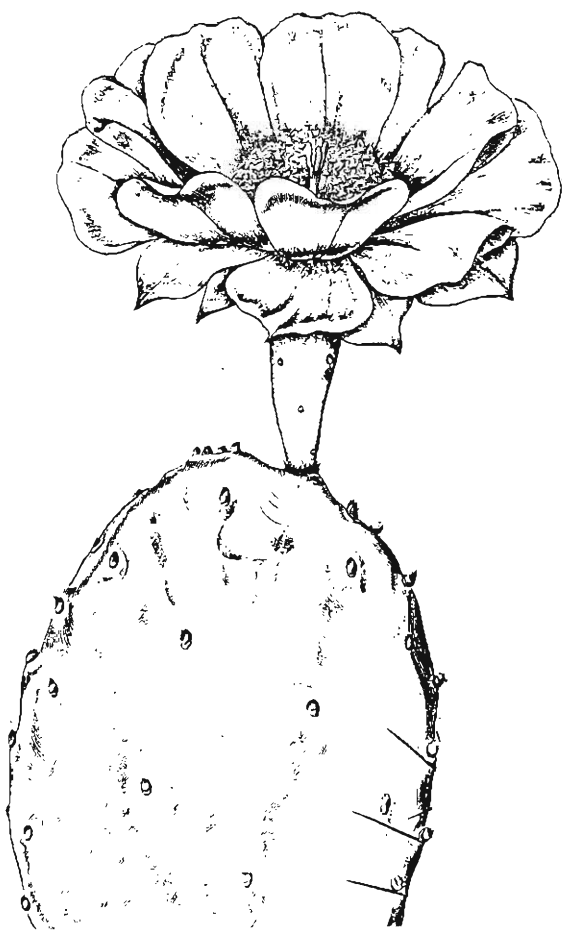


OPUNTIA

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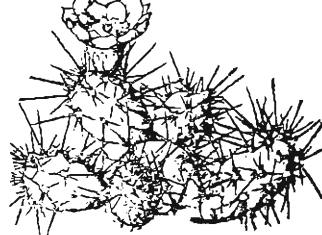
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Whole-numbered OPUNTIA's are sercon, x.1 issues are reviewzines, x.2 issues are indexes, and x.5 issues are perzines.

ART CREDIT: The cover depicts *Opuntia rafinesquii*, by an unknown artist in the 1856 House of Representatives (USA) REPORTS OF EXPLORATIONS AND SURVEYS TO ASCERTAIN THE MOST PRACTICABLE AND ECONOMICAL ROUTE FOR A RAILROAD FROM THE MISSISSIPPI RIVER TO THE PACIFIC OCEAN, Volume 4.

I ALSO HEARD FROM: Sheryl Birkhead, Joseph Nicholas (who sent an account of opuntia gramophone needles), John Held Jr, Bridget Bradshaw (thanks for eclipse stamps and postcard), Scott Crow, Chester Cuthbert, Andrew York, Murray Moore

TO THE EDITOR
[Editor's remarks in square brackets]



FROM: Lloyd and Yvonne Penney
1706 - 24 Eva Road
Etobicoke, Ontario M9C 2B2

1999-08-25

Garth Spencer is the 1999 Canadian Unity Fan Fund winner. He will be the CUFF delegate at and a guest at CanVention 19/InConsequential II. This is the Canadian national SF convention at the Lord Beaverbrook Hotel in Fredericton, New Brunswick, from October 15 to 17, 1999.

[CUFF is a travel fund to send an eastern Canadian fan to a western SF convention and vice versa. As Garth lives in Vancouver on the Pacific coast, and CanVention 19 is on the shores of the Atlantic, the travel fund will certainly be useful.]

I RAN OUT OF ROOM but will have letters of comment on SF national organizations and filksinging in issue #45.

YOUR MILEAGE MAY VARY: A SHORT AND INCOMPLETE SURVEY OF CONRUNNING MATERIALS (PART 1)

by Garth Spencer

(Garth may be contacted at Box 15335, Vancouver, British Columbia V6B 5B1)

Introduction.

