

# One Swell Foop #4



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ONE SWELL FOOP #4 (May-June 2011), the journal of recreational insanity, comes from Garth Spencer at 82 East 40<sup>th</sup> Avenue, Vancouver, BC CANADA V5W 1L4, garthspencer @ shaw.ca.

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## Monkey Mind

*Or, things I found myself saying with my bare face hanging out  
(usually on Facebook)*

Shiminedic. Thorpby Vickthwaite.

Shnib. Thungy. Wapplish.

fooby sork vlib

(gestures towards a new constructed language)

I thought the force that bound and held the universe together was marketing. (apologies to Mel Brooks) Or the might demon Build Your Empire and the dreaded god Cover Your Ass. (apologies to S.M. Stirling)

Seeing a concentration of movies or episodes in one series can be a mistake, the way that reading a concentration of works by one author can be a mistake. I found this out when I overdosed on James P. Hogan just before he was a Guest of Honour at our local convention.

This winter I was again reminded of the need to tap into our climate's most ignored power source: RAIN! Yes, all we have to do is turn windmills \*sideways\*, hook up a power generator and you're laughing! At least when the rain is really pissing down ...

(after the false rapture alarm recently in the news) I think someone should file a suit on behalf of God alleging libel, slander, and copyright and trademark violation by fundamentalists worldwide.

I think the proof that God exists lay in the continuing occurrence of science fiction conventions. My observation and participation in SF cons led me to think they were, in fact, logically impossible, like the legendary clang birds.

Have you noticed that our news is defined by stupidity, and violence, and the decline of civilized behaviour? It's a lot like our entertainment that way. Is there anyone specializing in news about intelligence, peaceable, constructive behaviour? Or are \*all\* news sources dominated by advertisers?

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Sometimes I think I am retreating into a fantasy world not unlike that of the Nowhere Man, the strange critter in the Beatles movie /Yellow Submarine/. Have you seen that?



### Locs

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*Cheryl Gonnason, April 26, 2011*

I can understand your disappointment that you don't have "None of the Above" to vote for because so many politicians seem to be self-interested and/or arrogant. I went to an all candidates meeting last week and thought the Liberal and the NDP did well and were genuine, the Conservative was full of it, the Canada Action guy didn't seem to have a full platform and the Green, sadly, was not yet ready for prime time. We also have an independent running in our riding. At first he was disappointed that nobody was asking him questions then he just sounded off. It was sad because he came across as mentally ill. It gave some entertainment to the evening but it was clear that someone like that would be useless in Ottawa even if he managed to survive. I'm looking forward to the election being over and an end to the attack ads. It is a wonder that anyone wants to run for office.

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Bill Wright [bilw@iprimus.com.au], April 28, 2011

Thanks for OSF #3 focusing on current abuses of electionism through the lens of Canadian politics.

The world's so-called affluent nations (whose trade-advantaged wealth is increasingly being funnelled into fewer and fewer hands) are not themselves immune from forms of corruption of democratic institutions they condemn in foreign dictatorships. Despite appearances, European-style parliamentary democracy (with its inbuilt checks and balances occasioned by separation of legislative, executive and legal arms of government centred on democratically-elected parliaments) is a fragile plant that may wither as powerful special interests gnaw on the bones of its debt-laden economies.

*((The concentration of wealth and executive power was documented in Canada in the 1950s, and when documented again in the 1970s, had only intensified. In fact the same picture of concentration was found typical all over the continent.*

*((An unsympathetic observer, with no axe to grind, might argue that conventional political structures were always intended to serve special interests.))*

Throughout history there have been apologists for all forms of government from so-called benign dictatorship to anarchism - the latter being least understood as, for it to function, individuals have to govern themselves. There is nothing wrong with the Anarchist ethic to the effect that no man is capable of judging another, except that it has never been known to work in practice. Indeed, a truly anarchist society would swiftly fall victim to subversion by would-be predators seduced by their lust for power nourished by any number of high-sounding principles. If you ask me for examples, Niccolò Machiavelli's prescriptions for being a good ruler\* come to mind.

*(Note: I excerpted Bill's parenthetical remarks to a separate article, "Bill Wright on Machiavelli".)*

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As for myself, I take refuge in faith in the independent mind. Its educational consequences are belief in free inquiry and discourse. Its political consequences are belief in democracy, but only in a democracy in which the minority, even a minority of one, can continue to differ and be heard.

*((As opposed to fringe parties in Canada, such as the Work Less Party, the Marijuana Party, the Pirate Party, etc.))*

Those who desire to conform with these norms but are prohibited or hindered from doing so by intolerance and prejudice must be aided. That, in the process, the nonconformist conscience must not be stifled requires craftiness and statesmanship to sustain - qualities many leaders aspire to but few attain.

*((For example, advocates for a New Democratic federal administration in Canada.))*

À propos of which I make the long-term prediction that Barack Obama will not be seen to have come into his own as a statesman until he has seen out two terms as President and is well into his second decade as Chief Justice of the United States Supreme Court. Only then, I believe, will his political agenda – encapsulated above and apparent to me, albeit seemingly opaque to everyone else – be consummated. Balancing domestic and global politics is a lot more complicated than most people realise and a thankless chore for the leader of a declining superpower. I wonder sometimes why Obama bothers while being thankful that he does.

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*Lloyd Penney, 1706-24 Eva Rd., Etobicoke, ON, M9C 2B2, May 13, 2011*

*One Swell Foop 3 is in a printed format for my tired eyes right now, and that should help me write a letter with the little bit of allotted time I have left. That's my story, anyway...*

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The election the government said no one wanted has come and gone. The advance polls were nearly stampeded, and the turnout was a little better than the last couple of federal elections. Can't say I like the final result...my part of Toronto went almost entirely Conservative blue. In fact I live in one of only two ridings that are automatically going for a judicial recount because of the slim margin of victory. Conservative Ted Opitz beat Liberal incumbent Borys Wrzesnewskij in Etobicoke Centre by just 25 votes. Go, Borys! With the NDP as the official opposition, now to see if Harper and his majority will govern for all the people with a majority and a strong opposition, or just do as they please, and abuse Parliament and our civil rights even further. My money's on the latter. (Actually, I don't blame the Belgians for anything. They haven't had a functioning government in nearly two years, and they're doing fine. Some would say we haven't had a functioning government, either.) (I will also say that with this election, proroguing Parliament, acting disgracefully and slandering the leader of the opposition at the time (I would have sued) gets the Conservatives a majority? Good guys finish last, but in this case, the villains triumph. Not impressed, Canada.)

Get that party set up, now, Garth. Don't wait for that election to come along. If Harper follows his own elections law this time, you've got four full years to plan it, set up the party structure, get the funding for it, and run some candidates.

Mike Glicksohn, Al Betz, and now Ed Hutchings. Maybe the rest of us should go see our doctor, just in case? People die, but all these three at once is depressing. Stay well, everyone!

I have nominated in the Auroras, but I do not participate in the Constellations. I want to vote in something I have some background in, and I rarely watch any SF television these days, so I certainly do not know the names of the stars in them. I also watch few movies, so I would be totally unqualified to participate in the Constellations.

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Organizer Andrew Gurudata seems to accept that. We've voted in CUFF, and we will see what happens.

The Michael Baigent book you refer to shows us all that we cannot use religious profiling to determine who is trying to undermine our society. Every religious group, political group, and group of other divisions all have their extremists. Lots of countries have them, too. The Republicans and Tea Partiers look pretty extreme to me, and I think they should be watched carefully.

