

Opuntia

14



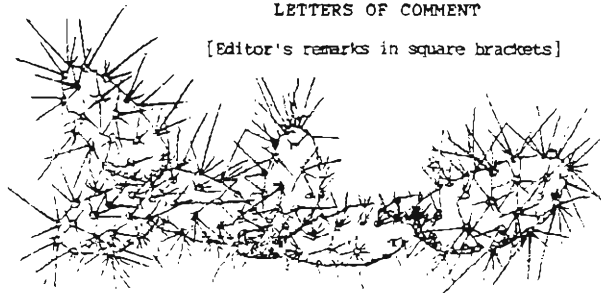
OPUNTIA is published irregularly by Dale Speirs, Box 6830, Calgary, Alberta, Canada, T2P 2E7. It is available for \$2 cash, trade for your zine, or letter of comment.

ART CREDIT: The cover depicts Opuntia humifusa, from the 1929 STANDARD CYCLOPEDIA OF HORTICULTURE by L.H. Bailey, artist unknown.

SEEN IN THE AQUARIUM LITERATURE was the following extract from the January 1993 issue of the HAMILTON AND DISTRICT AQUARIUM SOCIETY MONTHLY BULLETIN (snappy title, eh?) The writer is discussing an aquarium show, and after talking about the setup, goes on to say ...

"Then there was the fun of hauling around Mike Bryce's pump. This thing had wheels, cylinders, hoses, gear shifts, warp drive. It was an impressive piece of machinery and efficient. But moving it could be a pain at times. But it did its job. Unlike the HAMILTON SPECTATOR. I got the feeling they sent a reporter who really didn't want to be there. The gist of the article seemed to be whining about the \$2 admission price and not much else. Like they missed the forest for the trees. Myself, I've learned not to expect too much from the press. I remember one columnist, sent to cover a Star Trek convention in Toronto, gave her article the title "Nerds Are People Too". Seems the columnist (a well known one) had never even seen an episode of Star Trek and didn't understand the interest that other people have in it, the kind that has made it a cultural institution. What she didn't understand (or want to) she made fun of, regardless of whose feelings got hurt."

[Editor's remarks in square brackets]



FROM: Chester Cuthbert
1104 Mulvey Avenue
Winnipeg, Manitoba R3M 1J5

1993-6-8

I knew from having assisted preparation of the second edition of Bleiler that many Canadian books were unknown to bibliographers. This suggested that a useful project might be the compilation of a list of fantasy and science fiction books by Canadians. I undertook this by reading as many Canadian books as I felt might contain fantasy elements or short stories. Early in 1968 I submitted to the WINNIPEG FREE PRESS an article covering my findings that of about 6000 Canadian fiction books, 200 were in this category. Accepted but never published, this article was likely the first attempt to provide information.

Imagine my surprise when John Robert Colombo wrote me on May 10, 1978, to tell me that CDN SF&F would be published in the spring of 1979. He had learned from Judith Merrill that I already had notes on over 500 books. He suggested a publisher for mine, but I told him it was not nearly ready.

[continued next page]

When his and his collaborators' was published, I realized that their expertise and the extent of their research was beyond my capability, so when John Bell sent me (on June 16, 1980) a 61-page draft of the additions which would form the second edition of the bibliography, tentatively entitled NORTHERN VISIONS, I checked it against my notes and sent him twelve pages of further additions. I have not heard from Bell since I wrote him on February 5, 1984, so having offered and given all the information I could, I dropped the matter. Perhaps someone has recent information of Bell?

Lo and behold! On May 3, 1993, Allan Weiss and Hugh Spencer, co-curators of Lord Cultural Resources Planning and Management Inc., (164 Davenport Road, Toronto, MSR 1J2) notified me that the National Library had appointed them in January to produce catalogues of the Canadian fantastic fiction holdings of the National Library in Ottawa and the Merrill Collection of Speculative Fiction in Toronto, including a bibliography of all known works, both book length and short fiction, in that genre. I replied that they should get in touch with Bell, and that I could assist them little because recent expansion of the field was barely known by me.

Since I have read nothing of this important project from the few Canadian fanzines I receive, I suspect that most fans are, like me, ignorant of academic and literary work in the fantasy field. Anyone interested in sharing information would likely be welcomed by Weiss and Spencer, so their address is given above.

FROM: John Mansfield 1993-6-9
321 Portage Avenue
Winnipeg, Manitoba R3B 2B9

I attended that 1980 Falcon 3 dinner where the Canadian SF&F awards started. This past Convention, again in Nova Scotia, I was toastmaster, and gave Bob Atkinson his due

for starting these things.

Dave Panchyk's article on Sask fandom is interesting. I note his mention that Combine "got a number of Aurora votes" instead of stating that it won as the best con in all of Canada in 1990. I'd rather believe his words at his acceptance speech. His winning is one reason why Canadian fans cannot take the awards seriously.

FROM: Ned Brooks 1993-6-12
713 Paul Street
Newport News, Virginia 23605

The idea that an economy can thrive on the production of useless commodities is probably correct in the short term, but eventually there would be adverse effects from the depletion of resources and the pollution of the environment. What we need to know is how to achieve an economy that produces more or less the right amount of useful stuff with full employment and without depletion of irreplaceable resources or pollution of the environment.

