my manners. My name is Profan. Not that I’m the first to hold that title and, with luck, I won’t be the last.”

We shook hands, I introduced myself, and Profan continued to discourse on the nature of the city. Noticing that one group of Akadeem, in contrast to most of their fellows, were actually taking a building down, I asked Profan if he knew who they were.

“Deconstructionists,” he replied.

At Profan’s invitation, I accompanied him to his mansion in the old part of town. No sooner had we passed through the mansion’s impressive gates, and Profan had locked them behind us, than bolts of bile began hitting the ground near my feet. Astonished, I sought out their source and found it on the other of the gates in the form of a small, bespectacled man who was throwing bolts at me with all his might while screaming obscenities. I was so stunned that I was rooted to the spot – not that any of the bolts landed near enough to cause me any harm.

“Wh..who is that, and why is he attacking me?” I asked.

“Oh, that’s just Antifanpro,” said Profan, unconcernedly, “it’s usually best just to ignore him.”

Difficult as it was, I took Profan’s advice and followed him into the mansion, turning at the door to see that Antifanpro, having lost interest in me, had wandered away, though I could still hear his shouted imprecations, carried on the breeze. I felt I should quiz Profan further about this strange creature, but my host had already led us into a large hall lined with kegs of beer and shelves of fine whiskies.

“Hmnm. How did that happen?” he asked, taking a bottle from one of the shelves. “This shouldn’t be out here. This is *cooking* whisky!”

Tossing the bottle aside, he pulled me a pint of clear, dark ale from one of the kegs, pulled one for himself, then bid me sit down at the long table that ran down the centre of the hall. No sooner had we done so than the doors at the far end of the hall opened and servants began bringing in platter after platter of food and laying them before us. Profan, clearly a man of large appetites, piled his plate high with meat and vegetables, smothered the whole in a thick, dark gravy, and attacked it with great gusto. We both ate well – though Profan ate more than me, demolishing a further two plates of food, each as large as the first, before he seemed replete – and then, relaxing afterwards over further pints of ale, we began talking. I was intrigued by a painting on the wall of a tall, bespectacled man wearing an immaculate suit. Somehow, he had achieved the remarkable feat of smiling with the bottom half of his face while frowning with the top.

“Who is that?” I asked, pointing at the portrait.

“Another who also sometimes goes by the name of Profan. We’re few in number, but we come from a long and proud tradition.”

“So who or what,” I then asked, unable to put the question off any longer, “is Antifanpro?”

“A sad case,” replied Profan, lighting his pipe. “As someone who started in Fandom I still love the place and do what I can to help those fans I encounter. Antifanpro also started in Fandom, but now that he’s achieved great fame in Sercon he repudiates Fandom totally and seldom misses a chance to attack fans. Fortunately, his aim isn’t as good as he thinks it is and he rarely strikes his targets, as you have cause to know. Even when he does, he causes a lot less damage than he imagines. He’s forgotten so much about what Fandom is truly like that his attacks are of little real consequence. Anyway, enough about him – why give him the attention he demands, after all – what about you? How can I aid you further?”

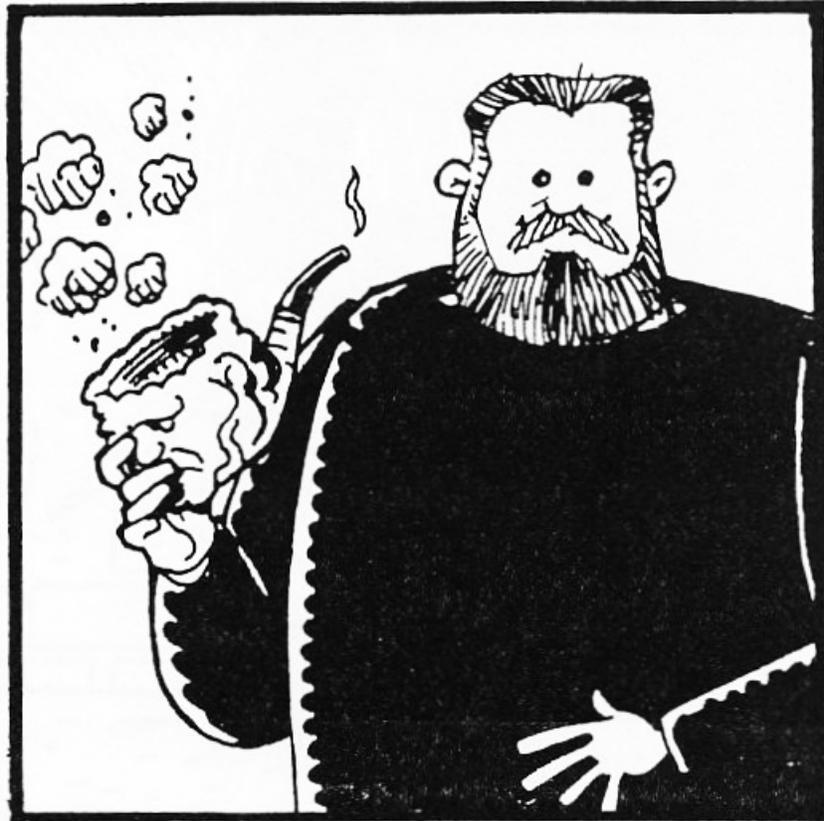
“You’ve been kindness itself already. You’ve fed me, offered me lodging for the night, and helped me learn about the city. If I require anything else it’s advice on how I get to the Tower of Trufandom from here and on the dangers I still have to face along the way.”