My thanks to Eric Mayer, and the cheque's in the mail. Or check, whichever you prefer. I know why the .pdf format is popular, financial mostly, so as far as I'm concerned, a .pdfed fanzine is just that, a fanzine, but it hasn't been laid on paper. Still, it's a fanzine, and deserves some attention and a loc. I've just applied efficient time management to the process, plus I also bring all outstanding e-fanzines with me at all times via a thumbdrive. I also have at least one paper fanzine with me, too. When time allows, out comes the zines, and most computers have Word...

Garth, if you are looking for Colin Upton and don't have an e-mail for him, he is on Facebook, and you are too, if I recall. If not, I can pass along messages if you'd like.

For me, the best memory control would be to install a row of thumbdrive ports on the back of my head, the way George Alec Effinger used to write about it. If I need a memory wipe, just pull out the right USB. If I want to learn Cantonese instantly, plug in another USB. If only it worked that way...sometimes, the wetware is just too unreliable. I am still at the OAA, but the assignment end at the end of May, and I am already looking. I had a great interview at TVGuide.ca, but no luck there. I think your reasons for Yvonne keeping me are bang-on. We celebrate our 28<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary on May 28.



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The drunk Buddhist satyr...I am sure that anything else I could say would just get me into trouble, so I hope I run into her the next convention I go to. I'll buy her a drink in the con suite.

The Conservatives are in charge, the Liberals are decimated, the Bloc nearly wiped away, the NDP are greatly strengthened but will probably be simply ignored by the Conservatives, and Elizabeth May got Canada's first Green seat in Saanich-Gulf Islands. Small miracles here and there...if nothing else, politics will become a great spectator sport over the next four years. With some luck and clarity of vision, the Canadian electorate will be the Conservatives as the wannabe Republicans they truly are, and will turf the rascals out. I hope to dig out the old "Conservative Party, table for 2" joke in 2015.

I am done...you have yourself the best weekend you can, and I promise to sleep in in the morning. Yay! Old coot me need sleep bad. See you soon.



### **Bill Wright on Machiavelli**

Machiavelli's ideas are contained in *The Prince*, a manual of advice to Lorenzo De' Medici (1449-1492) to whom the book is dedicated, on how to gain power and keep it efficient<sup>1</sup>. Machiavelli maintained that a

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<sup>1</sup> Also in the same author's *Discourses on the First Ten Books of Livy*, and even his play *Mandragola*. -GS

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strong leader is needed to maintain domination for the benefit of citizens.

Among questions discussed in the book is, “Is it better for a Prince to be loved or feared?” Machiavelli’s short answer is that it would be preferable to be loved and feared; however the two simply can’t exist together. As a result, he says that it would be best to be feared and not loved because as a leader it is your responsibility to control and run the state and to do so you need complete obedience from your people.

Machiavelli does not believe in cruelty and warrants it only for military use. This is because he believes that if you have a good military then you will have good laws. One of his most famous quotes helps explain this theory, “The presence of sound military forces indicates the presence of sound laws.” Although Machiavelli believes it is better to be feared than loved, he recognized that a leader cannot be hated or it will lead to his downfall. He advises that Princes should avoid being hated or despised, as the people’s allegiance is a better defence than building a fortress.

Machiavelli was a traditional yet flexible thinker and writer who raises strong emotions in his literary works. Political concepts and theories outlined in *The Prince* are insightful. His theories on governing people have influenced historical and modern leaders ever since. The word Machiavellian, which came from this book and from Machiavelli’s theories, means to be crude, cunning and deceitful and this is exactly how Machiavelli thought a prince should act. However, to my mind, the only ruler in modern times to have come even close to the Machiavellian ideal is Thailand’s 83-year-old King Bhumibol Aduladej - visit Issue #2 of my fanzine *Antipodean Areopagus*: <http://efanzines.com/Antipodean/AA-02.pdf> page 7 to find out why.

*(My take on Machiavelli is that he was an early Italian nationalist, frustrated and enraged by Italy’s fragmentation and by his powerlessness as a mere secretary, so he examined power politics*

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*without conventional appeals to ethics – and advocated Italian unification, again without appeal to ethics, which might have qualified him as an early fascist. Apparently he was simply the first person to write this way, not just talk this way.)*



### **The Art of the Con**

By Garth Spencer

For most of the 1980s, when I was over-involved in science fiction fandom, I intended to summarize what I had seen and read about science fiction conventions in One Big Article, or book-length manuscript. Well, time went on, I never had all the material I wanted, the field changed and I grew away from fandom. This condensation is only an opinion piece, and obviously based on thirty-year-old material; it still may offer some points of interest, even some useful points, for contemporary fans.

### **Abstract**

All I really had to say about SF conventions is that we seemed to persist in some self-defeating policies, such as merely expecting fans to

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understand membership and to volunteer, rather than scam the con. Convention-running fans have several times displayed serious misconceptions based on baggage they brought in or first impressions they gained, when they entered fandom. Some of the worst fiascos in convention history resulted not only because a convention committee – at least the chair – gained some misconceptions, but clung to them, stubbornly. Perhaps unfairly, I think that most convention committees do not clearly *\*define\**, they just *\*assume\** what their purpose is in holding a convention at all. Not precisely a plan for success.

### **Varieties and some History of SF Conventions**

#### *Fannish conventions*

On the evidence (i.e., the fanhistories of Sam Moskowitz, Harry Warner Jr. et al.), SF conventions began – and remained for a long time – an inexpensive entertainment for SF fans, a place to meet each other and socialize, and usually posted a net loss. The fact that only a few hundred people might attend – perhaps less than a hundred – leads one to suspect this was really a large party, held in a hotel because nobody has a home quite large enough.

This sense of fandom as a community, a place where you could actually talk to other people who read the stuff, was a part of the ambience called “fannish”. It explains a lot, such as the fact that paying congoers are expected, right up to this day, to buy *memberships* rather than tickets, and to *volunteer time* for tasks as humble as collecting trash, cleaning tables, or checking badges at the door. Robert Runté, whose fan involvement was largely in the 1970s, pointed out to me that conventions were not even supposed to make money, until the 1980s; but by the time I came along in the 1980s, that expectation had pretty much reversed. Andrew Nisbet in Portland once pointed out that we are buying *\*memberships\**, not *\*tickets\** as a lot of congoers seem to think. By that time conventions were like heraldic beasts, pasted together from parts of several different animals - partly featuring daytime panel programming, partly featuring an artshow, partly

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featuring a dealers' room, partly featuring a running party room (the consuite), and partly featuring frat parties in all but name (the room parties). Obviously it's possible for things not to get passed on.

The largest of these were travelling conventions, such as the World SF Convention or Worldcon, which fans in different cities bid to hold in different years. Similar are perambulating regional conventions, such as Westercon, held in western North America (usually just alternating between northern and southern states). There are now some travelling special-interest conventions, such as CostumeCon, but I get ahead of myself.

Actually it appears the ambience started changing in the 1970s. A lot of social changes have been attributed to the 1960s and 1970s, or more specifically to the disproportionate "baby boom" generation. It may be no accident that there were a surprising number of children between 10 and 15 years of age in 1966, when Star Trek went on the air. By 1971, at any rate, there appeared to be nine Star Trek fans where there had been one fannish fan. The 1971 Worldcon was the last convention with an attendance as low as 2000 members. Torcon II, the 1972 Worldcon, was described as "the last fannish Worldcon".