Robert Runté is probably quite right about the organization of SF conventions, though my own experience has been only on the receiving end of these efforts. The New Orleans Worldcon of 1988 is said to have been the worst-organized of recent years, but I was there and had a fine time. The latest effort in Orlando was very well organized from the standpoint of schedule, but the movie room was uselessly bad in projection and sound quality, and the Orlando area is of interest only for those who want to go to Disney World, whereas New Orleans is a real place with bookstores and such.

FROM: Harry Warner Jr.
423 Summit Avenue
Hagerstown, Maryland 21740

1993-6-19

FROM: Don Fitch
3908 Frijo
Covina, California 91722

1993-6-12

I dislike regimentation and bureaucracy in fandom just as much as Robert Runté does. But after my 55 years in fandom, and all the things I've read about the problems this and that con has suffered over the years, and all the descriptions I've seen published about experiences of certain con committee members, I wouldn't want to take charge of a con and depend on asking questions to get the knowhow I lack. There would be too much danger that I'd forget to ask certain important questions, or I would misunderstand the viva voce advice I heard. So I think it would be a good idea to publish some sort of manual on the topic. There is no way fans could be required to study it; it would just be there if needed. I certainly wouldn't know the basics of what to demand from the host hotel in its contract to stage the con, or what Star Trek-related program items can be provided without incurring the wrath of Paramount's attorneys, or whether certain amounts must be budgeted for taxes, or where the con risks trouble with the musicians' union. It doesn't matter too much if a fan makes mistakes when publishing a fanzine or forming a local fan club, but running a con brings much greater interaction with the mundane world than fanzines or clubs.

If you use stuff out in space to feed a matter transmitter, I wonder how the ecology groups would react to raiding a black hole? Those organizations would find it difficult to show with photographs the beauty you were spoiling, or list the species whose very existence your meddling is threatening.

[Actually, what would be interesting is seeing what might happen if a black hole was put through the device. Would it be duplicated? Destroy the device?]

Dave Panchyk's piece on Saskatchewan fanhistory, though brief, is interesting and potentially useful. For what it's worth, of the 17 fans listed there as of ca 1953, none of the names rings a bell with me, which might mean that they weren't active in U.S./fanzine/apa fandom as of ca 1960. Of course it might also mean either that I didn't chance to encounter their zines or that I've forgotten them.

[None of those 1953-era fans are listed in the Canadian Fanzine Bibliography.]

Aside from a handful of incidents in which the concom departed so far from precedent as to do things like neglecting to sign a contract with the hotel, convention disasters rarely affect the people out front, the ordinary attendees. They tend to affect the concom almost exclusively, in their pocketbooks, in nervous breakdowns, and by producing longterm or permanent gaffiation (and sometimes by dissuading people from bidding for future cons).

I find particularly disturbing Robert's suggestion that "the principles of sound business management" need not be followed. I guess it's okay if the concom is willing to sink thousands of dollars of their own money into it, but I'm one fan who is disinclined to help pay for what I consider blatant stupidity, the action of not taking stock well ahead of the opening day and calculating shrewdly to make sure they're not committing themselves to spending more money than they can reasonably expect to take in.

The statement that "pre-registration will triple, or at least double at the door" is a bit confusing since it would appear to depend on just when pre-registration is

[continued next page]

cut off (currently, this seems generally to be a month or so in advance), but the axiom I'm familiar with is that walk-in memberships are usually about 20% of the total, a big discrepancy. Few situations are similar; a con at a big-city downtown hotel may not get many more walk-ins than at a rural resort venue, or it may get a vast number if there is newspaper and television advance coverage. Such publicity does increase the number of heads and swells the coffers, but this doesn't take into account what's inside those heads ... and that's a big part of the atmosphere and non-materialistic success of a convention. The conventional (as it were) wisdom I used to hear was that it's smart to be breaking even when the doors open; walk-in memberships are the profit, and if there are so many that this would be embarrassing, send the van out for another load of soft drinks and munchies for the Con-suite and/or donate them to the various Open Parties.

Perhaps because Canadian conventions are rarely large enough to have this problem, both Garth and Robert seem to be ignoring the factor of Order of Magnitude, the idea that at a certain number of attendees (variously fixed, but usually between four and five hundred) it becomes necessary to move to a different class of hotel, much larger and more expensive. The people attending have more diverse interests, so programming to keep them entertained becomes more complex, additional Guests and celebrities need to be paid for, both membership fees and attendance need to be increased to cover the cost, and suddenly it's a very different sort of convention. Conversely, as Robert points out, some big conventions are turning small, often leaving the concom at sea and sometimes in debt. Of course it's easy to read the signs afterwards.

This isn't meant to put down Robert's numerous excellent ideas concerning con-running, but I do feel strongly that a strict sense of fiscal responsibility is necessary and important to those of us who enjoy attending conventions. I also feel that rigidity in this area doesn't necessarily have anything to do with flexibility and innovative-

ness in other aspects of the convention, aside, possibly, from helping assure that there'll be a con next year for the exercise of more innovations. Perhaps the best point Robert makes is that "It's been tried, and doesn't work" should be used with caution. There are so many variables that the main reasons it didn't work need to be known. Conversely, it's helpful to have some idea why something else did work; maybe those factors won't be present at your convention. Written documentation can be very helpful (even though some of the most useful data rarely is kept track of, things like how many of what kinds of soft drinks were bought and which ran out early) because oral tradition and experience, important though they are, tend to be more limited.

