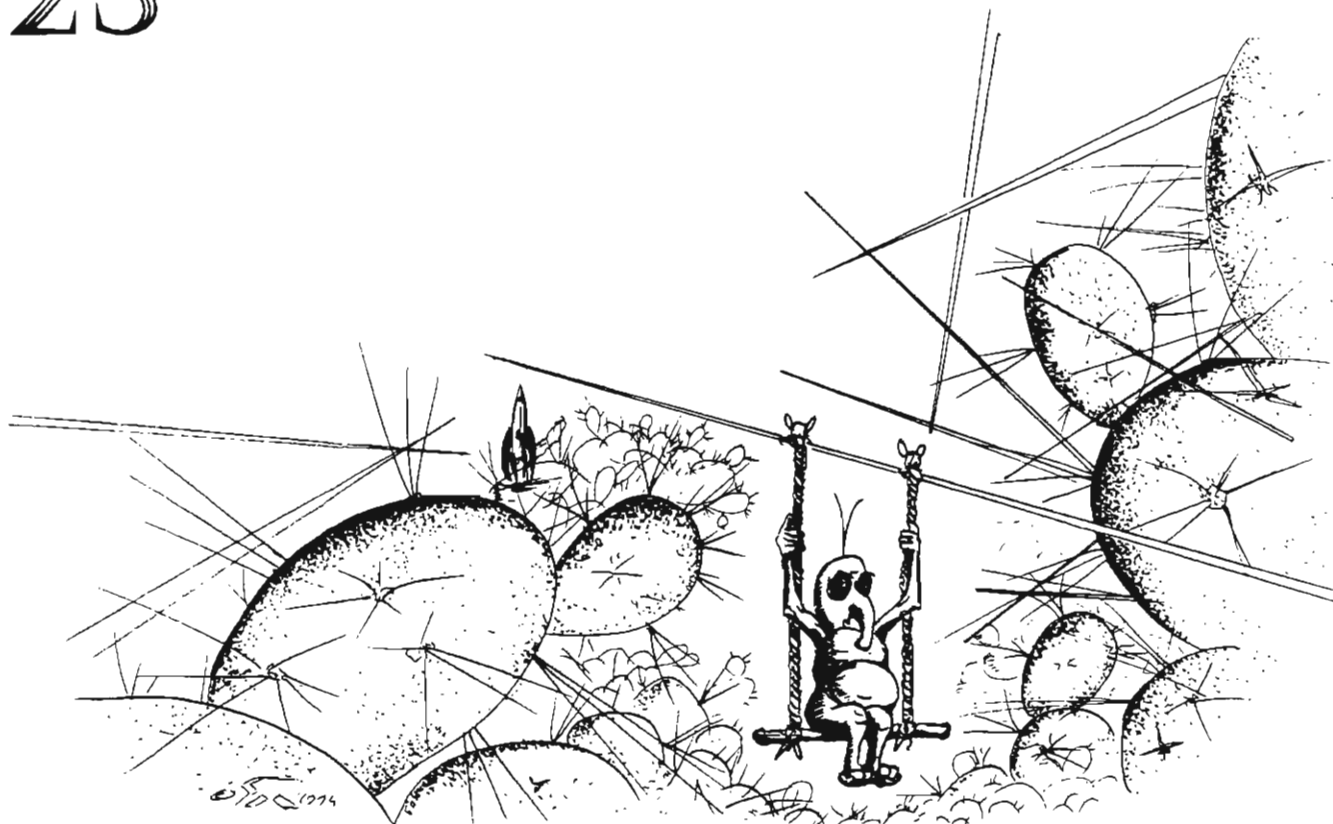


OPUNTIA

23



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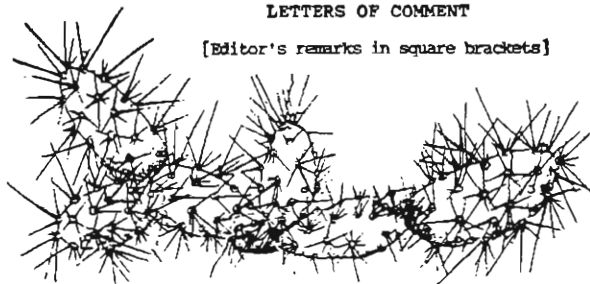
ART CREDIT: As the Wuzis continue to explore Opuntia-world, one of them takes time out for a bit of relaxation. From a series by Franz Miklis, A-5151, Nussdorf 64, Austria.

EDITORIAL: This is the 50th issue of OPUNTIA since #1 rolled off the photocopier in March 1991. Officially this zine is still an irregular (that way I can't be held to blame if an issue is late) but unofficially I've been getting enough material to come out monthly. OPUNTIA is mostly living up to the ideals I had in mind when I began it: to document Canadian fanhistory, to write about economics, politics, and anything else I want to preach, and as a means of positive expression, to get me out of a negative outlook on life and doing something constructive instead.

Lloyd Penney sent me a flyer advertising Eclipticon, a Toronto in 2003 bid for the WorldCon. I sent off for my presupporting membership (C\$10/US\$7) but haven't yet heard from them. Address: Toronto in 2003 WSPCB, 3026 - 300 Coxwell Avenue, Toronto, Ontario M4L 2A0. Conchair is Martin Miller.

Mon Canada comprend le Québec.

[Editor's remarks in square brackets]



FROM: Murray Moore
377 Manly Street
Midland, Ontario L4R 3E2

1994-11-26

Leah Zeldes Smith organized a game at Ditto. Each person was given the name of a fanzine editor and a fanzine. Someone else had the fanzine name to match the editor, and a different person had the fanzine editor to match the fanzine. Each person was to find the others and, to prove it, learn from them something not widely known about them. OSFS STATEMENT was my title. I didn't know it. Mike Glicksohn did not know it either, as he is not receiving it. He professed mock horror. Leah's general comment was that this gathering of fanzine fans was not up to date on what is being published.