### *Regional variations*

In the mid-1980s, a Toronto fan commented that there seemed to be congoing "regions" in North America, defined by who tended to circulate at the same conventions - in the Southwest, the Southeast, the Midwest, the Northeast, and the Pacific Northwest, for instance. There were overlaps, of course, and some places were nearly isolated, like the Maritime provinces, and Saskatoon fans; but the upshot seemed to be that conventions were held somewhat differently in different regions. For example, for a long time Pacific Northwest cons have usually held dances on Friday or Saturday nights.

This has led to some frictions. For one thing, early in the 1980s *New Canadian Fandom* reported on a Halcon held in the isolated Maritimes,

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which ran on bizarre policies - you bought a \*ticket\*, not a membership, had the card punched to limit how many panels or movies you could watch, and while there was a consuite, it was kept a deep dark secret; the concom thought it was supposed to be a closed event, only for GoHs and concom. (This misconception popped up again at Ottawa's Maplecon, which is strange as Ottawa is by no means as isolated as the Maritimes.) Years later I was surprised by a Con-Version that didn't feature a dead dog party - the concom didn't know that was expected. For another, there seemed to be something more expected of Westercons than was quite communicated to Vancouver fans, either in the 1970s or in the early 1990s; as a result, Mike Glyer described Westercon 30 as "a one-and-a-half day convention crammed into four days", and the chair of Westercon 44 was so intent on adding neat whizzbang features that the con went about \$14,000 into the hole. Obviously there is scope for communication to fail, disastrously.

### *Media conventions*

By the 1980s the average attendance at Worldcons was on the order of 8,000. In comparison, Star Trek conventions in the Midwest were drawing as many as 30,000 members.

It is of interest to compare the Trek model of conventions with the fannish model. The emphasis was on the film show (later the videotape, or DVD show), costumes, and a dealers' room. Panel programming was limited at "professional" conventions (for profit, held by TV/film studios) to the same few actors holding the same interview discussions on stage each day.

(In a future edition I will quote the Star Trek Welcomittee book's misconceptions)

It is of even more interest to compare this "Creation Con" model with something I read about in the newszine *File 770*, in the early 1980s. Apparently there was an alleged person in the Los Angeles area who was given to descending on local fan groups with a pre-packaged, for-

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profit event, recruiting their volunteer labour, giving them no say in the choice of Guests of Honour or in the programming, and raking off the profits. This rather resembles the Creation Con events, which also competed directly with other dealers offering the same media-inspired merchandise.

More old-fashioned fans were unenthused about “media” conventions, but I think not simply because it was profit-driven; not even because it was exclusively about, let’s face it, rather juvenile and inferior film and television SF. Mediafans neither knew, nor cared about fannish community as fannish fans knew it; they invented their own terms of reference and were self-absorbed. Some people will tell me that Star Trek fandom was their fannish community, but honestly – I have seen a lot of fans less than 20 years of age who had no idea what “membership” meant, they kept calling it a “ticket” and quite honestly thought they were merely buying admission to a show.

The fact is, perhaps, that fandom had never been a community, much less a united one, and even the illusion had ceased to prevail.

(In a future edition I will quote Andy Hooper/Arnie Katz comments on different “waves” of conrunning styles, and my collection of convention disaster stories)

### *Special-interest conventions*

Today any major population centre probably sees a variety of conventions – gaming conventions, costuming conventions, Japanese animation conventions, and conventions for fans of furry-animal/anthropomorphic comics – each of which, I suspect, is moving out of touch with other fandoms.

### **Internet communication and advertising**

When personal computers became inexpensive enough to become household appliances, fans were among the first to use word-

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processing, and then desktop publishing for their publications – including convention publications.

When the Internet became accessible enough to become another public medium, fans were among the first to adopt it for correspondence – including convention advertising.

By now, any convention in North America will have its own website. There are several Web pages devoted to listing upcoming conventions, domestically and abroad. There are even a lot of “cobweb” sites, still in existence and using up electrons, advertising past conventions.

### **Anatomy of SF Conventions**

At the time I entered fandom (in 1980), and for at least a couple of decades following, local annual SF conventions seemed to work as follows.

#### *First steps:*

- Assess your resources: available seed money, or potential manpower you can muster, or something nebulous called “goodwill” – partly the willingness of local and regional fans to give you credence, let alone attendance; partly the willingness of local hotels and other businesses to participate
- Have a nest egg of \$200 to \$500, to cover a hotel deposit, initial advertising, stationery and postage and perhaps a POBox and/or phone/fax line.
- Recruit a core convention committee, including at least a chair, a treasurer, a hotel liaison, a Guest of Honour liaison
- If it doesn’t exist already, register a non-profit society, for at least minimal protection from a net loss; think seriously about incorporating as a non-profit corporation
- Open bank accounts in the name of the convention
- Open accounting books, not just membership records



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- If it doesn't exist already, file a trademark application for your convention name, preferably listing the non-profit society as the owner
- Formulate a convention theme and plan, at least a year in advance of the desired date
- Survey potential hotels and secure at least a signed letter of intent; get a satisfactory contract negotiated and signed as soon as feasible
- Contact potential Guests of Honour; arrange for their transportation, accommodation, special needs, an honorarium, preferably a dogsbody for each of them

As the year or more of preparation continues:

- Keep recruiting for the convention committee, e.g. a (Pre)Registration head, Dealers Liaison, Security, Operations/AV/Logistics, Publications, Video Room, Hospitality, Gaming Room head ; offer inducements and goodies for volunteer services
- Keep advertising – differential rates for different age groups, for dealers/artists, for different periods leading up to the convention
- Publish progress reports (about 3 months apart) at intervals leading up to the convention, detailing any changes in which guests are attending, and any changes or new confirmed features in daytime program panels
- Engage local businesses, partly as dealers for the dealers' room (e.g. book, comics, video and costume supply stores), partly as advertisers (e.g. in the program book), and as suppliers (goodies for the volunteers such as pins or badges or trademarked convention T-shirts, Hospitality munchies, and refreshments (including alcohol))
- Rush around madly in the week, or at least two days, before the convention weekend, trucking stuff to the hotel and setting things up

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At the convention:

- At Registration, provide members with a Program Book and pocket program at the convention, maybe a daily zine about the program changes
- From beginning to end of the convention, run some day-long features – Registration, the Operations/Volunteer Room, the Hospitality suite, the Video Room, the Games Room, the Artshow, and possibly a Kidcon room. (In the 1990s I began to hear about a “Green Room”, a term taken from theatre, for a room where program participants could prepare for panels. I also began to hear about a “Pink Room” where volunteers could similarly prepare for specific assignments.)
- During Friday afternoon, Saturday and Sunday during the day, hold at least two “tracks” of panel programming in various function rooms.
- On Friday and Saturday evenings, at least up to the 1990s, fans would host “room parties”, partly for fun and partly to promote their clubs, or other conventions. Some of these were elaborate enough to have floorshows, or at least compete with Hospitality in serving refreshments. Some conventions helped supply parties with alcohol. (Some Northwest conventions, like VCON, made a practice of holding Friday and/or Saturday dances.)
- On Sunday afternoon, hold a “roses and onions/bouquets and brickbats” panel, where people can credit the convention with some notable good performance, or (more commonly) complain about things that went wrong. (NOTE: you have to take this panel with some perspective; for one thing, some people will always complain about things you got right!)