A lot depends on the particular concom; if it has one strong personality who imposes a lot of impractical whims, the convention is bound to have problems. Some concoms are composed of people who need to plan everything carefully in advance, and some of the type who are great at improvising and solving problems well when they arise. Very helpful to a concom is the presence of a potent Reality Checker to tighten the reins when the concom starts to develop runaway grandiosity or unrealistic expectations.

It's beginning to dawn on me that fandom might not need clubs. Fanzines serve much the same purpose in SF fandom, though conventions seem to be produced mostly by members of one club or another. Then again, there are those people who are basically club fans, those who just like to get together fairly often and socialize.

[This seems to be the case in Calgary, where most such activity is either fanzine (myself) or a club that is in existence to produce a con, not primarily as a club per se.]

FROM: Andrew Murdoch 1993-6-23
 2563 Heron Street
 Victoria, British Columbia V8R 5Z9

My own pet theory of economics is that the current concept of working to make a living is outdated. This train of thought is only a holdover from the primitive times when a person had to build or find their own house, make their own tools and clothes, and grow, gather, or kill their own food, or they suffered and died. I believe that with today's level of technology everyone on Earth can be fed, housed, and healthy without any form of money whatsoever. Until I've figured out how though, I believe in everyone else's idea of a guaranteed income. Once the cost of living is no longer a factor, and people have more time to devote to their education or other pursuits, we'd likely have large numbers of people eager to contribute to whatever field they've decided to study. I'm certain we'd have a lot more artists, writers, poets, inventors, and amateur zine publishers. Guaranteed places to live and food to eat would mean a dip in the crime rate among the desperately destitute.

[The problem is, of course, how do we make the transition to an economy of abundance and still have someone run the sewer plants or patch the potholes. Unfortunately it seems that the computer age is doing the exact opposite of what was predicted; working hours are longer now instead of providing more leisure time. Primitive hunting/gathering societies have more leisure time than we do; hunters only work a few hours a day.]

Everything I've seen on Star Trek indicates that those matter duplicators don't use any raw materials at all, a matter of E equals em see squared. My guess is that the replicators aboard the Enterprise take up at least as much of the antimatter reactor's energy as the warp drive.

FROM: Joseph Major 1993-6-10
 4701 Taylor Boulevard #8
 Louisville, Kentucky 40215-2343

At least as I understand it, the slacking-off in birth-rates in the industrialized countries is due to the demographic transition. In an agricultural economy, children can become net producers at quite a young age. A three-year-old can toddle along the fields with a can and stick, knocking the bugs off. This holds true in the early industrial age, but less so. Child labour could be abolished because it became basically uneconomical. But as industrialization progressed, children became net consumers. So smaller families were economically better. For example, while my great-grandparents Major had ten children in the 1870s-1890s, my grandparents Major had only three, in the 1910s. However, it should be noted that if children do not become a financial burden, this disincentive vanishes. People who note this are often stigmatized.

[I've noted this in my own family, regardless of what country each generation lived in. My Finnish and Scots great-grandparents had ten to twelve children, the next generation had four to six kids, and my parent's generation of relatives had two or three. In my own generation, only a few of my cousins have had children, and they only one or two.]

I ALSO HEARD FROM: Ben Schilling, Harry Andruschak, C. F. Kennedy, Buck Coulson, Alexander Vasilkovsky, Boris Sidyuk

CHANGE OF ADDRESS: Henry Welch, 1525 - 16 Ave., Grafton, Wisconsin 53024-2017.

Leah Zeldes Smith, 410 West Willow Road, Prospect Heights, Illinois 60070-1250

Until recently, Marlborough Inn was the site of most Calgary stamp shows, which have now shifted to cultural centres (stamp collectors don't drink enough to interest hotels; give them a wedding reception or Shriners anyway.). Now ConVersion is there. Easier parking and more space. But it felt strange to go into a ballroom after all these years and not see philatelic exhibit frames. Mind you, the dealer bourses look much of a muchness.

ConVersion 10 was held July 16 to 18, 1993, on the last weekend of the Calgary Stampede, the world's largest rodeo. The weather has been wet and rainy this summer, which has affected the Stampede but shouldn't matter to SFers holed up in their own universe inside a hotel.

The opening ceremonies on Friday were brief. GoHs were L. Sprague and Catherine De Camp. The moderator mispronounced Sprague's name. L.S. then took over the microphone and gave a hilarious lesson in the history of the De Camp family, traced back to France of the 1600s. He said Sprague rhymes with 'plague'; De Camp as in 'decamp', to run away, except in francophone areas such as Québec where he pronounces it with the original 'de comp'. Canadian GoH Dave Duncan did his impersonation of Sir Winston Churchill and Toastmaster Ed Bryant reminded the moderator that Ed rhymes with Ted.

I was surprised to see Bradley Harris at the registration table. We know each other from the Calgary Philatelic Society, but I didn't realize he was on the concom. Even though we live in the same city, we usually see each other only at SF cons or stamp shows. He is a lawyer who will be moving to Memphis, Tennessee to do an M.A. in fiction writing and screenplays. Quite a career change from defending the juvenile delinquents on Templegreen Drive. (There are no slums in Calgary, but the Temple district is a low-income neighbourhood where, as Harris is fond of

saying, a strafing run by the Canadian Armed Forces would solve the crime problem in our city.)