Tara Wayne's interesting article includes in its bibliography James Morris (1973) HEAVEN'S COMMAND. I admire the publisher's wording: "During the writing of the Pax Britannica trilogy James Morris completed a change of sexual role, and now lives and writes as Jan Morris."

Michael McKenny's list of former Ottawa fans includes Rosemary Wlyot, which properly is Ulylot.

[Typographical error on my part.]

FROM: John Thiel 1994-12-2
30 North 19th Street
Lafayette, Indiana 47904

I cannot but point out that I like the exceptional SF cover [by Paul Rivoche] that graces OPUNTIA #22. It's very provocative to the imagination. It is a little like the things Richard Shaver visualized.

FROM: Buck Coulson 1994-11-29
2677W-500N
Hartford City, Indiana 47348

What's the title of that painting on the cover of OPUNTIA #22, "By Canoe To The Stars"? Interesting, but old-time fans will howl at it. Flying saucers aren't in good odour with us old farts.

Taral Wayne has a good history article. The Pig War is not too well known in this country, though there have been articles and possibly a book about it. I've read about it but I don't have a book, so my assumption that one exists is a belief, not knowledge. I note that Taral, unsurprisingly, lists only British and Canadian writings.

FROM: Gary Deindorfer 1994-12-4
447 Bellevue Avenue, #9B
Trenton, New Jersey 08618

OPUNTIA #22 had a beautiful, haunting cover. I can imagine myself at night out in that canoe and this happening to me. Awesome concept. And good to see something from Taral Wayne, one of fandom's great unrecognized minds.

FROM: Vicki Rosenzweig 1994-11-26
33 Indian Road, 6-R
New York City, New York 10034

I have a theory that the problem with Internet, like the problem with television, is precisely that there is so much bandwidth. Rather than being bemused that we have "76 channels and nothing on", it's because my local cable system has 76 channels that there's usually nothing worth watching. If there were one channel and it could broadcast only two hours a day, whoever was running it would treat that time as a precious commodity and be careful what they did with it. With 76 channels, all of them available 24 hours a day, they'll put on any old thing to fill space. The problem with this theory is that it does not help anything. Even if it's valid, the solution isn't to cut Internet back so that everyone can only get thirty lines of message in a day. If someone (unlikely) could do that, we'd get thirty lines of boring, bureaucratic junk, or at best a note from a distant relative asking after our health. I suspect the only real answer is word of mouth. If you choose to ride the information highway, you have to talk to other drivers and ask them which truck stops are worth bothering with.

In general, I agree with your approach to choosing technology that will make your life better, rather than adopting everything just because it's new. Once in a while, this seems to happen on a wider scale. Nobody seems to actually want videophones, perhaps because they vividly imagine being caught in their underwear. I have limited e-mail access, because it comes with my job, and find it sometimes useful both professionally and socially, although some of those uses are artificial. What I find disturbing is people who freely admit that, having e-mail, they're tending to drop people without it from their social circles.

I enjoyed Taral's account of the San Juan islands. It's not what I expected to find under his byline, but it's a tale well told, and worth the telling.

FROM: Henry Welch 1994-12-6
 1525 - 16 Avenue
 Grafton, Wisconsin 53024-2017

My observation of Internet is that most of it is dreck. Of the small trickle I monitor, I actually only read a drop or two. There is simply not enough time in the day. My personal philosophy is not to contribute to the glut. Respond only when the response adds to the discussion and often times respond locally rather than globally. I also do not indiscriminately include the original message in my response, but cut it down to its essential parts. I often see dozens of responses chiding a neo for wasting bandwidth. I wonder if the posters see that they are just as guilty?

FROM: Joseph Major 1994-11-30
 4701 Taylor Boulevard #8
 Louisville, Kentucky 40215-2343

Your comments about the slush in the pothole on the information superhighway sound very apropos. You might look into forming a trio with Arthur Hlavaty and Dave Langford, who have complained in like manner. As when Hlavaty complained about system errors getting him deluged with messages saying "Unable To Deliver Message", or Langford noting the cancerous growth of responses where each had to contain the entire previous text plus a humorous personal I.D. with the often miniscule actual response.

Garnet Wolsley, on his way to the Red River, fame, and a title, passed through Maine in 1860 as part of the reinforcements for the Pig War. One wonders about the seriousness of a crisis where the troops find it easiest to travel through the enemy's country.

Congratulations to Chester Cuthbert, the kind of reclusive fan hermit whose independence (and collection) we all envy.

FROM: Harry Warner Jr. 1994-12-27
 423 Summit Avenue
 Hagerstown, Maryland 21740

I believe "Official Editor" as a title for the person who does most of the work in an apa was chosen for FAPA because he did do some editing, being entrusted with writing and publishing the official organ that accompanies each mailing. Small apas may have no separate zine, just a listing of the contributions for this mailing and perhaps a membership list, but FAPA's THE FANTASY AMATEUR has always been more elaborate. In its early years it even contained reports by Official Critics, a couple of members who were supposed to evaluate the contents of the previous mailing in very brief terms. Incidentally, THE FANTASY AMATEUR is the oldest continually published fanzine in the world. My HORIZONS, which began as a genzine and then switched to FAPA, is the oldest fanzine published by the same individual without title change or long gaps between issues.

You didn't mention one other aspect of computerized information that bothers me: how long it may be until the magnetic impulses on disks begin to weaken sufficiently to cause problems.