After the convention:

- Rush around madly in the day after the convention weekend, taking things down and trucking them away
- A month or so later, hold a post-mortem meeting to review what went right, what went wrong, total gain/loss of money, or manpower, or “goodwill”.

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### *Details to note:*

In my part of the world, SF conventions only took money for memberships, or dealers' tables, or art show hanging space. Unlike "mundane" conventions, they did not include your hotel reservation, your meals, or your transportation in the membership fee.

In my part of the world, SF conventions usually provided a bar in the Hospitality suite, entirely apart from the hotel bar. This would be staffed by a volunteer bartender and partially remunerated by donations into a jar.

### **Peculiar Institutions:**

The Worldcon SF Society, SMOFCon, The NonCon SF Society, The Northwest SF Convention League, ConComCon all generated unique traditions which they held onto, and perhaps some of them were mistakes ...

(In a future edition I will quote The SMOFCon Game criteria: basically, so many points each for funds available, people available, and "goodwill" available, before and after the event)

### **Pointed Questions**

How will potential conrunners learn what convention practices are practical, let alone expected?

How many conventions have a business plan, or insurance measures?

How accessible are your signing officers? Either in the convention committee, or in the overseeing registered non-profit society? If they won't attend meetings or show up to sign cheques you can't get anything done.

How do potential congoers learn that conventions are going to be held?

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Why do conventions set up a conflict with hotels? Hotels generally want to sell drinks and meals, not simply rooms; fans want to decline drinks and meals, and get a deal on function space (preferably a discount if at least a certain number, a “room block”, is booked). If fans are too broke or too cheap to pay hotel prices for food and liquor, why are they nevertheless paying for travel and accommodation?

Why do some conventions merely expect fans to understand “membership” and to volunteer their time, rather than to scam the con?

What requirements do you face with respect to dispensing alcohol (e.g. B.C.’s “Serving It Right” course), or customs and excise (a constant issue for artists and dealers and Canadian conventions)?

### **Conclusions**

All I really had to say about SF conventions is that we seemed to persist in some self-defeating policies, either by the standards of the conferences and conventions usually hosted by hotels, or for the purpose of holding a regular gathering for all kinds of science fiction fans; a community event, or even a fraternal event. Even after the “community” air of former fandom was forgotten, and many fans had adopted a more limited focus on media series and actors – even after some fans were telling each other “conventions are a business” – some self-defeating policies have been maintained.

Through all these phases, fans displayed misconceptions based on baggage they brought in or first impressions they gained, when they entered fandom. Some of the worst fiascos in convention history resulted not only because a convention committee – at least the chair – gained some misconceptions, but clung to them, stubbornly.

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I was no different. At first, as I mentioned above, I got the impression there were any number of wild-eyed media-influenced nutbars roaming the hills and valleys, ready to pounce on any innocent fan community, create a convention fiasco, and leave smoking ruins, death and destruction in their wake. As time has shown, even local business communities forget about these fiascos within six or seven years. Also, it seems to be inevitable that one or two such events will occur per decade, in a region such as the Pacific Northwest, or the American Southwest, or Midwest: that is, in any area where fans mostly go to most of the area's conventions, and share many of the same practices.

After enough time, and enough exposure to actual conventions, I began to realize the real problem with conventions was repeated failure of communications – within the committee, between the committee and hotel and GoHs and panellists and artists and dealers, and with potential attendees, in the whole world to which a convention advertises.

Conventions continue to be held, despite numerous challenges and failures and occasional disasters. I have come to conclude that the persistence of SF conventions is proof that God exists, and intervenes in human affairs.

But why He keeps us going, only He knows.

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### Crank Theory

One of the fun things I haven't seen fans do in a while is to compete to create epically silly crank theories. Crank theories, to my knowledge, are generated by people who don't really understand how to make a sound theory, nor indeed understand the field they're talking about; often they are fixated on unproven or disproven premises, such as the existence of visitors from outer space, lost civilizations, unknown creatures, undiscovered physical phenomena, or a conspiracy to preserve scientific dogma; some cranks seem to feel they've got to have an answer for everything, as if any conventional sciences pretend to omniscience; and a few cranks descend to fast double-talk.

Here is my entry in the Crank Theory competition. Are there any other contenders?

### **MY THEORY WHICH IS MINE AND BELONGS TO ME**

#### **Abstract**

Studies of human behaviour can be put on a sounder basis. The key is saying definite things about definite things –to shift the idiom of sociology, anthropology and psychology from abstractions to

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statements that say definite things about definite things. One consequence of this is that we have to speak of “societies” or “a society”, “cultures” or “a culture”, rather than “society” or “culture” in the abstract. . We would also benefit in human studies by generating a non-quantitative symbolic system, similar to and based on set theory and symbolic logic.

### ***Common Fallacies and Misconceptions***

Attempting to talk about this subject with friends turned up some common misconceptions:

- For one thing, there’s no reason to expect people to be logical, in order to describe their behaviour in logical language. People display a lot of repeated and shared behaviours, some of them in quite complex patterns, without their being in the least logical.
- For another thing, applied logic does not require universal statements about rigidly separated categories. Most realities involve statements about partial and overlapping sets, or inferences from statistical samples about general categories.
- For another thing, there’s every reason to think human behaviour can be predicted, within probabilistic limits – especially if you apply some incentives, or deterrents. That’s the basis of insurance, management, advertising, the Mob, a large part of politics, criminology, and the con artist’s profession. Yes, humans are capable of original and creative behaviour – but not much of their behaviour is original.
- Most of all, a great deal of human behaviour is not obviously practical, nor are the causes or goals always self-evident, rational, or profitable; that is the reason for history, psychology, sociology and anthropology.
- Just because a great deal of human behaviour is predictable does not mean it is inevitable. Unlike many physical processes, human behaviour is probabilistic – any outcome carries a probability, however high it is. This suggests that anyone can do

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something original at any time; it also suggests that any projection of outcomes is also a calculation of chances.

- Finally, it doesn't take any ulterior motives to want to explain human behaviour; I just want to figure out how to survive among these crazy people. Even if that amounts to slowly and painfully working out the obvious.

### **Verbal Conventions to Adopt**

One of the first things you notice, in studies from history to anthropology to sociology to psychology, is a reliance on abstract and general terms. This is a sharp contrast to other fields, such as the exact sciences, where specific properties of specific entities are the subject – the mass, the volume, the velocity, and the energy parameters of mechanical or astronomical or subatomic bodies.

I suggest we would benefit in human studies by *saying definite things about definite things*. We could frame statements in the humanities in terms of *specific* behaviour – interactions, customs, legal procedures, crimes, institutional policies and procedures, what have you – displayed by *specific* individuals or groups. Instead of “society” specify *a* society, a community in a particular place and time (or, in this age, defined by their mutual communication and interaction); instead of “culture” specify *a* culture, defined by traits such as dress, cuisine, language, taboos, or investment and management decisions.

Note: The subject of these studies is human behaviour, not individual human beings. In fact, specific human behaviours are the least elements of a culture. Repeated and shared behaviours – from interactions such as common courtesies through customs and rituals to work habits and national policies – are the major elements of a culture.

For the purpose of this theory I modified several basic terms of sociology and anthropology, perhaps into simplistic terms:

Societies are communities of people who interact repeatedly and continually, practicing the same behaviours and interactions with each other. You could say they amount to the performers of social practices. Until recent generations they were also limited to specific regions, and are still somewhat limited in time span. Of course, societies



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will change over the course of time, as older members die and new members are born, as members disperse to settle in new communities, and as newcomers are introduced.