Since before World War Two, science fiction and fantasy fans, like members of other special interest groups, have been holding conventions. By now these SF cons have taken a form unlike other conventions and conferences, and unlike other fan activities. There is a good deal about holding conventions that is not self-evident and just don't go without saying, but guidelines for conrunners were rare until the mid-1980s, and still are not well-known outside of an interested subfandom.

Conventions started almost as soon as SF fandom itself started, originally because fans wanted to meet each other, and meet the people who wrote SF and fantasy. That, right there, tells you what fandom was in the beginning; a scattering of isolated readers, alienated by the mundane world, for whom finding someone they could talk to was worth a lot of effort. Well, that was then, and this is now.

Most SF conventions take place over a long weekend, up to two or three days on average. They quote room rates, membership rates, and dealers' table fees as separate items. They may or may not lay on a Sunday brunch as an optional (and separately paid) programme item. All of these features were added onto SF cons successively over time; conventions evolved significantly from the 1930s onward.

This distinguishes SF cons from other conventions or conferences. Professional (academic or business) conferences are likely to charge delegates, or their sponsors, for a whole week of attendance, including membership, room, and meals and drink, in one lump sum. Airfare might also be arranged through the conference organization. The differences in SF conventions have to be pointed out to people like hotel staff.

There are also distinctions between SF cons in different areas. I keep reading that British conventions typically revolve around the hotel bar, while North American conventions customarily feature a Hospitality or Convention Suite. Conventions in the West feature at least one dance, while (I am told) Eastern conventions rarely feature dances.

Obviously someone in fandom, and someone entirely outside the

subculture, can have completely different ideas when they hear the word 'convention'. People from different regions, or different eras, or who simply circulate in different subfandoms, can also have very different conceptions. These differing ideas and practices will come into conflict.

A typical SF convention is an event put on once a year by fans, for fans, and not staged by professional conference organizers or for professionals. Because they depend on volunteer labour from paying members in order to keep costs down as much as possible, it can be particularly important to have some reference source as to what details have to be taken care of, the kinds of plans that work, how to get some things done, and what neat ideas won't work.

The vast majority of conrunning materials I have located originate from the United States. This is unsurprising, as the earliest and still the largest population of SF fans is in the United States. In practice, the source has usually been word-of-mouth education, and at-the-con training. This has failed us before.

The Con Committee Chairman's Guide (circa 1964)

To judge from e-mail discussions via the Timebinders listserver in 1998, some older fans, Ted White, for one, believe that very little about conrunning is not self-evident. This might have

been a general impression in fandom through the 1950s.

The first written material about conrunning that I can trace was the first guide to running WorldCons, the "Con Committee Chairman's Guide", written by a co-chair of the first Discon in 1963.

WorldCon Organization (circa 1973)

MidAmeriCon's progress reports numbers 3, 4, and 5 serialized John Millard's essay "Worldcon Organization", after he chaired Torcon II in 1973. Ken Keller also contributed a detailed WorldCon organization article, "Ken Keller's handy-dandy guide to understanding how the MidAmeriCon committee functions ..." etcetera, complete with flow chart. Jim and Susan Satterfield, in lee's Summit, Missouri, probably still have copies of these MidAmeriCon progress reports; Ken Keller writes that they have about 300 complete sets.

SMOFCon (1972 to present)

A convention for conrunners, called SMOFCon 0 in retrospect, was held in 1972 in New York City by Tony Lewis. A short set of proceedings is available from New England SF Association (NESFA). SMOF is a traditional fannish acronym meaning Secret Masters Of Fandom.

"This was not called SMOFcon until much later when it was retroactively given the name. I know this because when I presented the idea to have this to Ben [Yalow] we came up with the name ConCon. I gave it the name SMOFcon (as a joke, actually) on the first flyer. It stuck." (Joe Siclari, 1996-12-18)

I had thought that SMOFCons, and the SMOFs listserv, tend repeatedly to focus specifically on how to run WorldCons. Coming from my background, I found this focus rather beside the point. At least it missed the need that I perceived, to explain for new conrunners the non-obvious workings of local and regional conventions.