I ALSO HEARD FROM: Chester Cuthbert, Teddy Harvia, Tara Glover, Michael McKenny, Arthur Hlavaty, Dave Panchyk, Sheryl Birkhead, Lloyd Penney

THE LIFE CYCLE OF THE SF CLUB

A Case Study of Activity Patterns in Avocational Subcultures

By Robert Runté

Garth Spencer's overview of Canadian fan history in *Opuntia* #20 describes the rise and fall of a number of Canadian SF clubs and conventions. He observes, for example, that Edmonton "was for a time the largest and most active Canadian fan group" but is now "in limbo". Similarly, V-Con was Canada's oldest and most successful convention, but it has recently faltered and may well be gone forever. Similar phenomenon can also be observed in the United States. In the 1970s, Minneapolis was the undisputed centre of fannish activity on the continent, but subsequently went into decline and was replaced by Seattle as the "fannish Mecca of the '80s". This raises the interesting question of why clubs rise and fall.

I have long argued that such changes represented the inevitable life cycle of any club. It seemed obvious to me that the synergism required for noteworthy output cannot be sustained indefinitely. Even if the legal identity of a club or convention remains unchanged for years, the actual level of activity within that structure will vary immensely from one fannish generation to the next. In this article then, I would like to outline the typical life cycle of an SF club, highlighting some of the key decision points.

The Club Founding

An SF club or convention is typically formed when a handful of proto-fans meet, rejoice in their discovery of like-minded individuals, and — assuming the necessary numbers to achieve critical mass — begin a flurry of fannish activity. Most of these groups will fail within 18 months because they are dependent on two or three founding members and cannot sustain themselves when these key players either burn out or leave. The Speculative Fiction Society of Regina,

for example, appeared out of nowhere, put out 3 issues of its excellent clubzine, *Spintrian*; mounted ConBine 0 in cooperation with the Saskatchewan Writers Guild; and then as abruptly collapsed following the departure of its chief instigator, Dave Panchyk.

Since SF fandom has traditionally appealed to a college-aged population, fans tend to be highly mobile. Given the constant departure of graduates, university-based clubs like the SFSR have the greatest difficulty sustaining a consistent level of activity; but all fan groups have to contend with rapid turnover as college-aged members move to other centres, become enmeshed in career or family obligations, or simply lose interest as they mature. Consequently, a fannish generation — defined as the period for which a membership list remains recognizable — is usually considered to be about two years.

There is some evidence that this rapid turnover has slowed somewhat in recent years as traditional fannish demographics have been disrupted by the baby boom population. Just as the general population now includes a higher than usual proportion of individuals in their forties, fandom has aged significantly in the 1980s. Older fans tend to be settled in their careers and homes, and so less mobile. This has not always translated into greater club longevity, however, since older fans are also more subject to burnout or competing priorities. The demands of family, career, and mortgage often leave older fans with less free time and disposable income than their college-aged colleagues, so it is rare for someone in this bracket to sustain their leading role for more than a couple of years. Even though these members may remain nominally involved for some years after, their reduced role will still create a leadership crisis, or at least a corresponding reduction in the group's national profile. Consequently, the problem of clubs failing with the departure of key players remains essentially the same.

Most fan groups, then, enjoy only a very brief burst of activity before dissipating. Occasionally a local club will give the appearance of greater longevity if new groups arise quickly enough to assume the vestiges of the previous cycle's formal organization. For example, the Edmonton Science Fiction and Comic Arts Society was founded by five

individuals interested in trading comics and running a 16mm SF film series through the local art gallery. This group failed within 18 months as the President moved to Calgary, the VP turned his attention to his new comic store, and the Treasurer gaffed. As this film and comic book club collapsed, however, an essentially unrelated group of fanzine fans entered the scene and — not to put too fine a point on it — stole what was left of the club. Having transferred the ESFCAS treasury and legal status as a nonprofit society to themselves (without bothering with such bureaucratic niceties as elections), they put out three issues of their fanzine before experiencing their own falling out, and subsequently announced that they were folding the club. At this point the legendary John McBain arrived and essentially started the club over from scratch, and it is this version of ESFCAS which grew to dominate Canadian fandom for the next decade.

Sustainable Activity Through Member Involvement

The obvious question, then, is why did John McBain's version of the club succeed where the two previous versions had ultimately failed?

The answer, I think, lies in leadership styles. Most clubs fail because the personality type and leadership style necessary to launch a club are often antithetical to those necessary for sustained growth. In both of the first two versions of ESFCAS the key players undertook to direct all the club's projects themselves, while the rest of the membership remained passive consumers of whatever the executive provided. Under such an arrangement a club remains viable only so long as these key individuals remained active.

McBain, however, insisted that everyone become actively involved, and placed great emphasis on the recruitment and training of new members. As McBain's chief lieutenant, I was all for recruiting admiring consumers of our various fannish projects, but McBain's delegation of minor tasks often struck me as more trouble than it was worth. I would often complain I would rather take care of the details myself, and it took some time for McBain to convince me that if I hogged all the responsibility, we

risked making the membership both overly dependent and increasingly apathetic. By asking each member to assume some minor responsibility, McBain provided each member with a sense of ownership. Instead of two or three key players, ESFCAS quickly developed a reservoir of dozens of involved, reliable, and committed members.

McBain's policy of member involvement not only ensured a supply of qualified replacements as various members left or burned out, but changed the entire dynamics of the club. Instead of waiting for the leadership to announce projects, individuals and groups within the club initiated their own, and it was these broadly based activities that put ESFCAS on the map.

Sustainable Growth Through Recruitment

The high level of individual commitment and initiative in ESFCAS not only meant more and better projects, but also more successful recruitment. The larger number and variety of projects attracted more recruits than would have a similarly sized club which limited itself to a few Executive-sanctioned projects. More member-initiated activities not only implied a larger net with which to ensnare the interests of potential recruits, but also held out the prospect of starting their own project if newcomers could find nothing of interest among the current offerings.