Situations: We know that one situation leads to another, in human social environments.

Behaviour: A finer level of analysis would require us to specify who does what and with which and to whom, to what effect, and (possibly) from what motive, or towards what goal.

It may be simplest just to list some categories of behaviour, ranging from dress, cuisine, language, taboos, or investment and management decisions. (People who have to work out slowly and painfully what others find obvious often *simply do not register* the vocal tones, facial expressions, gestures, postures, or speaking distances of others – in fact, the whole category of nonverbal communication.)

It will be a huge job to identify all the behaviours people perform, so for this we may as well list all the verbs in a core vocabulary, such as Basic English.

Patterns of Behaviour – why things happen and how things work – have been a continuing study for anthropologists, criminologists, novelists, con artists, sociologists, godfathers, actors, psychologists, and public relations officers. Some patterns are common knowledge, and some are not. Is there anything like a universal index of typical behaviour? I didn't think so.

Most behaviours and interactions perform practical functions. However, dysfunctional behaviours can be shared over a surprisingly wide population or region, and can persist remarkably long. This points to covert functions, or “secondary gains”: personal motives and psychological imperatives and cultural goals that are less than obvious, especially to foreign observers.

Cultures are complex systems of behaviour amounting to programs of social practices. Until recent generations they were limited to specific regions, and are still somewhat limited in time span. They will change over the course of time. (If you think I'm drawing an analogy to computer programs, you're quite right.)

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(Note: There is not, apparently, a generally-agreed taxonomy of cultures around the world; they are generally identified with nation-states, or with linguistic groups, or with religious affiliations.)

Individuals: human beings are the elements of societies.

Personalities: We may, at some point, need a taxonomy of typical personality types, defined by reasonably probable behaviour. There is a good deal of variety in the ways “typical” personalities are described, from astrological signs to national stereotypes to, perhaps, stock characters from theatre or literature. (My favourite tendency is to describe people in terms of cartoon characters, such as Bugs Bunny.)

Social roles: We may, at some point, need a taxonomy of typical social roles. This can be hard to distinguish from our social and political stereotypes, or the stock characters in contemporary thrillers.

### **Formal Rigour**

Ultimately I hope the humanities can adopt a notational system, as has been attempted in linguistics and even in analyzing folktale motifs. The notational conventions and rules of set theory, of formal logic and of probability theory are helpful in clarifying a good deal of muddled thinking.

For example: we know the set of religious fanatics is a small subset of the set of all religious people. In fact, fanatics of all stripes (including militias and survivalists and extremist terrorists) have more in common with each other than with their co-religionists. (Sometimes I wonder if the Thuggee really went out of business, or went underground and re-emerged, *disguised* as various terrorist groups ... but conspiracy analysis is a whole other subject.)

As soon as you see people as individuals making up groups, and different members of groups doing different things, it becomes difficult to generalize about them; what one member of a family or an ethnic group does at a given time, or one youth gang or biker club, may tell you nothing about what the other members will do. Thus set theory.

Even in ordinary language there is logical structure available, to lend rigour to the humanities. As long as we deal in whole, truth-functional statements – statements capable of being true or false, that

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is – we can use the conventional terms from sentence logic: “and”, “or”, “not”, “if-then”, “if-and-only-if”, etc.

There are also conventions and rules from probability theory, that can be added to discourse in human studies – especially in assessing the range and probabilities of future outcomes, or the effects of interactions and interventions.

### ***Symbolic Conventions to Adopt***

Sometimes the content of an argument tends to divert and distract our attention from thinking quite straight. For a mind like mine, converting a plain-language argument into symbolic form puts the content in the background, and brings the structure of the argument to the fore.

Between whole statements there are just a few logical operators:

Not =  $\sim$   
And =  $\wedge$   
Or =  $\vee$   
Then =  $\supset$

For example:

$\sim p$  (p is not the case)  
 $p \wedge q$  (p and q)  
 $p \vee q$  (p or q)  
 $p \supset q$  (if p, then q)

where “p” and “q” are any two statements. (Note: “But” is logically equivalent to “and”.)

Whole statements: Single lower-case letters are typically used for truth-functional statements in formal logic, but a set of signs for typical social situations may be necessary ... However, we may have an enormous job to identify all the situations people typically respond to, or typically create: a far larger set than the 26 letters of the alphabet.

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Until we have a better tool, I suggest using the hexagram symbols from the *I Ching*, adapted to signify specific rather than nebulous situations.

Finer analysis: For specifying people and their actions, we can use conventional signs from predicate logic: mainly, symbols for specific actions taken by and towards specific people; secondarily, symbols for the people involved.

Since any language's basic vocabulary for human actions runs to at least several hundreds of words, there is no way to symbolize them all by single capital letters, as in standard predicate logic; at best we could use acronyms.

For example:

*Ba*

Where *B* is any behaviour, *a* is any person

*Bac*

Where *B* is an action, *a* is the actor, and *c* is the person acted upon

*Bac*  $\supset$  *Dca*

where *Bac* is *a* performing *B* on *c* (carrying out a con job, for example), and *Dca* is *c* performing *D* on *a* (carrying out a revenge, say).

We could signify *individuals* by their initials in lower case, or (more abstractly) by the 16 personality types in the Keirsey/Myers-Briggs taxonomy. However, these are normally signified by four-letter acronyms. To avoid confusion with any standard terms for behaviours, I suggest we use the 16 runic symbols in the Younger Futhark:  $\mathfrak{A}$ ,  $\mathfrak{B}$  or  $\mathfrak{C}$  for INFP, ... etc.

Perhaps *societies* can be symbolized by borrowing some conventions from set theory, and some from chemical or mathematical notation – i.e., a set of people form a community (designated by one or more letters for their shared characteristics, such as municipality/

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neighbourhood or Facebook group or email list), at a given time (designated by a numerical subscript). For example,  $VA_{2000}$  could be adopted to stand for the population of Anglophones in Vancouver in the year 2000, and compared with other municipal Anglophone populations (in Seattle, New York, etc.), other language groups in the city (speaking Punjabi, Cantonese or French), or other years ( $VA_{2002}$ ,  $VA_{2004}$ , etc.)

### **Assessing the Present**

If we confine ourselves to interactions in a small circle of people, it can still take a large set of statements to describe the relevant facts. This suggests that a matrix of conditions is at work at any time:

[ ... ]

including any number of statement lines.

There is a growing body of evidence suggesting that many events depend on multiple factors at once; that you can rarely find just one cause, in several kinds of phenomena. Human behaviour seems to be one of these phenomena.

There is no reason to think any summary of a given situation is completely described. Fortunately, there is argument available (the “Pareto principle) that completeness is unnecessary, that as little as 20% of the variables in a situation cover 80% of the phenomena.

### **Assessing the Future**

From any given situation, of course, a number of possibilities are open to us. The question is, how likely are each of them? Or what causes that we don’t know about will determine what happens next?

Set theory is also the basis of probability theory. Human beings are always *capable* of original, unexpected behaviour, which means any statement of how humans are going to behave is a statement of probability:

$$P(\text{Bac} \supset \text{Dca}) = \_\_\%$$

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This can be symbolized easily by standard conventions from probability theory. Very little modification of probability notation is necessary – putting the probability in a subscript at the closing bracket, rather than after an “=” sign.

There is a saying now that you cannot do just one thing: that more than one effect follows from every action. This suggests that describing probable futures also amounts to a whole matrix of outcomes.