The first panel I attended was a report by John Mansfield on ConAdian, the 1994 Worldcon. He showed us the Hugo rockets and denied there was any phallic significance in the trophy. He also held up a copy of the hotel contract, which is one centimetre thick. All the details they can think of are specified, such as three tons of ice per day for parties. Hotel room details will be available in spring 1994. They checked such things as distance between hotels; a Winnipeg constable walked the distance in three minutes. Mansfield talked about such differences between a regular con and a Worldcon like keeping the bid committee together for five years. Compare with an ordinary concom that is expected to last only one year. The Winnipeg in '94 bid committee spent \$50,000 on the bid.

The other panel I attended on Friday night was a humorous parody of an Oxford Union debate resolved on a premise that SF&F is not/is literature. Speaking for the affirmative was Janis Svilpis, an English literature professor, while Bradley Harris contended for the proposition that SF is not literature. Harris said he felt like the crewman extra that beamed down with Captain Kirk's landing party. You know the one, the guy you never saw before who will be dead before the opening credits. Svilpis opened the debate but I think he fudged the issue, going from "Is SF good literature?" to "What is good?". A bestseller? Shakespeare was a commercial playwright in it for the money, an Elizabethian version of Neil Simon. His contemporary John Webster wrote plays of equal or better quality but is now forgotten. Harris said SF is to literature like country and western is to music, riddled with cliché and rehashing the storylines taken from the mainstream literature. SF cannot be judged by its own standards; it must be judged by the same standards as all other literature. In reply, Svilpis said these standards

vary with time. He also admitted a taste for C&W and said he had been a member of the "Draft Willie Nelson For President" campaign. Harris concluded that SFers read it just like romance or western readers; they want the same stories over and over again.

The only panel I attended on Saturday was L. Sprague De Camp on time travelling, not the fictional kind but the time travelling done by simple longevity. De Camp was born in the Edwardian era, and he spoke on the differences between his childhood world circa WW1 and today. De Camp has an excellent booming voice that belies his years. He didn't dwell too much on technological change such as the photocopier and modern medicine, but rather culture shock and behavioural changes. He noted the world is becoming more uniform, reducing culture shock. But some examples still exist. Americans are horrified at oriental cultures that eat dog meat; he told of restaurants where diners can pick out a nice puppy, tail wagging friendly, and have it prepared on the spot as a meal. We are shocked at this but do the same thing to lobsters and fish, picking them out of an aquarium, so the orientals find our dismay about the dogs hard to understand. De Camp told a story about a cannibal who asked a European how they could eat so many bodies in WW2 and was horrified to learn that all those people were killed for no apparent reason. Culture shock works both ways.

De Camp mentioned culture shock can occur between generations. In his younger days, divorce was met with a wall of silence; today family reunions will have ex-in-laws in attendance and children who never see each other on weekends because they are all off visiting one of their parents. Today we have serial polygamy. There are fewer class barriers today, and racism is nothing compared with what existed in De Camp's boyhood. De Camp lamented that one is no longer allowed to tell ethnic jokes unless a member of that ethnos. Asimov could tell Jewish jokes and Ben Bova could make fun of Italians, but De Camp couldn't find any good WASP jokes for himself.

In Edwardian times, men walked up stairs ahead of the ladies so they couldn't sneak a peek at a shapely ankle. Screen doors were not found in houses; instead kitchen servants placed domes over the plates to keep insects off. Today anglophones lack a term to distinguish intimates from business or casual friends; we call most people by their first names. We have no you or ye terms like German or French. De Camp felt that beyond a certain point equality and liberty oppose each other, since too much equality holds back merit. And in a miscellaneous note, he said the USA is edging into the metric system one millimetre at a time, opposed by people who didn't like learning in school and don't want to learn in later life.

Saturday afternoon I was in the hotel café for lunch with Paula Johanson, Robert Runté, and John Mansfield. Mansfield filled us in on many details of the 1994 Worldcon; there are all kinds of fascinating things being planned.

The GoH speeches were at Sunday midday, with Ed Bryant presiding as Toastmaster. I've seen him in this job at a previous con, and he is always very humorous. Any concomm looking for a Toastmaster should consider him. There was a rather unusual arrangement of the GoHs, who were arranged on the stage in two tiers. The De Camps sat on the lower tier and the minor GoHs were arrayed on a level behind and above the De Camps, what Bryant referred to as the peanut gallery.

Bryant started off by establishing his connections to Calgary. He once travelled with his uncle, who was a rodeo cowboy and had competed in the Calgary Stampede years ago. Other than that, Bryant said the only other connection he could make with Canada was that he had a distant ancestor who fought in the War of 1812 and once swam across Lake Champlain to deliver a message. Trouble was, the Bryants aren't certain which side he was on.