“Well,” said Profan, draining his beer and pouring himself a whisky, “I suppose you’ll have no difficulty with the clubfans and hucksters you’ll encounter before leaving the city?”

“Hardly. I’m not a club person, and my kolektinbug died years ago.”

“I thought as much. Then the next obstacle you’ll encounter is the

Desert of Indifference. Even an experienced fan can find it difficult to cross without a sufficient supply of 'Egg o' Bu', the egg of the Bu-birds, which is increasingly difficult to come by these days. The keepers of the birds, the Letraks, were once a mighty tribe, but now they are almost extinct. I think you'll have to link up with one of the groups that still has a plentiful supply, which they keep to themselves, if you're to cross the desert safely. Yes, I'm afraid you're going to have to join an Apa."



## .X.

Rising early the next morning, I bid farewell to Profan and headed for the Desert of Indifference. Within a few hours I had cleared the city and arrived at the edge of the desert, which was just as bleak as I expected it to be. I shivered as a chill wind blew in from the desert and swirled about me. Over the next few hours a number of the hardy nomadic desert tribes, the Apas, passed by but none seemed interested in having a newcomer join them. Still, my luck was obviously still holding because the head of the fourth tribe to pass by – the Owie, as he was called – decided, after conferring with his fellows, that I could travel with them.

My days in the Apa were firmly regimented, with work being produced according to a strict schedule on pain of your being cast out for lack of activity, to survive alone in the desert as best you could. That the work was rewarded with a steady supply of the precious egg o’bu, was a powerful extra incentive to keep your activity up. The tribe was a closed, incestuous group, and very intense, but close friendships grew up and I was sorry that I would eventually have to leave the Apa.

All too soon, the day arrived. I had enjoyed my time in the Apa and could have comfortably stayed with the tribe for the rest of my days if something more powerful had not been calling me. The day we reached the far edge of the desert was a sad one for me and for the others in the Apa, and our parting was tearful, yet in a strange way I felt liberated. While the strict routines of the Apa had resulted in me being more productive than I might otherwise have been, much of the work I had done for it had been rushed and unmemorable. Still, the Apa had provided me with the sustenance I required during my time in the Desert of Indifference, and for that I was grateful. Now, however, it was time to continue with my journey.



## .XI.

No sooner had I set off on the final leg of my long trek than I encountered another traveller on the road. It was a young woman, somewhat the worse for wear from the trials of the road (as I myself must be) but with a determined air about her. Her Shield of Umor was pitted and rather corroded but she greeted me cheerfully enough.

“Hi,” she said, “my name’s Jofanne and I’m seeking the Enchanted Duplicator so that I may produce the Perfect Fanzine, for that is what I want to do more than anything else in the world!”

“Pleased to meet you,” I said, shaking her hand, “I, too, seek the Tower of Trufandom, in which resides the Enchanted Duplicator, though for a different reason. Perhaps we could travel together?”

“Well,” she said, giving me an appraising look, “perhaps we can. For some of the way. I have to make a small detour to get my shield repaired.”

“What happened to it?”

“It was damaged by the corrosive rains from the Clouds of Condescension that feed the Stream of Sexism.”