### ***The Point of All This***

Small-group interactions: It can take quite a long time to recognize abusive parenting, office bullying or co-dependent relationships for what they are.

It can take a naive person quite a long time to register political machinations and secondary goals that hinder or block constructive work, as in social service or artistic organizations.

Equally, it can take a long time for mildly autistic adults – of whom we are recognizing a growing number – to understand other people, let alone to understand the limitations that hinder their personal and professional lives.

How much human misery can be avoided by detecting, confronting or resolving such toxic behaviour, with an effective intervention?

Historical processes: perhaps more documentation has been accomplished in the field of historical, or economic processes. Famously, the generation that included Poul Anderson, Isaac Asimov, James Blish, Robert Heinlein and H. Beam Piper also led these science fiction authors to attempt future histories, based on the patterns they saw repeated in the past. Asimov, for one, pointed out the extraordinary similarities between the features of the English, French and Russian Revolutions. (I had to work out for myself the similarities between the American Civil War and its aftermath, the Boer War and its aftermath, and the First World War, and the resulting rise of the Nazi Party.)

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How much national misery can be avoided by detecting, confronting or resolving such toxic developments, with an effective intervention?

Interventions can themselves be described in the same formal language this paper has been planning, and their chances of success evaluated in the form of hypothetical projections.

### ***In summary:***

- Standard situations can be designated by I Ching hexagrams
- The way situations lead one another can be designated by sentence logic signs
- Behaviours, interactions, and customs can be designated by capitalized acronyms
- Individuals can be designated by Younger Futhark Runes
- Societies/Communities can be designated by capitalized acronyms, plus date subscripts
- Chances of given behaviours can be designated by probability notation, or P(...) plus a percentage subscript

CRANK THEORY SCORE (up to 20 points each):

unsound premises: \_\_\_\_\_  
unsound reasoning: \_\_\_\_\_  
poor understanding of the field : \_\_\_\_\_  
unproven or disproven premises: \_\_\_\_\_  
answer for everything: \_\_\_\_\_  
resorting to double-talk: \_\_\_\_\_

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### Future Recall

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(Originally published in *Torus 5*, March 1989)

Time sure lazes, doesn't it?

A while ago, I was clearing away a lot of the rubbish that had collected in my files back in the '80s. Some of it was interesting. Probably more interesting now than it had been when my acquisitive instinct tagged it for keeping. Unfortunately, not interesting enough that it's worth continuing to keep. I threw away the alternate ending to *Roach Motel*, about 500 unused DUFF ballots, Victoria Wayne's last known address and all those fundamentalist pamphlets by Brad Foster.

Also thrown away were the stencils for the special Eric Mayer issue of *DNQ* that I never published for reasons I've since forgotten.

I lined my waste-basket with seventy-nine identical copies of *Vax* that I found on freebie tables in fan rooms; a bill of sale from the Feder Paper Box Co. that had C.O.D. scrawled across it in what looked like Moshe's own hand; a sneak bit of software that generated locs on your own last issue that Marty Cantor wrote (but it made too many typos); several death threats from "Keep the Funny in Funny Animals"



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Committee (I had to have the law clockwork one member after he succeeded); a counterfeit copy of *Hyphen* from the big collector's swindle that finally ruined D. West's reputation; one of Teresa Nielsen Hayden's dead brain-stem batteries; the Heinlein cell-sample that came with one of his posthumous novels, and wouldn't die; some print-outs from a local old-fashioned BBS that had trashed my videos; some 44,000 late entries downloaded from the Canadian fanzine database after the mysterious disappearance of Mike Hall; and the notice of LASFS's bankruptcy sale. I bought rights to Jerry Pournelle's works from the ensuing mail auction for next to nothing, just to remember the bad old days when books that worthless made millions. But there was never a revival of Pournelle. The books had as little value now as ever, and went into the dumpster along with the rest of the trash. Ah, memories!

Wasn't it strange that we ate at McBurgers, cheered brain-damaged wrestlers and elected a TV evangelist as president in those days? Who under the age of twenty would believe that there had ever been an Israel, that you could eat fish, or that automobiles were once a major industry in the United States? But, before the Philippine Conflict – remember calling them “wars?” – everything was different.

Glad I lived in another country. Even if the public hasn't had mail service in Canada since 1994, at least none of my fandisks have been censored for Secular Humanism and had a Creationist file added by an MVV (Modem Vectored Virus), as a certain *Mad Scientist's Digest* did. (The name probably misled the “carrier.”) Another time, I'll have to write an article about Secular Humanism and Creationists for those of you who are too young to have clear impressions of those vanished issues.

But speaking of the mail, here's another of those clippings, like the one I found and published in *Larrikin* not long ago. I think you might find it, um... prophetic?

**From *The Toronto Sun and Volkisch Beobacter, July 11<sup>th</sup> 1993***

“Yesterday, the Mulroney government took a controversial step to privatize Canada Post, by halting public delivery. While

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unprecedented, observers of business trends have been expecting such a development since the ratification of the Free Trade Agreement.

“Canada Post rule only last year that the purchase of a postage stamp was not, in fact, an obligation on the part of the post office to deliver mail. That option resided with the Postmaster General (who is now solely responsible to the new stockholders as Chairman of the privatized corporation, and not to Canadians). In effect, the option to deliver has been delegated to middle-level management at the central sorting facility in Yellowknife, and is exercised by the lowest level of clerks and sorters at the individual postal station. A decision by the Supreme Court of Canada that the Post Office could legally regard all residential areas not incorporated within the metropolitan boundaries of the 1980 census as rural areas, was a portent of things to come. Their decision resulted in the withdrawal of delivery service from as much as 40% of the nation’s population. But, at the time, spokesmen indicated that this was only an economic measure, and not a policy trend.

“Today’s announcement confirms the opinion that Canada Post is now committed to sound fiscal policy, rather than nationalist public programs. Beginning early next year, only commercial publications, advertising matter, government forms, business communications, veterans and take-out places with ‘Dollar-Off-On-a-Large-Pepperoni-and-Cheese-Pizza’ coupons may use the mail. Private correspondence, or any publication without an ISBN number that is dropped in a mailbox will be regarded as interference with the mails and be punishable by law.”

It was hell getting an ISBN number at the last minute, what with the sudden demand for them by thousands of amateur publishers never suspected by fandom. The normal wait while the paperwork was processed was 18 to 21 months. Low priority cases like me were back-ordered for relatively important organizations like the Oceanic Sound Research Council, church bingo fundraisers and the Canadian chapter of the Star Trek Welcomittee. For most of the rest of the 1990s, the only fanzine anyone received from Canada was *The New Maple Leaf Fandom*. It

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had had an ISBN number since they were free... for what reason no-one could hazard a guess. To shed further light on the subject:

**From *McLeans Magazine (Ee-Zee Read Edition), Nov. 1993***

“...Canada Post has had a long and troubled history since then. The Mail-Carriers’ War, three years ago, caused hundreds of injuries and many deaths when carriers delivered letters containing plastic explosives to household across the nation. These and other acts of union terrorism were met by management reprisals, including the notorious massacre of picketers by crack South African mercenaries. The financial crisis finally provoked the Conservative government to reform its wayward Crown Corporation. The incidental destruction of large parts of suburban Toronto and Ottawa, when two fortified sorting stations had to be stormed by federal troops, complicated negotiations. Eventually, a settlement was made that compensated the union for its casualties, and underwrote the reconstruction of Mississauga and Riverview from the union pension fund.