[continued next page]

Bryant mentioned that he gets his story ideas from close observation of all that goes around him and from newspaper clippings. He brought along a few clippings and read them to us, such as the one about a man who rushed into a hospital emergency ward. He was carrying a plastic bag containing the mortal remains of a racoon, and wanted to know, purely hypothetically, if one could get AIDS from a dead racoon after [as Bryant put it politely] sexual congress. When he ran out of newspaper clippings, Bryant went on to selected anecdotes about his life, such as the time he was travelling to Europe and, not sure if they had laundry detergent, put some powdered soap in a plastic bag. Fortunately he was never detained; either the Customs inspectors didn't even open his luggage or they checked it with dogsniffers.

From there he got onto innovations in GoH types, such as Dead Guest of Honour. The advantage of a Dead GoH is that while he/she may not contribute anything to the con, the expense of airfare and room is avoided, not to mention running up a bar tab. [I like the idea the B.C. fans had for one of their cons: Secret GoH.] This idea naturally took Bryant to the subject of the Royal Tyrrell Museum of Palaeontology, a half-day drive from Calgary in Drumheller. This is the world's largest fossil museum, and is doing land-office business as a result of the movie JURASSIC PARK. Bryant noticed there were no lawyers evident when he was at the museum. It should be noted though that Alberta's dinosaurs are Cretaceous, not Jurassic. T. rex is found here but vegetarian hadrosaurs predominate.

Dave Duncan, Canadian GoH, stepped down briefly from the peanut gallery and said he was honoured sharing half a platform with the De Camps. He gave a brief account of how he went from respectable geologist to freelance writer (basically Calgary's economy fell dead to the ground in 1982 when the oil boom collapsed, and Duncan was one of the victims).

The De Camps' speeches were autobiographical. Sprague mentioned that he was once asked why he didn't use a pen name; he replied that with a name like his, he did not need one.

That afternoon I sat in on the CUFF auction, run by John Mansfield. This is the Canadian Unity Fan Fund, and all proceeds from the donated items went to it.

And after that, the Closing Ceremonies. The preliminary Treasurer's report was that the con was in the black. About 550 people attended.

Both Calgary newspapers covered ConVersion, and both did it in the time-honoured traditions of the news media everywhere. Both featured photos of a Trekkie in costume, gushed about the SCA and the gamers. It could have been worse; one of the panels was on Satanism but the press missed that story. The hotel also hosted Stampede tourists, a wedding reception, and a group of British and German soldiers (who did most appreciate the concom member who walked about in a micromini all weekend).

The Art Show was the usual clichéd stuff. Dinosaurs are a hot item this year because of JURASSIC PARK. In the dealer bourse, most tables were Trek material. The Costume Bacchanal was much like the Art Show.

When I wasn't about dining with friends or at panels, I was in one of the three video rooms watching an old B- or C-movie. A good way to fill in a spare half-hour. Criticizing these movies is unfair; they're so bad it is like killing animals in a slaughterhouse. In both, the task is easy and there is no sport to it. I shall, nevertheless, pick a few. Such as DR. MORDRIED, who, in the brief scene I stayed for, battled an evil wizard in a palaeontology museum. The wizard animated a dinosaur skeleton (T. rex, what else?) to attack Dr. Mordried. Two security museum guards rushed to the

rescue by firing their revolvers at the stop-motion dinosaur, apparently in the belief that six rounds each would halt a skeleton. Naturally they got stomped on. What can you expect for \$6 an hour? I am puzzled as to why such a museum would have armed guards anyway. I know the Americans have a violent culture but one would think that not too many fossils are stolen in daring daylight raids by gangs of armed men.

Then there was the Japanese movie RODAN, considered one of the best examples of the urban renewal genre. Down in a coal mine, Japanese miners have been a bit too productive, liberating oversized beasties, such as a supersonic Pteranodon (two of them actually). An impressive feat of evolution sadly since lost to us, as these critters flap their wings a couple of times, reach high speed within about 500 metres after takeoff, and thereafter travel at supersonic speed with wings held rigid. One scientist is not quite up on either radiocarbon dating or palaeobology, as he informs us that C^{14} -dating shows the Pteranodon eggshell fragment is more than 20,000,000 years old. This is about 45,000,000 years after dinosaurs died out, so we could have said this without leaving our armchairs. Not to mention C^{14} -dating is only good back about 50,000 or so years. In the Guess-Who's-Next category, a hotel doorman warns a honeymoon couple "Be careful! The volcano could be dangerous.", to which he receives the cheery reply "Don't worry, we'll be careful.". And as a posse of miners enter the mine, an accompanying police inspector wonders if the missing man is still in the mine. A miner rather disrespectfully tells the inspector "Of course, you idiot, there's only one exit."

The video room ran a number of OUTER LIMITS episodes. Now I catch movies at the theatres but not owning a television set, I only see these things at cons. So I sat down in a chair to watch the episode "Cold Hands, Warm Heart", and nearly fell out of it again when I saw it starred William Shatner, who played an astronaut in charge of Project Vulcan. Thus alerted, I kept close watch and was

well rewarded by Trekkish tidbits pre-Trek, such as him telling his wife she was "the best of all possible worlds", and the purpose of his life was to lead the way "to new life, new worlds".

I mentioned earlier that the con shared the hotel with a wedding reception. The latter had a banquet room decorated with blue or white helium-filled balloons. A number of these balloons found their way into an adjacent video room. Thus was begun the sport of balloon volleyball. It started accidentally when someone entering the room batted a balloon out of his chair. It hit someone else, who batted it back across the room, and moments later a dozen balloons were in motion. We all sat in our chairs; no leaping up to get in a good spike. No formal teams, just twenty or so players on a side, trying to keep all the balloons on the other side of the room. It beat watching the video, of yet another silly woman screaming her head off as a rubber suit menaces her.