Sharon Sbarsky counters my impression: *"If the program (also on the Web page) seems to concentrate mostly on Worldcons, that's news to most of us who were there. If participants use Worldcons as examples, that is mainly because of common experience, but other conventions are also used as examples and learning points."* (Timebinders listserv, 1998 summer)

SMOFCon 1 was held in December 1984. As a continuous annual series of numbered conventions, SMOFCon has been held in various locations ever since, usually each December. Proceedings of some past SMOFCons are available, through NESFA Press or other sources.

SMOFCon 2 would have been held in the Bay area in 1985, but was canceled due to lack of memberships. SMOFCon 3 was held in Lowell, Massachusetts, in 1986, hosted by MCFI with the topic "Brainstorming the Worldcon". Proceedings are available from NESFA.

SMOFCon 4 was held in 1987 in Columbus, Ohio. Mark Evans writes: *"SMOFCon IV proceedings, if we have any still available, should be ordered from P.O. Box 163391, Columbus, OH 43216 or via my e-mail address."* (Mark Evans, 1996-12-18) SMOFCon 5 was held in Phoenix, Arizona, in 1988, chaired by Bruce Farr.

SMOFCon 6 was held in December 1989 in Toronto, Ontario, by Lloyd Penney. No proceedings of this SMOFCon were published, apparently because no-one was available to transcribe the tapes. I have offered once or twice to transcribe them, if Lloyd wishes, but I have not received a response.

SMOFCon 7 was held December 1990 in Ft. Lauderdale, Florida, chaired by Joe Siclari and Edie Stern, and sponsored by the South Florida Science Fiction Society.

"A number of papers, forms, procedures, & contracts were

distributed as well as 2 supplements totaling more than 100 pages ... SFSFS still has some for sale.” (Joe Siclari, 1996-12-18)

SMOFCon 8 was held December 1991 in Portland, Oregon. Proceedings can be obtained from Oregon SF Conventions Inc., P.O. Box 5703, Portland, Oregon 97228, or from John Lorentz at john_lorentz@planar.com. I was mildly disappointed in these proceedings, first because of the emphasis on WorldCon operational procedures (by this time I believed only small cons, under 1500 or so, were real cons), and partly because the enclosed videotape's sound amounted to a series of mumblings.

SMOFCon 9 was held in New Orleans in December 1992, hosted by Peggy Rae Pavlat and others.

1993 was distinguished by two SMOFCons. SMOFCon 10 was held in Easter 1993 on the Isle of Jersey, Channel Islands, hosted by Tim Illingworth and other British fans. SMOFCon 11 was held in December of the same year in Lexington, Kentucky, hosted by Jane and Scott Dennis (of JANE'S FIGHTING SMOFS).

SMOFCon 12, in December 1994, was held in Burbank, California, and was combined with Fanhistoricon 2. I found this set of proceedings had a selection of articles of satisfactory generality. They applied to setting up and running local and regional, as well as very large, cons.

SMOFCon 13 was held in Austin, Texas, in December 1995. It was hosted by the Fandom Association of Central Texas. I do not know if the proceedings are available. -6-

SMOFCon 14 was held in Seattle, Washington, in December 1996. For this SMOFCon, I have the published proceedings. I was pleased with this year's volume, as it contained a lot of information useful to regional and local conventions, the majority of conventions, actually.

SMOFCon 15 was held in December 1997 in Boston, Massachusetts, hosted by MCFI. I have no address as yet for this year's proceedings. SMOFCon 16 was held in Colorado Springs in 1998. SMOFCon 17 will presumably be held in December 1999. Information on this convention should be listed on the SMOFCon Website: http://world.std.com/~sbarsky_list.html

The SMOFCon Game

Leslie Turek's "If I Ran the Zóó ... Con" Game was introduced at SMOFCon 3. The second edition of the SMOFCon Game came out in October 1987 from NESFA Press. Upon examination, this make-your-own-adventure game has some useful tips for many conventions, but it takes off in an odd direction. Some preposterous and hilarious adventures are written into the game,

and all, allegedly, are based on real events.