Furthermore, recruitment was greatly enhanced as the sense of ownership felt by the members translated into more enthusiastic — and therefore more effective — word of mouth. It was not uncommon for ESFCAS members to accost complete strangers with testimonials about the club whenever they spotted likely recruits standing in the SF section of bookstores or libraries, or just reading an SF book on the bus. Nor did it hurt that a third of the city's used bookstores were staffed by ESFCAS members. There is also a subtle but significant difference between someone telling a potential recruit, "They do this" or "The Club does that", and a member who feels a sense of ownership saying, "We are doing . . ." or "we are involved in . . .". In the first case the individual is merely informed of the existence of what is to them a disembodied, abstract organization; whereas in the second example, recruits feel they have received a

personal invitation from one of the key organizers. Which, thanks to McBain's delegation of authority, was indeed the case.

The continual influx of new blood during the McBain era (which includes the years during which the club was run by the successors he helped to train and for which he then stepped aside) was the foundation of the ESFCAS's success and longevity. As new members contributed their labour, their dues, and their ideas to the club, its rapidly expanding reputation made it even more attractive. The more people recruited to the club, the more there were to contribute to further expansion and to recruit yet others in their turn. ESFCAS peaked at about 300, at a time when most local clubs would have considered one tenth of that an unusually heavy turnout. Two other factors were significant in ESFCAS's early growth. First, the original founders had arranged for the dominant used bookstore chain to sell club memberships and to require memberships of anyone wishing to purchase SF from any of its stores. (Non members had to trade 2 for 1 so the chain could build up its stock to sell to its regular customers, who by definition became ESFCAS members.) Consequently, many members were initially recruited (myself included) simply because we wanted to buy, rather than trade, SF books from the Wee Book Inns. After the first club collapsed, this was changed to a 10% discount for members, but remained a significant member benefit for many years.

Second, ESFCAS meetings were social affairs, without recourse to boring speeches or Robert's Rules of Order. Official business was limited to one annual general meeting for the elections; everything else was conducted informally. Consequently, recruits waiting for the meeting to "start" often found themselves chatted up (either as volunteer labour or dating partner) before they knew what had hit them.

The Reaction Against Continued Recruitment

A fan group, then, can survive beyond the normal two year life cycle only if it manages to recruit and actively involve new members faster than it loses old ones. While this may appear self-evident, it is often difficult to convince

members of a currently successful club of the importance of continued recruitment.

In the beginning, of course, the club will have actively promoted recruitment to achieve the critical mass required to mount whatever projects initially motivated the club's founding. Once these projects are up and running, however, further recruitment begins to be seen as redundant — or even threatening.

First, enthused by current triumphs, most fans have difficulty imagining that they could ever lose interest and drift away, so the need to recruit and train successors is seldom recognized. Once gaflation begins, most fans either do not care what happens after they depart, or else deliberately disband their group so that the name is retired with them. Decadent Winnipeg Fandom, for example, was an organic collection of friends, rather than a formal club (for all the accompanying accoutrements of T-Shirts and newsletters), and it would have made no sense for anyone to have carried on as DWF after the founders's departure. Given that experienced fans are often reluctant to turn the operation of their beloved club or convention over to impetuous and untested youngsters (even when these are the only members left with the energy to actually do the work), the active recruitment and integration of the next generation into current operations is often resisted.

Second, in clubs where the executive attempts to direct the group's activities, and where the membership remains a passive audience for whatever the executive provides, newcomers with leadership potential are more likely to be viewed as competitors than as a useful resource. Thus, once minimum critical mass is achieved, or the labour and financial needs of the organizers satisfied, recruitment is replaced with screening. The inevitable result is the emergence of rival groups founded by rejected newcomers, often followed by a pattern of competitive recruitment in which the denigration of the original group is offered as the chief inducement to join newer ones.

Third, even with the most broadly based club leadership, members who joined earlier may resent the inevitable changes in the status quo as more recent recruits start making demands on the organization and attempt to

take it in new directions. Friction between founders and successors over the nature of the club's mandate often discourages further recruitment.

Fourth, even if the recruit's interests match those of the founders, each new member changes the social interactions within the club. At first, new recruits are welcome because their presence can revitalize conversations that might otherwise have become repetitive. Not only do new members introduce novel topics, ideas, and approaches, but these new stimuli can often call forth unexpected responses from those one has known for years, thus completely changing the group dynamic. Eventually, however, the need to constantly re-establish the group's equilibrium becomes onerous. Comfortable routines, taken-for-granted friendships and the exchange of confidences are disrupted by the presence of outsiders trying to elbow their way into established conversations and cliques. Fans who remain unattached, for example, are more likely to favour active recruitment in the hopes of bringing in a satisfactory mate; but as the majority of members pair off, the interest in recruitment correspondingly declines. Indeed, further recruitment at this point threatens to disrupt established relations, and there may therefore be active sentiment against it.

Fifth, however effectively new recruits are integrated into the existing dynamic, there comes a point where the increased quantity of interactions necessarily implies a reduction in quality. As successful recruitment expands the possible permutations exponentially, members begin to leave the club meeting or convention disappointed that they missed the chance to speak with this person or that, even though the conversations they did have were perfectly satisfactory. As members are forced to prioritize their encounters, identifiable cliques develop, and the club begins to break into competing factions. This phenomenon is most commonly articulated as a loss of family feeling, and often leads to a resentment of, and resistance to, continued recruitment. Indeed, since their arrival will have indirectly triggered the emergence of splinter groups, the most recent recruits are often vilified as a destructive element,

though the process really has little to do with them as individuals.