“In the restored peace that followed, reform was effected by an emergency session of Parliament. But reform wasn’t enough – wide-ranging changes of policy toward the Crown Corporation were undertaken to put in on a working basis. Early last year, public delivery was curtailed, eliminating an expensive but not very profitable operation that interfered with Canada Post’s proper service to business and government. Indeed, this did simplify the Post Offices’ task. The loss of revenue was small, in as much as it was long known that no plausible first-class rate structure could have possibly subsidized bulk rate privileges in any event. The increased deficit, while not out of line with expectations, nevertheless dismayed Mr. Mulroney’s government. It was no surprise, then, when Mr. Mulroney revealed in his last throne speech that Canada Post had been seeking a purchaser in the private sector. For several months, there had been no offer, but a tentative arrangement has finally been made with an undisclosed direct-mail operation in North Carolina.

“As a condition of negotiation, the name of this organization may not be released until after the sale. Mr. Mulroney assures the media that the company has been providing a comprehensive, reliable and efficient service to political action groups, conservative politicians,

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evangelical ministries and Christian institutes of learning since the 1970s, and comes highly recommended by the White House. There are still certain barriers to the final sale of Canada Post, however. The North Carolina outfit wants a guarantee from Mr. Mulroney of a minimum of 400,000,000 pieces of first class mail per annum, deregulation of rates and a tax write-off of \$920,000,000 for each of the first three years. Best estimates of the North Carolina offer for Canada Post put the figure at \$65,000,000, but the Prime Minister hasn't confirmed or denied any speculation. Final agreement is likely to be announced sometime before the New Year, but Mr. Mulroney has no comments in *this* matter, either. Rumours that the government, or one of the major Canadian banks, will cover a loan for the sale are equally vague.

"At present, the only difficulties the Prime Minister will have to deal with in the sale of Canada Post is the guarantee of 400,000,000 pieces of first class mail. Last year only 324,000,000 pieces of first class mail were processed in Canada, leaving a margin of 76,000,000 pieces to be made up by Federal subsidy. At the \$.85 one-ounce rate, this means a payment to the North Carolina firm of over \$50,000,000 annually. (More, if rates are set higher by the new operator, as is expected.) In a statement to the press last week, Mr. Mulroney said that the savings to the country by the disposal of the money-losing Canada Post will be well worth the nation's expense. No word has been given to the press about the government's own use of Canada Post. However, in last week's press conference, Mr. Mulroney assured Canadians that it will work ultimately to their benefit to pay the private sector for the administration of the country, leaving government to its proper role of legislation."

From a few page later in the same issue, I found this bit of trivia that tied up a loose end.

"Philatelists concerned over the future of their collections needn't worry. A representative of Canada Post announced that the North Carolina direct mail concern that is bidding for the fully privatized corporation has dropped its demands for this lucrative brand of the Post Office. In a move to bolster confidence, the chairman of the board (Postmaster General) has advanced the date of next year's issues and will introduce the 1994 catalog in 1993. Plans include an

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expansion of the number of designs to be struck, state of the art lithography, and special collector's covers. Of interest to eagerly waiting philatelists are the expected \$.94 stamps issues in a Moebius strip, glued on both sides and commemorating the discovery of topology. Also under development are? A series of stunning holographic issues, portraying scenes from classic Nelvana animation; a mosaic sheet of \$.65 stamps die-cut in irregular shape, celebrating the jig-saw puzzle;<sup>2</sup> \$2, \$5 and \$10 stamps depicting printed microcircuits that will actually operate simply transformer toys (also for sale at postal stations); and a series of stamps with portraits of hockey, baseball and CLF greats on one side, their career statistics on the other."<sup>3</sup>

There's a lot more of the same. I don't know why I kept those particular clippings, since sending your zine by fax has made the Post Office obsolete anyway.<sup>4</sup> Perhaps that's why the public has let it go so easily, and why the unions and management fought over it so viciously. Remember Detroit-made cars, and The Plight of the American Farmer? I rest my case. But enough of politics. Here's something of fannish relevance that I found in an obscure newszine. The printed newszine was long ago made impractical by the Corporate Secrets Act, of course. Most of you remember how most large conventions, SFWA, NESFA, and even TAFF were found to have been bought by Michael Jackson in a multi-billion dollar transaction, of which most of organized fandom was an incidental asset. Before the editor was sued by Jackson's legal department for libel (and infringement of copyright), File 770 was quite well known and frequently accurate. In an editorial I reprint in its entirety, Mike wrote:

*From File 770, number 108, October 1995*

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<sup>2</sup> Am I clairvoyant or what! Canada Post has done almost exactly that, **and** issued holographic stamps!

<sup>3</sup> So the user can try to lick them, of course!

<sup>4</sup> I slipped a little on that one. But sending a fanzine as e-mail really **that** different?

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“...One of the more gratifying features of the Tokyo Worldcon<sup>5</sup> was borrowed from Japanese big business employee-psychology theory. Anyone who had a complaint about the con was told to go to the ‘aggression’ room to work out his frustration there. I approached the complaint desk under an inconspicuous pseudonym, Douglas McArthur Wright, and pretended that the antiseptic mask they gave members with their registration kit was too tight. The committee had had the idea that these masks not only prevented the spread of cold germs at the con, but could replace the usual membership badge. The masks were stamped, “Sho-Con 1” in English and Japanese, and had a number embossed below a space to sign your name. So, it was important that you wear your mask at all times, as the convention facility guards carried enormous riot sticks they were most ready to use. The complaint desk sent me to a large room behind the half-acre table-top model of Pearl Harbor (over which the Starship Yamato simulated combat with Starship Arizona). Inside were a row of dummies dressed and made-up to look like the chairman and other members of the concomm.

“Someone handed me a four foot stave, and pointed to a dummy that was unoccupied. The other dummies were in the process of disintegrating under the attacks of furious looking Japanese fans. There were one or two Occidentals like myself, who looked uncomfortable amidst such enthusiasm. Willing to try anything once, I pummelled my assigned dummy with a vengeance. Sure enough, five minutes later I was much too exhausted to consider anger toward anyone, or anything. I never did get a looser mask.

“A disciplined looking samurai next to me put such energy into one particularly devastating blow to his dummy’s head that his follow-through poked me in the stomach. He was effusively apologetic. He had hardly been able to help it, he said, and hoped my majestic stomach would suffer no pangs of indigestion, or he’d never forgive himself for committing so unforgivable a breach of etiquette as strike an honourable visitor to his humble country. Words to that effect, in any case. I didn’t understand one word out of three of his Japanified English, and had to rely mainly on intuition. He bowed. I bowed, and remarked that any anyone was entitled to an “occident.” I don’t think that he understood English any better than he spoke it, since he never as much as

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<sup>5</sup> I remind you, I wrote this in 1989, 18 years before the actual Tokyo Worldcon. I don’t suppose it was really that huge a leap of imagination, though.

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cracked a smile, much less laugh. If I didn't know any better, I'd say he scowled.

"On the way back to the main lobby, I passed the hourly filk-sing. American and British filk-singers cultivate an amateur aesthetic that naturally leads them to Celtic or Folk. The Japanese, on the other hand, had the room full of speakers and tape players. Remember the Ronco (or was it Kay-Tell) singing machine? Each of the filkers sung to the accompaniment of a Rock and Roll band or electronic synthesizer as they performed classic rock numbers, such as *Blue Suede Shoes*, *Stairway to Heaven* and *Beat It*. (The one who was singing the later got some of the lyrics mixed up with the Weird Al version, but nobody seemed to notice.)