Some things bothered me about the game. For one thing, the emphasis is on bidding, planning, and running a WorldCon, many features of which have no bearing on the vast majority of conventions. For another thing, any decision can turn out to be right or wrong, or so it seemed to me. This disheartened me, and ended one of my sporadic attempts to work up a conrunning guide. Perhaps it's just as well. I needed to learn that there is not, and cannot be, a foolproof formula for a successful convention. I needed to be weaned away from a formulaic approach.

Fabulous Edmonton Fandom And The NonCon Bible

During the 1970s when fanzine fandom still ruled, conventions were supposed to break even but not make profits. Fans could reasonably be expected to understand 'apa', 'corflu', and 'fanac'. One of the largest and most active fan communities in Canada was based in Edmonton, Alberta. To a great extent this was basically a large contingent of University of Alberta students in their mid-twenties. The continuing interest and activity of this community derived from a large group of co-ed students entering fandom. The Edmonton Science Fiction and Comic Arts Society (ESFCAS) founded NonCon, which became an annual, perambulating Alberta regional convention. I did not learn until 1998 that the founders got static for using 'noncon', a generic

fannish term, as their convention title. They simply ignored the criticism they received.

ESFCAS veterans told me that a contingent of their members attended the 1977 Westercon in Vancouver, British Columbia, took a lot of notes, and planned NonCon on that basis. Other veterans tell me that NonCon was planned from the first as a perambulating regional. I suspend judgement, as I have assembled some history regarding the first couple of NonCons which perambulated to Calgary, and some of the information is not consistent.

It is about 14 to 17 hours driving time from Edmonton or Calgary to any other SF conventions, as in Vancouver, or Moscow, Idaho. At the outset the founding fans, like students, had more time and energy than money, experience, or other resources to mount a convention.

I used to think all these factors, and more, encouraged an ESFCAS member to assemble documented guidelines for NonCons. Ron Gillies, now a librarian in Lloydminster (straddling the Alberta/Saskatchewan border), put together a preliminary procedures manual for the benefit of the NonCon SF Society. I am told he swore up and down this wasn't Scripture and shouldn't be treated as such.

Naturally, of course, his notes

became known as the 'NonCon Bible'.

I have at least part of the materials that went into the NonCon Bible. I was somewhat disappointed in the materials, as they were mostly drawn on the NonCon Society constitution, and on ROBERTS' RULES OF ORDER. Rather than describing the few fundamentals that should apply to running any convention, or any NonCon, the emphasis was on describing the duties of Chairs, Treasurers, Secretaries, etcetera, and procedural bumph relating to the NonCon Society, or to subsidiary committees set up to execute some NonCon activities.

Maybe there's more material somewhere that I haven't located. I therefore tried again in autumn 1998 to contact Deloris Booker, another ESFCAS veteran now living in Red Deer, with no response so far.

The Little Golden Guide (1981)

THE FAN'S LITTLE GUIDE TO THROWING YOUR OWN CON was first published in 1981 by Sharon Ferraro-Short and Paula Smith, copyrighted by the now-defunct Star Trek Welcommittee. From internal evidence this is geared to the interests and expectations of Star Trek fans, and was inspired in part by an expensive fiasco which was held at an unnamed

Midwestern university.

An updated and expanded edition was published in 1992.

It may be of interest to quote from this guide. The authors wrote that there were several types of cons:

"The professional convention. This is usually a very large convention run by people who may have a passing interest in Star Trek, but whose real love is money. They are often promoters and their goal is \$\$\$\$. To our knowledge, no professional con has made money."