The Emergence of Competing Factions

The next crisis point, then, is when the club's successful negotiation of the problems of member involvement and recruitment allows membership to approach the 200 person limit. Experience tells us that no avocational group can sustain the close-knit family feeling that marks a club's Golden Age beyond this limit. ESFCAS membership was hovering at 180 when a visiting fan from Minneapolis explained the 200 rule to me. I confess that I scoffed at the suggestion that it could happen here. ESFCAS was one big happy family and it was completely inconceivable that I could become alienated from any of my fellow members, all of whom I considered close friends. Two months and 20 new members later, the club had split into the Gang of Four, the Old Guard and the Third World. The specific incidents or issues that split the club are immaterial; the fact is simply that certain people began to cluster around particular projects or personalities, which inevitably implied that others would feel excluded.

In some cases this fission is sufficiently acrimonious that the original organization dies and is replaced by two or more successor groups that then begin to repeat the entire cycle. In other cases the original club continues to operate as an umbrella organization for a number of informal factions, as happened with ESFCAS. Leadership of the umbrella organization can either be left to one of the factions whose sole purpose is to maintain this shell and mediate the interactions between factions (Steve Forty of the BCSFA comes to mind), or can be shared on a rotating basis among the member cliques. ESFCAS and NonCon eventually settled into a pattern where instead of fighting over control, each group willingly surrendered the executive to any faction that could mount a fresh slate to relieve them, relay style.

A club that acts as an umbrella group can survive for many years as new recruits are directed to whichever faction seems most appropriate and as new factions form to replace those that gaffate enmass. Activity within the club

will then depend upon the rise and fall of particular groups, the dynamics of which obey the same general principles outlined above.

The Numbers Game

Recruitment, then, is the key to organizational success and longevity. Too rapid recruitment may overwhelm existing social relations, expanding existing factions beyond their ability to absorb the newcomers, leading to the splintering described above. Alternatively, an existing club or faction may resist recruitment and reject the inclusion of outsiders in their clique. Such cliquishness is always fatal over the long term. Understanding these principles can help club and convention leaderships prepare for each crisis point and to take appropriate action to ensure the organization's successful continuation.

Ultimately, however, the Brownian Motion of recruitment and gaffiation inevitably lead to a period when there is a net loss and the organization falls below critical mass.

The Synergism of Mutual Personal Growth

Upon further reflection, however, I now believe this traditional analysis to have been too simplistic. While there are clearly definable minimum and maximum limits on club membership — below which activity cannot be sustained and above which clubs inevitably breakdown into smaller and more functional factions — this quantitative analysis ignores an essential qualitative dimension. We can all think of examples of large clubs and conventions which nevertheless seem to lack that certain spark necessary to become memorable. However successful locally, these groups attract little outside attention.

I would therefore argue that a club's reputation for greatness in fan publishing, convention organizing, or partying is based less on numbers than on the synergism of mutual personal growth. Fannish activities are interesting only to the extent that they provide opportunities to learn something new. An editor who constantly repeated him- or herself or a club that constantly debated the same issues would quickly gain a reputation as intolerably boring and fail.

Only those clubs, conventions, and editors who consciously stretch themselves with each new venture gain the national recognition of an ESFCAS in its heyday. I am often nostalgic for the early days of ESFCAS, not just because it was the first time I really felt at ease in a social setting (that sense of "coming home" experienced by all neos), but because I was able to connect with a group of individuals whose knowledge, skills and interests complemented my own in such a way that we greatly stimulated and accelerated each other's personal growth. This was particularly true of the six members of the Gang of Four who produced *The Monthly Monthly*. Even after over 20 years in academia, I have never again encountered a group that more thoroughly challenged my abilities, assumptions, and attitudes.

But just as veteran fans seldom attend convention programming on the grounds that they have seen it all before, there comes a point in every fan's life where they have learned all there is to learn from this particular hobby.

Some fans never seem to achieve significant personal growth, but these individuals are generally not the ones who contribute positively to a club or convention's reputation. As individuals and groups learn all they can and so "graduate" from fandom, the synergistic potential of that club or convention necessarily declines, and the remaining members are left wondering why they cannot recapture that elusive spark of the club's Golden Age. The problem is not just to replace these departing members with an equivalent number of newcomers, but to recreate the specific combination of complementary skills, knowledge and attitudes that generated the specific synergism of that particular period, project, or group. This is, of course, so improbable that we might as well concede it as impossible. New synergistic pockets may well be generated as newcomers begin interacting with each other, or with some of the old timers who may have been only peripheral in the original grouping, but these should really be considered distinct new developments, rather than a continuation of the old magic.

As each synergistic project or grouping is essentially a unique event, it is unlikely that they will rise and fall in any kind of coordinated sequence. Instead, synergistic pockets

will either develop simultaneously as overlapping factions within the same club or convention, or will rise and fall with significant gaps between. To outsider observers, the simultaneous pockets exaggerate the amplitude of the organization's high points (and so lend greater contrast to the low points), while overlapping groups are likely to only partially obscure the essentially cyclical nature of these processes. In other words, even if membership remains relatively constant, the level of activity within a club will still vary dramatically over a period of years.

The Life Cycle of the Subculture

Indeed, the same analysis can be applied to fandom as a whole. Just as the level of activity and creativity within a particular club, convention, or publication may vary dramatically over time, there is good reason to expect that the popularity of fanzine publishing, convention-going, clubbing, etc. will also vary. When I entered fandom, for example, fanzine fans clearly dominated the entire subculture. Fanzines have been in decline since the late 1980s, however, when they were replaced by conventions as the major locus of fannish activity. With the recent failures of V-Con, MapleCon, PineCon, ConText and other major regional conventions, we may now be witnessing a major downsizing of convention fandom. Lay on top of this cyclical analysis the changing demographics of baby boom and bust — with all that implies for the number of potential recruits in the appropriate age bracket; the economic cycles of recession and growth that allow or discourage participation in recreational hobby activities; and the technological changes, such as Internet, that create competing modalities for fannish-like activity, and it is amazing that fandom retains any semblance of continuity.