“Stream of Sexism? I don’t believe I encountered that.”

“No,” she said, ironically but not unkindly, “you wouldn’t have. Oh, it’s smaller in Fandom than in almost any other place I’ve ever been, but it still exists even here, as all but the most complacent would acknowledge.”

“Uh ... well you shouldn’t have any more trouble with stuff like that if you stick with me. My experience should be invaluable in helping us to avoid the worst that we’re likely to encounter on the road ahead.”

“Oh?” said Jofanne, arching an eyebrow, her voice suddenly icy, “You mean like it helped you in the mall and at the Torrent of Overinking?”

“How ... how do you know about them?” I spluttered.

“Who do you think pulled the plug on that games machine, and later hauled you out of the river?”

“Ah,” I said, feeling foolish, my face red, “um, thank you, I think. So, uh, who exactly is going to fix your Shield of Umor?”

“A master Umorist, sometimes known as the Shaper. I crossed the Desert of Indifference with an all-female Apa – the Apazons – and they told me about him. I’m quite intrigued by the thought of meeting him, actually,

because they'd smile in this really peculiar fashion whenever he was mentioned."

"He sounds interesting, and certainly somebody I ought to meet myself."

"Then," said Jofanne, hooking her arm in mine and playfully poking me in the ribs, "what are we waiting for?"



## .XII.

We knew we were getting close to the Shaper's home – a cave set into a small, grassy hill – long before we saw it, because the noise coming from it was incredible. The sound of metal on metal, of hammer striking anvil, became unbearable as the cavemouth came fully into sight, but the figure working the metal seemed oddly unbothered by it. He was tall and bespectacled, with thinning dark hair, a close-cropped grey beard, and a prominent, almost Semitic nose. But what caught the eye immediately were his legs, which were covered in fur and which terminated in small, cloven hooves. These were the hindquarters of a goat!

“My God,” I said, appalled, “the man's an aging satyr!”

“Well, I think he looks kinda cute,” said Jofanne, smiling strangely.

The Shaper, having finally noticed us, downed his tools and came over. When he caught sight of Jofanne – and I swear I'm not making this up – his eyes almost popped out, bulging right through the frames of his glasses! Greetings were exchanged, introductions were made, and the Shaper invited us into his cave. Behind the forge was a pleasant living area, its walls hung with carefully framed pictures, and Jofanne and I collapsed onto the sofa gratefully. The Shaper brought us refreshments before sinking back into a comfortable armchair.

“So how may I help you?” he asked, pleasantly. “My cave is well off the beaten track and few stumble on it accidentally.”

“I was told you could repair my Shield of Umor,” said Jofanne, passing it to him. He examined it gravely, frowning at the pitted surface, then carried it over to the rear of the cave, where he placed it against the wall and draped a cloth over it.

“Can you mend it?” asked Jofanne, anxiously.

“Oh, I should think so,” replied the Shaper, eyeing her appraisingly. “Fortunately, most of the corrosion hasn't penetrated too deeply. Now then, tell me all about yourselves.”

For the next few hours we did just that, and the Shaper kept us amused with tales of his own. Many of his stories were of the sort that, if told by most other men, a lot of women might have been offended by, but such was the Shaper's skill as raconteur, such was his charm and his sheer devilish wit,

that Jofanne was completely enchanted by the old goat and laughed as loudly at his anecdotes as I did. We talked all afternoon and well into the evening, having a wonderful time, but all too soon it came time for us to retire for the night. As the evening drew to a close, the Shaper retrieved Jofanne's shield from the rear of the cave and returned it to her. Removing the cloth cover, she was dazzled by the brightness of the firelight bouncing off its flawless surface.

"How ... how did you do that?" she gasped. "I thought you were going to hammer it back into shape on your anvil but you didn't leave your chair, or touch the shield, all day."

"A very agreeable way of working, don't you think?" he grinned. "No, what was needed in this case wasn't brute force but tenderness and joy. Your shield is no more than a reflection of what lies within. *You* were the one who needed to be 'repaired', and fortunately I was able to draw out the laughter that had always been there but which you'd allowed a few bad experiences in Fandom to almost bury. That's something you should never do. Fandom should be fun: that's why we stay here, after all. It's a wondrous place, and large enough that if you're not enjoying yourself in one part you can always move to another. Now, take your shield and don't let it get in such a state again."