"The fan-run big con. This tends to be smaller than the pro con. Although registration fees, events, and other hoopla are the same, since the con is run by fans they keep more of an eye on fan-oriented panels, trivia contests, club meetings, and so forth. Size ranges from 500 to 17,000 attendees, with the majority running around 5,000 to 8,000. They usually have three to four stars, a couple of writers, some displays, and perhaps a Fan Guest of Honour. The registration fee is invariably over \$15."

"The fan-run fan con. This is a smaller con, by, of, and for fans. There are no stars, no writers, just fans discussing fannish topics and enjoying themselves. Registration runs between nothing and \$15, as a rule, and attendance between 100 and 500."

“The fan-run neo con. While the fan con appeals to the active fans and its purpose is to stimulate interest in Trek and fandom, the neocon is for acquainting new fans with fandom. Here the registration fees should be low or non-existent, and the panels mostly introductions to various aspects of fandom. Often it is only a one or two day event.”

This was all pretty sideways to my own experience and understanding of conventions, but then I went to cons in a different time and place. For the last decade, at least in the Pacific Northwest, cons in my experience have worked on a concept of a general convention, as described at the beginning of this article. There are also media conventions, focusing on Star Trek, Star Wars, actor GoHs, film- or TV-inspired costuming, and so on. Specialized conventions for lit fans, Goths, filkers, costumers, and conrunners are also appearing.

Conventional Fanzine.

Eva Whitley produced CONVENTIONAL FANZINE, a very irregular conrunning zine, or so she describes it. The first two issues were produced either about 1979 or about the time of ChiCon IV (1982). On her own account, Ms. Whitley basically produced CONVENTIONAL FANZINE because she wanted to see such a publication, but nobody else offered anything of the kind at the time. I would be interested in a publishing history of

her fanzine, not to say a bibliography of articles still useful to convention committees, but Ms. Whitley has a life and is just too busy to oblige.

She has since published an article on planning convention (especially WorldCon) banquets, now available at <http://users.aol.com/ecwhitley/hugobanq.txt>.

My Barely-Hidden Agenda

My reasons for documenting conrunning procedures, and my reasons for documenting fanhistory, were shaped by some personal experiences. One of those experiences spanned much of 1982 and 1983. Friends of mine held one-day minicons in Victoria, British Columbia, in 1981 and 1982. They had more time and energy than money or experience (does this sound familiar?) but they were conscientious about breaking even and keeping track of their money. I suppose their being university students, or at least college-age, had something to do with that. I really had no idea that teenagers and twenty-somethings are presumed to feel invincible, and to downplay or ignore difficulties in their way.

Then came the Constellation Con crew.

Two of the principal

members were overheard, at a Halloween party in 1982, talking about the Chicon they attended, and saying: "*Gee that was just great; we ought to hold something like that here!*". The next thing we knew, they were proposing to hold a 1500+ member convention, in two hotels no less, and with ten guests, not one or two Guests of Honour. \$25 membership charges were announced, on par with large conventions such as Norwescon. The date given was close to the mini-convention my friends were already planning for 1983, and also conflicted with the relaxicon that Vancouver fans held at the time.

To this day no-one has ever explained where Constellation Con was going to get its starting capital, let alone its members. Apparently their Chair thought you just had to announce a convention, and hundreds of people would send in their memberships, and money would start rolling in.

The Constellation Con committee reacted to any criticism or disbelief as if to physical attack. Things got really paranoid in Victoria fandom for a while, tire slashings and things like that. This behaviour also occurs repeatedly, or so I infer from reading FILE 770 (an SF fandom neswzine) and other zines over ten or twenty years.

The Constellationoids persisted. Eventually they held a 100-member event in a Jaycee Hall, still charging \$25 admission.

Massive debts and losses were rumoured.

As I later learned, some new fans make mistakes like this repeatedly. The upshot, objectively, is that it was six or seven years before another convention was attempted in Victoria. I was surprised; I thought it would be ten or twenty years.