Ironically, the same pundits who today decry the sudden collapse of fannish numbers (as evidenced, for example, by a halving of WorldCon attendance in the last five years) are the very individuals who in the seventies were complaining that fandom had lost its intimacy. While it is true that we may well have to become accustomed to fewer zines, cons and clubs than a decade ago, this retrenchment may result in a reconcentration of quality. These trends are

a natural consequence of changing demographics, economics, and technologies, and of the inherently cyclical nature of all such social phenomenon. The attempt to attribute these contractions to a failure in leadership, or to assign blame to specific individuals or committees, simply misses the point. Just as the specific issue that splinters a club when it hits 200 members is immaterial to the inevitability of that split, the nearly universal decline in convention and club membership cannot be attributed to particular decisions, which can only accelerate or slow these processes.

The Final Phase: The Return of the Son of Fandom

There is, however, an important postscript to these cycles of boom and bust that is generally overlooked. I do not believe that we have told the complete history of a club, convention, or zine until we examine what happened to its alumni. Edmonton fandom, for example, did not so much fade away as turn professional. Two thirds of those in the Gang of Four went on to related professional careers. David Vereschagin graduated from designing *The Monthly Monthly* to a career as a professional book designer; Christine Kulyk became a professional freelance editor; Mike Hall is a professional journalist, currently editing a monthly magazine supplement for the Fort McMurray daily; and I often draw on my fannish experience when editing textbooks, and I am currently teaching a graduate level course in writing. At least five other ESFCASians went on to become published writers: Catherine Girczyc, Sally McBride, Marianne Nielsen, Michael Skeet, and Diane Walton. Former ESFCASian Lorna Toolis became head librarian of the Merrill collection of Speculative Fiction and Fantasy in Toronto. And, as Garth pointed out in *Opuntia* #20, Edmonton has become the national headquarters of SF Canada, the national writer's association; and of *On Spec* magazine, Canada's only professional English language SF quarterly. Since Garth's article, *Tesseracts*, the major SF book imprint, has also moved to Edmonton. These professional projects now absorb the energies that used to go into ESFCAS. Former president Cath Jackel now manages *On Spec* magazine; Lorna Toolis, Michael Skeet,

and myself sit on the Advisory Board of Tesseract Books. Diane Walton is Secretary of both SF Canada and the Writers Guild of Alberta, as well as a Board Member for On Spec. And so on.

So it's not so much that fandom is in decline in Canada, as it is that Canadian prodom is on the rise. As the concentration of capital in the publishing industry increasingly absorbs midlist publishers and drives out midlist authors, there are ironically increased opportunities for small specialty presses (like Tesseracts and the Books Collective) to fill the gap. As reading takes a poor fifth place to TV, movies, video games, and the information superhighway among the general population, the remaining readers are contracting into a fannish-style community. Is it, as one editor recently remarked to me, that more fans than ever seem to want to write; or that the only people left reading today are writers. This has already occured in poetry circles, where no one in North America (it is still possible in South America) seriously expects to support themselves from their poetry; and where the only people who subscribe to poetry magazines are their contributors and those who hope to become contributors. Similarly, even the most cursory examination of Janet Fox's market review (*Scavenger Newsletter*) reveals that most of the 500 SF publications currently out there are supported by writers polishing their craft as they attempt to break into the mass market. As desktop publishing increasingly blurs the line between amateur and professional publications, we may anticipate the redefinition of fandom as those individuals providing sweat equity to the small press. While few of those involved in SF Canada, *Tesseracts*, or *On Spec* think of themselves as fans any longer, I think they would be recognizable as such to our predecessors. We, like the Futurians before us, are fans who had to create the professional markets that allowed us to graduate from fandom.

UPDATE ON THE NATIONAL LIBRARY OF CANADA SF EXHIBIT
by Andrea Paradis

Work continues on the National Library of Canada's exhibition on Canadian SF and fantasy, with new developments occurring daily. Exhibition curators Hugh Spencer and Allan Weiss have worked with the staff and collections of the National Library and the Toronto Public Library's Merrill Collection, partners in the project. They honed a long list of books, comics, magazines, fanzines, manuscripts, and television and radio memorabilia into the 200 items which will form the nucleus of the exhibition. Additional artworks, artifacts, and audiovisual elements are under development. The exhibition title has now been confirmed as "Out Of This World - Visions D'autres Mondes".

The exhibition will start with a brief world history of fantastic literature, followed by seven main themes: Identity Variations, Fantastic Voyages, Strange Worlds and Strange Peoples, Québec Fantasy and SF, The Genre Variations, The Media Variations, and Who Reads This Stuff? The Publishers of ... and Audience for ... Fantastic Fiction. The opening of the exhibition will take place early on the evening of May 12, 1995, at the NLC. Can-Con will be a collaborator for the events of the opening evening, which lead into Can-Con's full slate of weekend activities, including an academic conference, the Convention and Boréal national conventions, workshops, seminars, readings, panels and entertainment, and presentation of the Boréal and Aurora awards on May 14. For information about Can-Con, telephone (613)596-4105.

The exhibition opening will also be the launching pad for a new anthology of essays on Canadian SF and fantasy. The books, produced in English and French, will be co-published by the NLC and a private-sector publisher.

[continued next page]

Essays have been submitted from across Canada, France, and England. Contributions are from SF&F authors, broadcasters, historians, scholars, and teachers, including sketches by Heather Spears and a graphic story collaboration by Larry Hancock and Michael Cherkas. Retail price of the anthology will be announced at a later date. The NLC will also launch a reading list based on the bibliography and the media resources list prepared for the exhibition.

The exhibition is currently being formatted for distribution on World Wide Web. Following the outline of the exhibition themes, and using the covers of the books in the exhibition as points of reference, the medium will allow us to include sound and a rich cross-referencing of information on authors, their books, sound, and other threads of the exhibition.