"Thank you," said Jofanne, kissing him on the cheek.

"Who says this job doesn't have its perks?" he laughed.

After Jofanne had gone to bed, the Shaper and I stayed up a little while longer, chatting amiably. I was intrigued by the framed pictures adorning the walls of his cave, all of them clearly the work of a single artist and one whose work had been well represented in the Museum of Fantiquites.

"These are superb!" I enthused, "Who drew them?"

"Someone who's no longer with us," replied the Shaper, wistfully, "though his spirit suffuses this land. He was a little man with a big heart and he left his mark on all of us who were privileged to know him." Turning to me, he managed a small smile and said: "What do you say to a final drink before bed?"

I said yes, of course.

I woke early the following morning, but not before the Shaper, who was already firing up his forge.

"Morning," I called, rubbing the sleep from my eyes, "Where's Jofanne?"

“Gone. She set off soon after dawn.” I was crestfallen.

“But ... I thought we were going to travel the rest of the way together.”

“She’s looking for the Enchanted Duplicator so that she can publish the Perfect Fanzine. That’s a search that she has to make by herself, but there’s every chance you’ll meet our young friend again one day. Now it’s time for you to be on your way also. I sense that your journey through Fandom, this one at any rate, is almost done. You’re very near to the end of your quest, but before you get there I’m sure there’s one more person you need to meet. Some of us used to call him Ghod, but these days we think of him as the Sage. Yes, I’m certain the two of you will meet. Now be off with you.”

I thanked him for his hospitality and bid him farewell. Soon the Shaper and his cave were far behind me, and only the distant sound of his hammering remained.



## .XIII.

I stopped at the summit of the pass and gasped at the scene before me. It was absurdly beautiful, the Tower of Trufandom rising out of the grassy parkland and soaring into the sky, bathed in sunlight.

“A wonderful sight, isn’t it?” said a man whose arrival I hadn’t noticed, so enraptured had I been, “Even after all these years it never fails to move me.”

The newcomer was tall and grey-haired. He carried a staff, though he didn’t appear to need it for support, and his steely eyes – which twinkled with amusement – suggested a fierce intelligence harnessed by a kindly nature.

“You must be the Sage,” I said, making a not-too-difficult deduction.

“I’ve sometimes been called that, yes, and many other things as well. I’ve been expecting you for a while, and it’s good to finally meet you. I imagine you have some questions for me.”

“I certainly do!” I replied, and launched into an account of all I had seen and experienced on my journey so far. “So who,” I asked on finishing my tale, “was the woman in the leather and mirrorshades? This might sound weird, but I think she was the Spirit of Fandom.”

“That’s right. After reading *The Enchanted Duplicator* you were expecting her to look like a fairy, complete with wand, but the Spirit of Fandom comes to each of us in a different form. How she appears to us is less important than recognising her for what she is and allowing her into our hearts.”

“In the short time we were together I was beginning to allow Jofanne into my heart, but she left to continue her quest without me.”

“She had to. The secret of the Enchanted Duplicator is one that each of us has to discover for themselves, and it’s a discovery that each of us makes alone. No two fans ever follow the same path through fandom, anyway. You can’t have failed to notice that your own has been considerably different to that described in *The Enchanted Duplicator*, and Jofanne’s will have been different to both. Which is not to say that we don’t all meet people on our journeys who become good friends, and that we will travel the same path together for much of the way.”

“I’m still not sure why I had to make this trek.”

“There are things to be learned from any experience. You consider yourself an experienced fan, and you are, yet it was a Neofan, Jofanne, who got you out of trouble at the Torrent of Overinking and at the mall. Beyond reminding us that we need Neofans, is the less obvious lesson that however experienced we may think we are they can still have things to teach us. *This* has been what your journey has been all about: learning from your encounters and applying those lessons when you leave us and return to fanspace. You were brought here because you were about to do something that would have plunged all Fandom into war.”

“Is Fandom so important that I shouldn’t?”