The only point of this story is that I spent the next several years thinking that fandom was crawling with any number of psycho mediafans, infected with delusions of grandeur, ready to perpetuate more fiascos and destroy the credibility of any innocent fans in the same community. Like my friends, I also developed severe reservations about big cons, say anything with over 1000 members.

Later on, fans like Robert Runte informed me about the much greater losses incurred by a Puget Sound Star Trek Convention, or the even more serious outcome of a 20th-anniversary "Star Trek Celebration" held in Spokane.

I still think Westercon and WorldCon committees can attract psycho mediafans with delusions of grandeur. Suffice it to say that I learned a know-nothing fan can be any age, not just in their early twenties, and even an experienced and knowledgeable fan community counts for nothing, if it simply won't stand up to a

know-nothing bully. Eventually I realized that fandom communicates its norms with a low degree of fidelity, but I digress.

The Con Committee's Guide (Strauss, 1984)

Erwin S. Strauss, of Alexandria, Virginia, drafted THE CON COMMITTEE'S GUIDE in 1984. Upon examination this appears to be a preliminary write-up, with cursory glance at most departments, except for an extended discussion of indoor signage, directing people to different convention events on-site. An updated edition is now available on the Web from Chaz Baden's Website.

Erwin Strauss' article on "Making string boards for distributing flyers" (1987) reappeared on July 14, 1990, and was revised again on June 11, 1991. I had string boards like this at Orycon, as an alternative to freebie tables. A good thing too, as the number of free advertising flyers well exceeded the space available on two or three tables. Dale Speirs tells me these were also used at ConAdian with success.

Strauss, also known as 'Filthy Pierre', is semi-famous in fan country, partly for having edited THE SF CONVENTION REGISTER for many years, which was perhaps the most globally complete listing of upcoming conventions ever produced. When

Strauss folded the REGISTER, he gave his mailing list to CONTEMPORAL, a con listing published in Texas. He is also known for THE COMPLETE GUIDE TO SF CONVENTIONS, available from Loompanics Press, Port Townsend, Washington. He also published a booklet on how to start your own country, available from Loompanics. He now edits The Libertarian Connection, a libertarian or anarchist APA.

New Canadian Fandom.

From about 1981 to 1983, Robert Runte in Alberta edited NEW CANADIAN FANDOM, a semi-quarterly newszine for and about Canadian fans. As you might expect, issues of conrunning kept cropping up in his fan news and his loc (letter of comment) column. Some of the first issues of NCF coloured my impressions of the general state of conrunning knowledge, such as reports on Halcon 4 (Halifax) and Great White North Con (Vancouver). Halcon 4 apparently was put on by some isolated fans who had never been out of Halifax before. Great White North Con, as reported by Len Wong, was ripped off by its hotel, and then by some executives of the Vancouver Comic Book Club.

Robert Runte's background includes deep involvement over many years with ESFCAS, the Edmonton SF club which at one point had over 300 members and which fostered an efflorescence of

fanzine publishing in the 1970s; and with NonCon, the Alberta regional con. He was also a Guest of Honour at ConAdian, the Canadian WorldCon held in Winnipeg in 1994.

The Amazing Invisible Con Calendar.

In the early 1980s in Vancouver, BCSFA member Pat Burrows saw the need for a regional convention calendar, mainly so that conventions could avoid scheduling too closely to each other. Nothing came of that idea for years.

Now, of course, in addition to the traditional convention lists in SF CHRONICLE and LOCUS, and some SF magazines, there are a number of convention-listing zines with different areas of coverage, calendars on Web sites, and even a newsgroup devoted to conventions.

Ad Astra: Where The Baycon Bible Came From.

I don't know how long Ad Astra has been held in Toronto but Mike Wallis was Chair of, well, I know not how many Ad Astras in the 1980s. He later moved to southern California and wrote or edited the Baycon Bible, based largely, he writes, on notes by Toronto fan Howard Scrimgeour about Ad Astra. When I found a copy of Howard Scrimgeour's notes for Ad Astra, I found it was based on earlier notes by Chris Meredith in 1981.