The NLC's annual "Read Up On It" program, which promotes the reading of Canadian children's books and is distributed in schools across Canada, will feature an SF&F theme in 1995, including lists of suggested reading for children and young people in both English and French. To underscore the importance of the SF&F genre, an education program for Grades 6 to 9 is being developed. May and June will be scheduled for groups from the Ottawa area, while the autumn months will be reserved for groups from outside Ottawa. Activities will include a tour of the exhibition and an interactive game that will transport students into the sphere of Canadian SF&F. The last element of the exhibition will be a reading corner, where visitors can sit down and leaf through some of what they have seen in the exhibition, some of what was not in the exhibition, and expand their horizons by discovering new authors, new titles, or rediscovering their old favourites.

A smaller spin-off exhibit will be planned for the opening of the new Merril Collection facility in the autumn of 1995.

For a brochure on the exhibition, or a copy of NATIONAL LIBRARY NEWS, featuring an outline of the exhibition themes and background information, contact the National Library of Canada, Marketing and Publishing, 395 Wellington Street, Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0N4. For general information on the exhibition or the education program, contact Andrea Paradis c/o the same address, or fax (613) 943-2343, or e-mail at ajp@nlc-bnc.ca

CAN-CON 95/CANVENTION 95

The theme of this con is the history of written SF in Canada. Located at the Talisman Hotel, with Dave Duncan as Guest of Honour. Membership \$15 via Box 5752, Nepean, Ontario K2C 3M1.

As of February 20, when this issue went to press, I had no response to my query about the Aurora awards. They are also to vote at Can-Con for the 1996 site in western Canada, but bids are traditionally last-minute so that doesn't matter.

Dave Duncan lives in Calgary and attends the local cons faithfully. I've never been able to get through any of his books, but he earns a living from them and Smithbooks always have some on the shelves, so someone must like them. I have, however, chatted with Dave at cons, and found him a very genial fellow. Like many Calgarians he used to earn his living in the oilpatch, so geology's loss is SF&F's gain.

Zap! Zap!

Atomic Ray Is Passe With Fiends

By GEORGE BAIN

Put down that ray-gun, Buck Rogers, I've got you cold. So I let him have it with my 25th century rocket-pistol (zap, zap), hopped into my space-ship (zoom, swish), and made off to the planet of the three-headed people. Minerva was waiting for me, a light sparkling in every one of her six television eyes.

Seen any machine-men of Zor lately? They have organic brains in metal cube-shaped bodies, you know. What's the word from Helen, the lovelorn robot, or the snail-lizard of Venus? How're inter-planetary communications with you, kid?

Nothing wrong with me that a long rest—and protection from another science-fiction convention—won't cure. The sixth world convention of these publishers, writers and readers of fantastic tales is being held at 55 Queen St. E. Just take a firm grip on yourself, plunge right in, and it shouldn't be more than a couple of weeks before you can sleep again without nightmares.

Of course, you may have a few bad moments if you start worrying about the cosmic veil of meteoric dust which is going to cover the earth in a few years. Don't let it get you; it's just going to last for 40 years and after that the sun will shine through again.

The business about the cosmic veil is contained in one of the fanzines which are available for the fan attending the Torcon. A fanzine, among science-fictionists, is a fan magazine, fan is the plural of fan, and Torcon is Toronto convention. Cunning, aren't they?

Those of tender nerves should make a point of avoiding the drawings displayed at the convention. These are up for auction (if any one wants a good portrait of a fiend for the bedroom wall, this is the place to get it) and are the originals of pictures which appeared in fantastic and astounding magazines and books.

There's one cosy little number, for instance, that shows a poor bloke being clutched to the breast of a beast that has the body of an octopus and arms which are individual snakes. Any number of these pictures show people being done in with ray-guns (zap, zap . . . ugh, you got me), space-ships flying through the mushrooming smoke of atom-bomb explosions, and lightly clad maidens being menaced by fiends of one sort or another.

On Saturday, before the formal goings-on of the convention started, the delegates were free to examine the fanzines, new books, and drawings on display, and to cut up touches about fiends they have met in their reading. Two men in one corner were earnestly discussing werewolves; a group of three was lost somewhere, in outer space on a jaunt between Mars and the moon.

The fanzines are kept in touch with one another and the writers of their favorite type of literature mostly by the fanzines. One of the latest of these is a jolly little number called simply Macabre.

It is advertised: "Want to feel disgusted, scream in horror, beat your head, kill your mother-in-law? Read Macabre."

Science-fiction is years ahead of actual science, according to David A. Kyle, a fan, literary agent, writer and publisher of Monticello, New York. "We had the atom bomb 15 years ago," he says, indicating that the atom is pretty much passe now. "We're on to new things."

At one time during the war, the FBI in the United States told one science-fiction magazine it would have to drop an atom story because it might give away military secrets. The publisher said his magazine had been publishing atom stuff for 10 years and if it was to discontinue abruptly it might create suspicion. Atomic fiction marched suspiciously on.

During the introduction of visitors, the delegate from New Orleans complained that he had mislaid his Zombie. It was learned later, outside the hall, that the Zombie, in this case, was a fanzine, not a representative of the walking dead.

GOSHNOWBOYOHBOY, EH?
by Dale Speirs

As Bill Cosby was fond of saying during his comedy monologues: "I told you that story so I could tell you this one.". I reprinted the 1948 news report by George Bain because he is still around and still writing. MACLEAN'S, the Canadian equivalent of TIME or NEWSWEEK, runs stern lectures from him on what is wrong with the world. More importantly, he has just recently published a book titled GOTCHA! HOW THE MEDIA DISTORT THE NEWS (Key Porter Books, available at W.H. Smith or Cole's). In it, and with an apparently straight face, he dissects the horrible sins of the CBC, the Globe and Mail, and many other easy targets who have not covered themselves with glory in reporting the tainted tuna scandal, the Free Trade Agreement, the late unlamented regimes of Mulroney and Getty, and the GST. Bain's columns in MACLEAN'S include stirring titles such as "Responsibility and the Press" and "The Media Are Not Above Criticism". I haven't followed the journalistic career of Mr. Bain, but I can only hope that he has reformed since 1948, not just forgotten what he was like in his younger days. The road to Damascus, etc..