“There are those who leave Fandom soon after getting here because it wasn’t what they expected or what they were looking for, or because it didn’t share their high opinions of themselves. But for those of us who stay, for those of us who found what we looking for here: yes, Fandom *is* that important. For all that we’re often accused of escapism, Fandom is part of the ‘real’ world, and as ephemeral, irrelevant, and totally vital as any other. Ultimately, only you can decide how important Fandom is to you. I’m often asked what the secret of fandom is, which is an easy question to answer. The secret of Fandom is love. Most of its greatest works have been produced during periods of loving harmony, and it is always these that we remember most fondly. Yet such harmony is fragile and easily destroyed. To be a cynic and a wrecker is easy and requires little talent. It’s something that those who have any feeling at all for Fandom should seek at all costs to avoid becoming.”

“How did you get so wise?” I asked, smiling ruefully. “Did it come with age?”

“I think of it more as common sense than wisdom, not that age is any guarantee of wisdom, anyway. All too often a young fool grows into an old fool.”

We were joined at that moment by the Spirit of Fandom, still resplendent in her mirrorshades and leather. Simultaneously, a golden radiance burst from the top of the Tower of Trufandom and briefly bathed all of Fandom in its glow.

“It looks like Jofanne has just learned one of the eternal truths of Fandom,” observed the Spirit, “that the Enchanted Duplicator is the one with a True Fan at the handle. Thus does Fandom continue; thus is Fandom renewed.”

“Not that it has, literally, to be a duplicator any more, of course,” observed the Sage. “The Perfect Fanzine could even be produced by a True Fan on old Zerrock’s copier. The means isn’t important, only the spirit behind it.”

“As for you,” said the Spirit of Fandom, placing her hand on my brow, “I think you’ve experienced much to think on in the days ahead.”

The Spirit then withdrew her hand, and as she did so I felt as if an oppressive weight was being lifted from me. In her hand was a dark green jewel, which she hung next to the others on her belt.

“What *is* that?” I asked.

“Jade,” she replied. “It eventually builds up on even the strongest sense of wonder, and only a journey of discovery such as you’ve just made can loosen it enough for me to remove it. It’ll build up again, I’m afraid, but for now you’re free of it.”

Indeed I was, and I felt a profound sense of liberation as I gazed at everything about me through new eyes. I loved this land, and wished I could stay, but I knew my time here was nearly over, as the Spirit confirmed.

“Your journey is now done,” she said, “and it’s time for you to leave.”

“So how do we do this? Are you going to wave your wand?”

“Wand? What wand?”

With that she snapped her fingers ... and I was back in fanspace! According to the glowing display near the periphery of my field of view, I had been gone less than a minute.