The Maple Leaf Rag.

I edited and published a national newszine THE MAPLE LEAF RAG from 1983 to 1987, and started running across scraps and tips and tossed-aside comments about conrunning. Years went by, I do not exaggerate, before I got even a hint that there were, already, some guides for fannish conventions going around. More years went by before I located even one or two.

One instance of significant comments: Donna McMahon of Vancouver made some cogent points while reviewing Eucon (held just once, in 1985).

“Eugene, Oregon, is a beautiful place on a sunny April weekend ... Under these circumstances it is no wonder that many people had priorities other than attending SF programming in the Eugene Hilton. ...”

“That particular weekend was also Easter weekend, which undoubtedly had another impact on attendance. The Eucon committee, though, was not overly optimistic in that regard. They had figured on a minimum attendance of 300 and got 320 ... “

“They broke even on attendance, but lost money on the brunch and function space, since they were unable to rent enough rooms

in the hotel. ... The way that they saved their financial situation should prove instructive to concons that think they can do their budgeting "by guess and by God". The Eucon concom were sufficiently on top of their financial situation, during the con, that they knew by Sunday afternoon that they were in danger of losing money. Instead of throwing up their hands in despair, they embarked on a number of last-minute money-saving measures. Among their tactics: talking to the hotel and persuading the Hilton to give them a partial rates break, despite Eucon not having booked the agreed-upon number of rooms; closing down Hospitality on Sunday and moving the dead whatever party to someone's room; and holding an auction of miscellaneous items on Sunday ... " (THE MAPLE LEAF RAG #15, June 1985, page 14)

Part of my not-so-hidden motive for publishing THE MAPLE LEAF RAG was to prevent further Constellation Con incidents. Combat the ignorance. Make explicit what running a convention really required.

As it worked out, MLR was a fan newszine, it was fairly frequent and regular, it gathered and spread around fan news, and sometimes it featured articles on how fan activities worked, apas, awards, and any material I vacuumed up on conrunning.

It didn't really work, of course. As I became less naive, I found

out how different the attitudes and agendas general in fandom were from my own. At one stage, Donna McMahon and Robert Runte actually implied to me that they didn't see where I came off dictating to fandom or trying to put convention committees in a procedural straitjacket. How they read that into anything I wrote, I don't know! But that's representative of the level of fannish communication and comprehension, in my experience.

More importantly, I worked it out that the general motive for conrunning is to do your own thing, your own way, and not be held to a rule. Psycho mediafans are very much in the minority. Fans who want to document their conrunning are also in the minority.

Sporadic Collecting.

By 1986 I had scraped together enough clues and notes to offer a short, provisional bibliography of conrunning resources, very incomplete and probably quite out of date. Every so often I dumped my collection in disgust, donating it to some fan group or other. Every so often I start collecting again.

About 1992 I had another fit of materials-gathering for a guide on convention operations. I started interviewing people who had

worked on our local convention. Among other people, I spoke to Frances Higginson, who had several years' involvement in Registration for V-Cons. Rather than material for a tape interview, Frances handed me a writeup, "On Site Registration" (unpublished), as of September 1992. Frances has since moved to British Columbia's Interior, but is still listed in BCSFA's membership book.

Every so often I took a look at what convention discussion went on over the Internet. In 1995, for example, a discussion took place on newsgroups alt.fandom.cons and rec.arts.sf.fandom labeled "Re: 'Rip-Offs' and Con Organizing NOW". Initially the argument discussion centred on convention sizes and what they mean.

Alexander von Thorn "vonthorn@io.org" of Toronto wrote: "And some of the managerial talent required to run a convention, regardless of its size, is spread pretty thin. Smaller cons does not mean more cons, it just means fewer fans come out."