And so ended ConVersion 10. I rate it a good one all told. Next year's ConVersion has Frederik Pohl and Marion Zimmer Bradley as GoHs. (And a safe prediction: next year the newspapers will show a Trekkie, gush about the SCA, and quote a gamer, while ignoring the GoHs.) Until September 30, 1993, membership in ConVersion 11 will be \$25 from Box 1088, Calgary, Alberta, T2P 2K9.

CONADIAN EH?

Just a quick reminder that memberships in the 1994 Worldcon are C\$95/US\$85 attending and C\$30/\$25 supporting until September 30, 1993. Write to ConAdian, Box 2430, Winnipeg, Manitoba R3C 4A7.

THE CANADIAN SF & FANTASY AWARDS

(Part II)

by Garth Spencer

Getting Involved

My recollection of events is that I started out, even before I began publishing *The Maple Leaf Rag* in 1983, trying to find out what I could about the Canadian SF & Fantasy Awards. This began to seem like pulling teeth.

After a while, I began to take on the Canadian-nationalist agenda without having thought it through.

By the time I had a preliminary idea of the first five years of the CSFFAs, here is how I wrote about it:

1. In the beginning there was John Bell, George Allanson, Sheldon Goldman, and Bob Atkinson; 2. and the Spirit of National Identity moved upon the faces of these fans. 3. And they said: Go to, let us make unto ourselves a Canadian SF and Fantasy Award, and let us award it annually. And behold, it was so. And Halcon 3 came to pass, whereat Spider Robinson gave the CSFFA to A.E. van Vogt for lifetime achievements; and the CSFFA and the con *were* the first Convention. 4a. And they said, Go to, let us rotate the Conventions. And behold, it was so ...

4b. and in 1981, Susan Wood won the CSFFA for her lifetime contributions, and it *was* good. And the CSFFA and V-Con 9 were the second Convention.

5. And in 1982, Phyllis Gotlieb won the CSFFA for lifetime contributions, even also for *Judgment of Dragons*; and the CSFFA and NonCon 5 *were* the third Convention.

6. And about 1982 they came who said, Look here, mates, A.E. van Vogt moved to the States in the 40s, and Spider Robinson moved here from the States; what *are* our criteria for giving the CSFFA?

7. And verily, none knoweth what became of the fourth Convention, forbye.

8. And the Spirit of Recession rose up in early 1983 and smote *New Canadian Fandom*, even with a great smiting; and Canadian fans were sundered apart, and knew not one another's fanac.

9. In that year Roscoe raised up the fan who started this silly Rag, and kept asking where are the CSFFAs, until people started answering him for very weariness; 10. and Bob Atkinson spake unto him, saying, Fear not that the CSFFAs have died of attrition, for I say unto you that Halcon 8 will give the CSFFA for some 1984 work, even the 1985 award also.

11. Then was Garth exceeding glad, and thanked Bob, saying Can I get more information?, and it's coming Real Soon Now.

* Here Endeth the Lesson *

("Chapter 12 or Something in the Interminable CSFFA Debates", *Maple Leaf Rag* #12, March 1985)

In summary, up to this point, the CSFFAs were already marked by confusion, conflict, lack of publicity and poor communication. If anything was subsequently cleared up it was only because one individual just happened to take it upon himself to ask for clarification.

How Not to Get Things Done

A member of the Maplecon 5/Convention 4 committee, S.K. Walker, echoes Robert Runté and tells an inside story about the award administration that year:

I don't know who Bob Atkinson and/or John Bell first contacted in Ottawa (in 1980), who apparently claimed to speak for the Maplecon committee; but the information was not passed on to the committee. The first we heard of the very existence of the CSFFA was an announcement in *New Canadian Fandom* that Maplecon 6 was to be Convention. Confusion was added by the fact that we had had to move our con from Oct 82 to Jul 83, missing out a year; so it turned out that it was really Maplecon 5 for which we were assigned the CSFFA; so even when we finally heard about it, we thought it was to be a year later than it was.

We received our first clue to this state of affairs in a letter from Robert Runté in Jan or Feb 83 asking why we hadn't sent out nomination forms. Some correspondence with him finally acquainted us with what Convention and the CSFFA were.

A person who shall remain nameless (I shall even use the neutral pronouns ne, nem, & ner to eliminate all clues to ner identity) volunteered to handle the entire CSFFA business, then went out of communication with us. We trusted nem to carry out ner promise, but began to worry a little when there were no signs of activity on ner part; but we still were unable to get in contact. (This part was probably just bad luck: missed timing. On the

other hand, ne didn't bother to come to meetings or to communicate with the committee, either.) In April, this person phoned a committee member on a different matter, and casually mentioned during the conversation that ne had decided *not* to handle the CSFFA after all! Even at this point ne did not bother to officially resign.