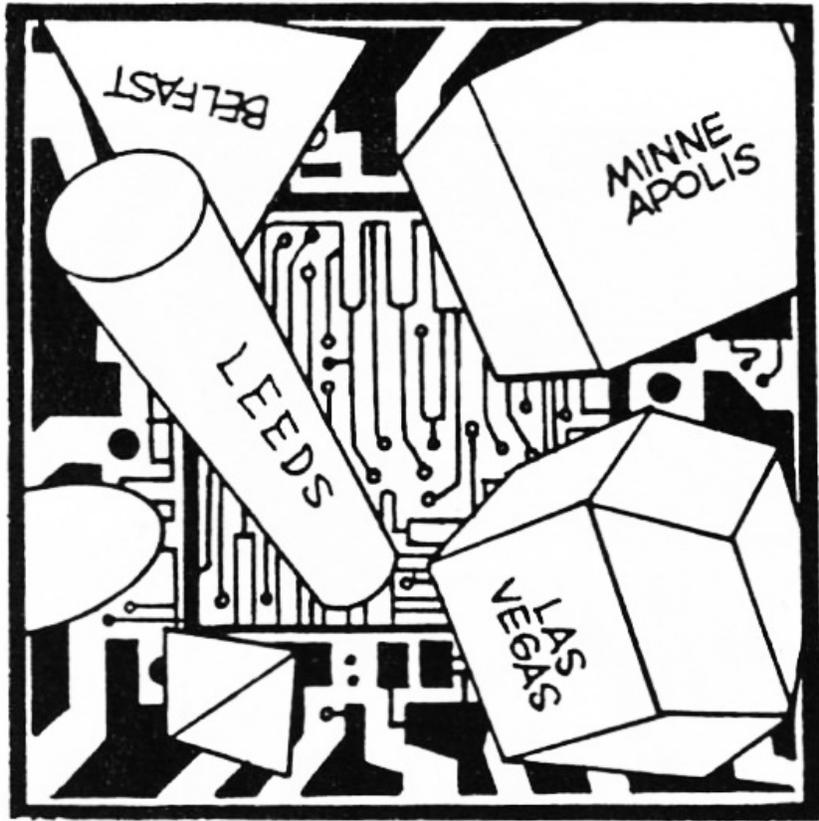


## .XIV.

The almost unrecognisable fanspace analogue of my friend is where I remember it, the title of the file I prepared in order to cut through that accretion of compacted assumptions and false data still before me in blazing letters, awaiting only the final hand pass that will launch it into the zinestream. One hand pass. Such a small action for the apocalyptic reaction it will almost certainly cause. Before my unexpected detour through that other analogue of fandom, the one depicted in *The Enchanted Duplicator*, I had been prepared to accept that reaction and to plunge all of fandom into war, but now I am not so sure. That my friend has been wronged I have no doubt, nor that this is a point of principle that I have to take a stand on, but perhaps there is a better, less damaging way of doing so that will be equally effective.

I review my pilgrimage to the Tower of Trufandom, which I never *quite* reached, noting that in this instance it really had been more important to travel than to arrive. For all that I had learned and rediscovered along the way, I realise there was one lesson that had been repeated time and again. And then I know with total certainty what my approach should be. In realspace I make the “erase” pass, and in fanspace the blazing letters blink out as the file I prepared ceases to exist. Knowing exactly where I should start, I swiftly make the necessary hand passes ... and a huge new structure comes into being in fanspace, bathing everything in the brilliant light shining from its flawless surface. I gaze at the shield and smile.

A new era has begun.



# Afterword

According to my diary, *The Reaffirmation* was written between the 5th and 15th of December 1993, but those dates only cover part of the story. Around the middle of 1993, for a whole variety of reasons, I found myself wanting to write my take on what I liked and disliked about fandom, how we seemed to have lost touch with some of the things that had made fandom fun in the past, and also to pay tribute to the London and Belfast fans of the 1950s whose writings had made researching that decade for my fanhistory zine *Then* such a pleasure. Once upon a time I would've sat down and written a serious polemic that covered all of the above, the sort of "Whither Fandom" piece I used to write ten years ago for the "Notions" section of my fanzine *Epsilon*. Then it struck me that it would be better and more effective to let the writing itself be an example of the sort of thing whose loss I'd been lamenting, that I could say most of what I wanted to in the form of an old-style piece of fan-fiction. The William Gibson-inspired opening section of *The Reaffirmation* comes from a personalzine I wrote in 1989 but never published, and seemed ideal to represent modern fandom. The more I thought about the older fandom I wanted to contrast it with the more I realised that the landscape of *The Enchanted Duplicator* was perfect for my purposes. Sometime in the middle-to-late 1980s, purely as a not-for-publication writing exercise, I'd started composing a "sequel" to *TED*. I never got very far with it but one bit that was written at that time, the section with Zerlocks, made it into *The Reaffirmation*. When it was complete, I sent about eight or nine copies of the manuscript out to various people in Chuck Harris's correspondence circle, most notably Walt Willis, Bob Shaw, Vince Clarke, and Chuck himself (for reasons that I hope will now be obvious) as a sort of Christmas card. Response was overwhelmingly positive, with Chuck and Robert Lichtman in particular urging me publish it for a wider audience. I intended to, too, in my very own brand new fanzine, and I would have if losing my job hadn't put that fanzine on indefinite hold. Which is how it comes to appear in this prestigious zine [*Blat* #4], and with great Dan Steffan illustrations, as well, If reading it dislodges the jade on one or two senses of wonder then writing it was worthwhile. And since I didn't quite manage to cover all the things I wanted to, there may very well be a sequel one day....

*Rob Hansen, 1994*

For those who didn't make the connection: the Keeper was Vince Clarke, Profan was Bob Shaw, the Shaper was Chuck Harris, and Walt Willis – who else? – was of course the Sage. Profan mentions “another who also sometimes goes by the name of Profan”. That was James White. The “little man with a big heart” referred to by the Shaper was Arthur Thomson. At the time this was written he had recently died. Now, sadly, they all have.

*Rob Hansen, 2016*

## **The End**

This free ebook version of *The Reaffirmation* is exclusive to the unofficial TAFF website at [taff.org.uk](http://taff.org.uk). If you enjoy reading it, a donation to TAFF is a fine way to express your appreciation.

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