Pam Wells "Vacuous_Tart@bitch.demon.co.uk" in England wrote: "Excuse me, but to put it bluntly, this is utter bollocks. It may hold true for Alexander, but it doesn't hold true for me. I am much more likely to come out for a smaller con than a larger one, as are many of my friends. It took me a long while to decide to attend Intersection, for example, but mere seconds to decide

to go to Precursor, the MiScons, the (late, lamented) Newcastle Silicons, and so on. More, smaller cons mean that more fans will come out. And have a better time. So there."

On Friday, 23 June 1995 (19:27:33 GMT) Bernard Peek wrote: "There are some people who only go to small cons. There are some that only go to larger ones. There are some that only go to local ones. There are some that don't go to 'generic' conventions, but only specialist ones."

"It seems pretty obvious to me that more people go to larger cons, which is why they are larger. These may not be the people that Pam wants to meet."

"More people go to better run small cons, which is how you end up with larger ones."

"I think Pam is confusing two different aspects of conventions. The larger cons are usually the three-ring-circus types which attract people from a lot of different groups. Either that or they are dedicated to one or more of the big audience TV programmes."

"The conventions that Pam lists are small and of little interest to the majority of fandom, because so few people attend them. If

they continued as a series they would end up growing, eventually reaching the size where they can't be run as a small convention."

"The small specialist group holds a small convention and it works. They do it again and most of the same people show up, plus half as many again who have heard good things about the last one. And so it goes. It ends up with a large convention, most of the people attending are there to meet other fans, who probably aren't the people who attended the first one in the series."

"The only group that I know of that has successfully dealt with the problem (and they've been doing it for a long while) are the group who manage the Royal Enclosure at Ascot. You need to be proposed by two current members and have to spend a minimum of, I believe, six years on the waiting list."

Bernard peek's response, alas, puts fannish fandom and fannish cons in their current place, very much in the minority.

You're probably wondering why I haven't mentioned fannish archives here. Until recently, no such archives were available in Vancouver. The archives of the British Columbia Science Fiction Association were hard to get at until R. Graeme Cameron became archivist for the West Coast Science Fiction Association. Graeme actually discovered some items relevant for this article. In the summer of 1998, I borrowed materials that I hope to boil down

into a useable handbook or manual. Like other projects, though, this could take two or three times as many years to accomplish as would be reasonable.

One information source I still have to track down was titled CONS AND SHELL GAMES. I sent out queries about 1997 to find out who edited it, when, and where. No answer came.

Local Notable.

INSIDE FROM THE INSIDE, the only fanzine from Ed Beauregard of BCSFA, was a 1985 one-shot detailing some drawbacks to the management of V-Con 5 and Westercon XXX.

Ed and his then-wife Norma were original and longstanding members of BCSFA, which is the main general-interest SF group in Vancouver. The Beauregards filled several roles on V-Con committees, notably as treasurers, and often stored V-Con's art show boards. I sometimes characterize Ed as basically working up V-Con financial statements, for several years running, from nothing more than shoeboxes full of unvouchered receipts.

INSIDE FROM THE INSIDE also details a 100-point system Beauregard devised for rating SF conventions, analogous but not identical to the People-Finances-Goodwill Points system of the

SMOFCon Game. In Beauregard's system, so many points were given for profits raised out of the convention, so many points for members gained from the convention, and so many points for enjoyability.

Moscon Timeline.

About the time I was editing MAPLE LEAF RAG, Michael and Beth Finkbiner of Moscow, Idaho, had a timeline for running Moscon (a small local convention in Idaho), with detailed descriptions of departmental duties. An electronic version was kept on a Moscow hard drive which crashed, and Michael's hardcopy vanished years ago. But I recovered an old copy from WCSFA archives in 1998 and forwarded it to Moscon.

Scavenger's Newsletter Articles.

"Who's Conning Whom?", a short article from Stuart Napier, appeared in SCAVENGER'S NEWSLETTER #32, October 1986. Napier didn't understand "who gains from all this?". Not the reader, he surmised, and not the writer of SF. I wrote an article in reply, pointing out that conventions were not particularly writers' events, but there is no reason to think Napier got the word.

[to be continued]



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