With only three months left, procedures had to be streamlined. We consulted with Robert Runté, who was the only person who had told us anything about Convention and whom we therefore thought represented a national committee. He decided to make up a nomination list (with room for write-ins) and to distribute the ballots, to be sent back to the subcommittee appointed by Maplecon: Jim Rea, Elizabeth Holden, and myself, Sansoucy Walker. The ballots included a section for voting on eligibility for the CSFFA, since this question was now being hotly debated among fans. The choice was "citizens only", "citizens plus residents of one year or more" or "anybody in any way connected with Canada"; and the second option was chosen by an overwhelming majority. ... (Sansoucy K. Walker, "CSFFA Meets Maplecon", *Cause Célèbre*, May 1985, pp. 4-5)

Due to some more failures of communication, there was no Convention in 1984. According to the original rotation plan, this was supposed to be held by Boréal, the francophone SF conference.

It was hoped that Boréal would be able to take the 1984 Award, but no-one could be found who

could make such a commitment four years in advance. It is my understanding that Boréal does most (or all) of its planning just a month or two before each con, rather than throughout the year, as the other cons do. The organization of each Award is a six-month process. ... (Atkinson, 84/85) ... To my great relief, *the voters on the final ballot's poll decide to keep the eligibility rule as originally stated.* We wanted to discuss the issue with NonCon people, especially Runté, but none are in evidence. We did, however, meet with two people who said they were involved with Boréal 84, one of them being Joel Champetier, from LaSalle, Que.

He indicated that he thought that Boréal could take the 1984 Award, which was great news for John and I, since we felt strongly about including the French Canadian side of fandom in the Award. Some Ad Astra people in Toronto were also interested in the Award, but we felt that Boréal should have the first chance.

At the con, I still assumed that the NCF issue with my open letter would be appearing "real soon now" ...

[Jan. 84]: ARGHH!! I hear, through the grapevine, that Boréal 1984 is off! To my knowledge, few Canadians outside Quebec ever get the Boréal literature, so it's not easy to verify this rumour. I hear that Joel is not involved with Boréal anymore (?), but I can't get in touch with him ... (*Ibid.*)

In December Elisabeth Vonarburg wrote heatedly to say that Boreal *was* held, and the concom never *heard*

from the CSFFA organizers, and pointed out that *French-Canadian writers and works did not appear on CSFFA ballots.*

A Wealth of Opinion, A Poverty of Facts

The Jan. 1985 MLR drew together a great many comments on the CSFFAs from a great many people. What did people say when MLR tried to sort out the facts?

Mike Glicksohn wrote (I believe about Nov. 83):

I've often wondered about these Canadian SF Awards and the Convention. I never knew where the con was going to be or who decided on its location, and the only time I can recall getting a ballot for the awards, it was already past the deadline for voting. You are certainly correct in suggesting that a lack of fannish communication was a major problem with the awards/convention, but I've always thought that the other problem was their essential lack of justification. I can see good reasons for awards in France, Britain or Australia; but I've never been able to take seriously the implication that there was any significant difference between U.S. and Canadian science fiction, so the awards always struck me as somewhat silly and superfluous. Still, if they do still exist (along with this mysterious and floating Convention), I'd like to know just who's in charge and how they're run.

Spider Robinson wrote at length to MLR, indicating that he didn't know which cons got to be Conventions, or how, or how arbitrary rule-changes were to be prevented. Robinson outlined a basic representative registered society that could be set up. The immediate problem Robinson recognized was whether, in fact, Canadian SF fans were willing or able to put in the organized effort that this enterprise took.

There were overtures. Lloyd Penney volunteered to act as a CSFFA committee member in charge of mailing; he also suggested a fan award category and a different name. Donna McMahan (chair of the V-Con 13 committee) and Mandy Slater (on behalf of Maplecon) both expressed interest in hosting the CSFFA, or at least bidding for the honour ... and asked what procedure to follow.

Finally Bob Atkinson wrote MLR to say that Halcon 8 (1985) was to bestow the award for works in 1984 and 1983. With this administration, Atkinson wrote, he felt the awards were back on track. The CSFFA nomination ballot listed one Anne Marie Feetham as the CSFFA administrator, and the Halcon SF Society was operating as the *de facto* CSFFA committee.

Bob Atkinson wrote (in MLR 12) that

For the past year we have felt the need for a National CSFFA Committee to properly administer the Award from year to year, without having to depend on a local Con Committee, as was clearly demonstrated by the *absence of the Award in 1984* ... We also feel the need to get a national cross-section

of fans' ideas on the future of the Award to help us in our work. ...

Eileen Kernaghan won the 1983/4 CSFFA at Halcon 8 in 1985, for her novel *The Drowned Lands*. This was (once again) a metal sculpture by Mike Spencer of Nova Scotia.

You Think You're So Smart, Try Doing It Yourself

While editing the *Maple Leaf Rag*, I had spent two years and a lot of postage to find out what had become of these awards. Fran Skene, the chair of V-Con 14, did the smart thing, I guess, which was to get me to coordinate balloting since I had bugged everybody so long about it in the first place.