But his 1948 opinion is still extant today. About the only change over the years has been the replacement of "that Buck Rogers stuff" by "that Star Trek stuff" in the minds of the general public. But every hobby is afflicted by stereotyping. Chess players are assumed to be mathematical geniuses, although a quick scan of their history demonstrates a closer acquaintance to mental instability. Stamp collecting is considered a hobby for the wealthy, and every stamp dealer must soon learn how to politely tell people that Grandfather's stamp album is of little value no matter how old the stamps may be.

George Bain's article did not go unnoticed at Torcon. In fact, it was melodramatically read out to the audience by George Smith, with sound effects by Bob Tucker. Leslie Croutch reprinted the Toronto newspapers' con reports in

his zine LIGHT. This rather neatly brings us to a brief review of the book YEARS OF LIGHT: A CELEBRATION OF LESLIE A. CROUTCH. It was authored by John Robert Colombo, and although published in 1982 is still available from Dundurn Press. It is a trade paperback, 195 pages. Cost is \$16.04 in Canada; add a couple of bucks elsewhere. To be had from Dundurn Press, Suite 301, 2181 Queen Street East, Toronto, Ontario M4E 1E5. They accept Mastercard and Visa.

The book is as much a history of early Canfandom as it is of Croutch. Colombo was writing for the Canlitcrit backscratchers at Canadian universities in addition for the few Canuck fans who might buy the book. This meant he had to fill in the background for those who had no idea people were seriously interested in "that Buck Rogers stuff". The book therefore wanders off at length, to place Croutch in his environment so that Croutch can be better understood by those who were not there. As a result, it seems rather disjointed at times.

The book starts off by reprinting four stories written by Croutch, one of which is a Québec separatist story to anger people as easily today as when it was written in 1950. Next is a section of editorial excerpts from LIGHT. So far so good, but the reader is then startled to discover that Appendix 1 begins on page 60 after only one-third of the book has gone by. Appendix 1 is the biography of Croutch born 1915, died 1969 of a heart attack shovelling snow. He spent most of his life in Parry Sound, Ontario, and was self-employed as a radio and television repairman. Further appendices are on the history of LIGHT (including a facsimile of one issue), Van Vogt (Croutch was the first to publish an article on him), a bibliography of Croutch's fiction, and three histories on Canfandom and the pulps. The book could be better arranged, but does serve its purpose of collecting Croutch's life and times in a useful permanent form. It should be in any SF reference library.

THE DEATH OF ORGANIZATIONS?

by Dale Speirs

Consider the following extract from the September 1994 BRITISH CACTUS AND SUCCULENT JOURNAL. It is part of the Chairman's Report to the 1994 Annual General Meeting of the BC&S Society.

"I am quite sure that all of you here today are very well aware of the decline in our membership and the problems that brings. ... By comparison with twenty or thirty years ago there are more activities available for filling one's leisure hours, so that we face much fiercer competition. Predictably, this has also hit the specialist horticultural societies. The membership of the American cactus society has halved in the past ten years. In the UK, other specialist societies, such as those concerned with carnations, daffodils, and iris have all suffered appreciably and, like us, they are having to think very hard about how to counteract this."

I could provide similar quotes from philatelic societies and no doubt many other hobby organizations. All are frantically trying to boost membership levels without much success. Is this a cyclical effect? Many say it is, and trot in the Baby Boomers and economic cycles. Or, as I have come to increasingly believe, a sea-change that will permanently alter how the First World enjoys its hobbies. (Bear in mind that hobby clubs and the Internet are fantasy in the Third World, where people are too busy trying to live.)

In our society, time is a scarce commodity. Not the normal 'lack of time', where people can't schedule the task, but a newer 'lack of synchronicity', where people cannot synchronize their schedules with others. Evening meetings were all very well when most of us worked weekdays, but now any collection of people will have many working evenings or weekends. Fewer people can make a weekday even-

ing meeting. A television show can be time-shifted with a VCR, but live-in-person events cannot. This explains the popularity of e-mail and faxes, which eliminate that time-honoured office game of telephone tag. Meetings of a club cannot be time-shifted. Might this be why Internet is so popular? Log on at your convenience; no mad dash home from work for a quick meal and change of clothes before dashing off again to the monthly meeting of a club.

Will this be how the future is? I'm sure that clubs will always be with us, because we all want and need occasional human contact, not to mention getting out of the house. But there will be fewer clubs, with fewer members, and fewer meetings. Meetings will be devoted to that which cannot be properly done over the Internet, such as shows and auctions. Simply to meet and chat will no longer be a drawing card for club members, nor to hear a programme. That can all be done on the Internet.

If clubs are dwindling in number and size, the logical but extreme extrapolation would be everyone in a club of one or two members. This is essentially what a zine publisher is: a club of one or two people. I don't, however, foresee a new golden age for zines in that the number of zines in a given category will increase. Rather, the number of zines will increase but the number of categories will increase even faster. This would create the illusion that a category, say faanish SF fandom, is declining because fewer zines exist in that group. In actual fact as demonstrated by FACTSHEET FIVE et al, the number of zines is increasing overall, even if each category is struggling to keep up the traditional activities. More zines but in more categories that hives off people away from each other.

Instead of one or a few large SF clubs in a city, stable and steadily growing if only incrementally, there will be fluctuating number of small clubs, most as shortlived as their special interest. Much the same for zines. Long-lived stable organizations will be dead.