I wasn't very satisfied with my performance as a ballot administrator; there were too many things I didn't realize I had to ask about. I got \$40 from the V-Con 14/Convention 6 committee, which was an order of magnitude or two too low for the postage and copying that was eventually undertaken. As it was, we got out maybe 200-odd nominating ballots. (Jon Rose of Bakka Books wrote that he could distribute ballots with his *Bakka Bookie Sheet*, if I cared to send him 2000. *Choke*) A friend suggested the Convention might put up posters in bookstores, but V-Con hadn't budgeted for this and I contented myself with running a list of eligible authors and works in MLR. As a means of advertising Canadian SF writers, MLR was not very effective; Practically the only frequent nominees on the voting ballot were William Gibson (whose novel *Neuromancer* was published before the eligibility period), Guy Gavriel Kay ... and myself. (I stepped down as returning officer when I became a

candidate.) The French translation of the ballot received a lot of complaints, and I barely got ballots out to all the Quebec addresses before the deadline (end of April).

The cardinal necessities for holding the awards aren't just all the specific tasks to be done by given deadlines. They seem to be the total time, the total money, and the total personal energy that this project alone absorbed; and I didn't have a gauge of how much to spare for this enterprise.

By this point, Fran Skene was questioning a number of CSFFA policies, and wanted to know what to do about the award for V-Con, so she started CASPERAPA to invite comments.

Anne-Marie Feetham ... would like to see the formation of a National Committee, composed of one or two representatives from each major Canadian con. The members would exchange the views and comments expressed by their own fan communities. The most work, though, would be done each year by the con administering the award. ...

Others in Halifax have suggested that a permanent governing body be set up there to control the award ...

Actually, I'm in favour of there being a governing body of sorts, that would raise money, send regular news releases to such (organs) as *Maple Leaf Rag*, keep track of the rules that this National Committee agrees on, and take on Convention any year no other group is able or willing. ... (CASPERAPA 1, 1985)

One decision Fran made was to initiate a bidding system — the committees of various Canadian conventions can enter competing bids for the honour of holding the award. This is the sort of system by which the World SF Convention, Westercon and some other regionals are run. Fran's attitude was: make the Convention something fans had to work for, in order to drum up participation and support.

This necessitated instituting a Convention Business Meeting for considering bids. The new system was advertised March 10, 1986.

While CASPERAPA was running, it was suggested that four award categories be opened up — French and English, and fan and pro in each language. By the time ballots were formulated, the categories were: English-Canadian SF, fantasy, or nonfiction about them; French-Canadian SF, fantasy, or nonfiction about them; and Fan Achievement Award.

The winners of the 1986 Canadian SF and Fantasy Awards (or "Caspers") were Judith Merril, for lifetime achievement in editing; Daniel Sernine, for his short story "Yadjine et la mort" (in *Dix Nouvelles de Science Fiction Québécoise*, Quinze, 1985); and Garth Spencer, for his editing of *The Maple Leaf Rag*, and "his dedication to Canadian fandom". Runners-up were: Rhea Rose, for her short story "Chronos' Christmas" in *Tesseract*s (Press Porcépic, 1985); Elisabeth Vonarburg, for "La Maison au Bord de la Mer" (*Dix Nouvelles*); and Elisabeth Vonarburg (again) for her various fan activities, including editing *Solaris*, organizing writing workshops, and participating in Boreal, the annual francophone convention in Quebec.

The 1986 Caspers were given at the awards banquet at V-Con 14/Convention 6. Two of the winners were

present, as Judith Merril and Elisabeth Vonarburg were to give readings of their work at the Canada Pavilion at Expo '86. (Artist Guest was Katherine Howes, who prepared the stained-glass frames for this year's Casper Awards.)

The 1987 Convention was chosen at the first Convention Business Meeting: Mike Wallis of Toronto entered the only bid, for Ad Astra (Toronto). Wallis immediately announced that his Convention intended to revive CUFF, the Canadian Unity Fan Fund, in conjunction with the Caspers, and he proposed that the CUFF winner each year should come to the Convention. He also proposed that future Convention bids and CUFF nominations be entered alternately by Western and Eastern fan communities, as divided by the Manitoba/Ontario border.

Some other decisions taken at that meeting formed the basis of the Canadian SF & Fantasy Association constitution: that each Convention hold a business meeting, with the current rules being published in the program book; that CASPERAPA be revived on a regular basis; and so on.

Ad Astra 7/Convention 7 (summer 1987) awarded the CSFFA (English language) to Guy Gavriel Kay for *The Wandering Fire*; (French language) to Elisabeth Vonarburg, for "La carte du tendre" (Aimer); and the Fan Achievement CSFFA, again, to Elisabeth Vonarburg, for contributions to *Solaris* and to English/French fannish communications.

The Ad Astra Convention advertised earlier, and with better distribution, than before. Ballot administrator Lloyd Penney had several thousand names to send ballots to, at

least an order of magnitude greater than the address list I sent ballots to. This committee also sensibly offered \$5 convertible supporting memberships to those who wished to vote, but could not attend.

Yet in several places, such as BCAPA, I voiced criticisms of the lack of communication I received from this concomm. (I had in fact thrown a conniption fit in Mike Wallis' face at V-Con. This was a sign that the struggle to get any information at all and accomplish some reporting was getting too much.) Lloyd Penney responded to my open letter to the committee, saying that my comments were uninformed, misinformed and unfair, I didn't know what was going on, and where was my right to criticize, as I hadn't attended?

As I was far from the only person who could not attend, and depended entirely on correspondence to participate in Convention proceedings, I was not impressed.

(to be continued)

Garth may be reached at Box 15335, Vancouver, V6B 5B1.