"I spend less time in the dealers' room than I wanted. So did most American fans. No-one had expected that the Japanese government would take a hard line about imports, so the dealers' room was a complete shock to anyone looking for books. Hardly any of them were in English, except for a few inexpensive editions produced for export to the U.S. Only a few of the 16 acres of tables were book dealers in any case. The majority of tables sold toys, masks, software, hardware, computer games, video, comics, posters, t-shirts and sex aids.

"One look at the program book saved me the trouble of walking out on the films. As you might have guessed, there was little shown but Japanese animation, identical sequels of movies about monsters wrecking Tokyo, and now and again something incomprehensible that involved sadomasochism, gallons of stage-blood, and items for personal use that I don't even want to think about. The special tribute to Gary Anderson's *Fireball XL-5*, *Thunderbirds* and *Space 1999* were a little closer to home. (The Japanese apparently thought American SF films were like theirs, and regarded Supermarionation highly.) But I hadn't come 5,000 miles to watch puppets at the front of the room. It was enough that I had to watch the Hugo presentations later that night.

"Parties were totally confusing and a disappointment. The average Japanese fan takes uppers, downers or benders with his soft drink, and ignores beer. As the drugs take effect, he either goes berserk for the rest of the night, or spends the next three-quarters of an hour admiring the artistry and manufacture of his paper cup. Most British, American or Australian fans, however, went to bed before midnight. Jet lag partly accounted for this shameful lack of stamina, but I became personally acquainted for the main

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reason Friday morning. Wake-up calls rang every phone in six hotels, rousing thousands of bleary-eyed fans from their rooms for morning exercises. The Japanese obediently formed groups in the parking lot and performed fifteen minutes of calisthenics. Most gaijin never made it out of their rooms. On Saturday morning, only a few who were especially slow learners ever left their beds. Some of the Japanese fans pointed out that the best way to miss the wake-up call was to stay up *all* night, only going to bed after 8 a.m. The problem was that for me it was already 8 a.m. When I went to bed at midnight local time, and to stay up another eight hours would take me into the middle of the next day, as far as my metabolism was concerned. The British had it as bad. Coming from the other direction, 8 a.m. was the middle of the previous day. For east coast Americans it was still too early when they went to bed at 8 a.m.

“By now, all of you know the disaster that fell upon the Guest of Honour speeches. Osamu Tezuka, the Japanese comic artist<sup>6</sup>, gave a short speech to a respectful audience as Sho-Con’s Artist Guest of Honour. He also narrated a slide-show version of his just-finished work, a life of Yoko Ono. As Dr. Tezuka speaks no English and I speak no Japanese, I followed nothing of any of this, except that he once said “Linda McCarthy,” evoking peals of laughter from the audience. Forrest J. Ackerman gave his Fan Guest speech next. Applause and laughter was polite, and usually at the wrong moment. At the end of his speech, he was chased off the podium by a rousing chorus of “*Famous Monsters of Firmand-san, Hai!*” that remains unexplained to this day. John Norman spoke next, as Professional Guest of Honour. That in itself is as much a mystery as anything at the con, so no one questioned the bewildering behaviour of the audience through the next half hour, or the large-screen video of nude-wrestling Amazons with six-gun holsters behind him as he spoke. I’m not even sure he knew the screen was there. One Amazon finally bit a nipple off the loser, ending the skin-flick and bringing the toastmaster to the podium again.

“Hezukia Ohara is unknown in the English speaking world, but he’s apparently a late-night TV personality, presiding as he does over the most popular midnight sci-fi thriller theatre. Some of his jokes verge upon the fannish, I’m told, possibly motivating the tragedy that followed. Mr. Ohara took up the microphone and gave one of his famous lines – it translates loosely

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<sup>6</sup> Better known now for his animation work than his early, Moebius-inspired comic books.



## One Swell Foop #4

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as ‘If you fart in your bathtub, take a sausage-casing to the doctor’ – this may be a pun, or more likely a bad translation. Suddenly, a scream rose from below the podium. A young man with a bandana tied around his head appeared on the stage next to Ohara, wielding a three foot sword. Before anyone could stop him, he’d stabbed the toastmaster several times through the seat of his trousers, then attempted suicide. Mr. Ohara survived the attack owing to his disregard of doctor’s orders to lose 200 pounds – nothing vital was pierced. The would-be assassin, who had pinned himself to the video screen with his sword, also survived. But as he turned out to be a dissenting voice on the convention’s steering committee, it’s uncertain if there will be prosecution.

“The hotel staff took that moment to serve the banquet. While the blood was mopped from the floor, dishes of raw fish and eels appeared on our tables, successfully extinguishing the likelihood that any trace of our appetite might recover. As I hurriedly left the room, however, I noticed that most of the Japanese fans had tucked into their sushi and seaweed as if nothing had ever happened.

“Fans who lacked the good taste to find no humour in the situation, later spoke of Lovecraftian horrors and “The Sushi-cide.” Myself, I admit there was something fishy about the whole affair, but it would take more penetration than I have to get to the bottom of it all.

“*Sho-Con* reported an astronomical attendance figure in its daily newsheets. Membership rose to over 38,000<sup>7</sup> by the last day of the con, and if the degree of crowding is any measure, the majority of them must have been in the same room as me most of the time. It comes as no surprise, then, that the site selected for the 1998 Worldcon is Osaka, Japan. It won by the slim margin of 32,122 votes over 3,710 for the LA bid. Many American fans are grumbling about this landslide victory for parochialism, especially many fans in Los Angeles, who invested the assets of LASFS in the ruinously expensive bidding war between LA and Tokyo. Rumours are spreading through the agency of irresponsible individuals that LASFS is in financial trouble. But, I assure you that bankruptcy proceedings, receivership and the legal firm of Hoffthaller, Burns and Schott have never come up for discussion. A little bird tells me, however, that the *Sho-Con 2* committee is secretly buying memberships in the 1996 Worldcon under assumed names. It’s said that they’re budgeted to buy 20,000

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<sup>7</sup> That would be an astounding figure for any Worldcon. But for San Diego Comics Con, it would be a mere room party.

## One Swell Foop #4

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memberships over the next two years. This would ensure perpetual control of the site-selection process after 1998, so that all future Worldcons would be held in Japan. With their estimated two million dollars profit – they refuse to make a statement before the '96 site is selected – buying false memberships would represent a huge return on a small investment. These, and other hints, led me to believe that ultimately the Worldcon constitution will be changed as well, limiting the number of American memberships that may be sold in Japan at a fixed, small percentage. This is grossly unfair. And, if necessary, we should protect ourselves against the possibility of unequal practices such as this. It will be far too late, of course, if we wait until the Japanese impose restriction on *us*. Obviously we should take the appropriate action against *Sho-Con 2 now...*"

Of course, we all know how that came out. When Michael Jackson discovered that he owned the Worldcon, he televised it on NBC as "Weekend to the Stars" with Steven Spielberg and an all-star cast. No fans were allowed on the set. The Worldcon was so profitable that Jackson held a lottery for memberships the year after, selling them for over \$400 each. "Weekend to the Stars" was produced annually for six years. When ratings began to sag, he sold the program rights to Taft Broadcasting (WBEN, Buffalo). The new host, Doney Terrio, quickly drove the ratings through the floor. I believe the final owner of the Worldcon was a small gaming-software outfit that also owns *Amazing Magazine*. Story was, they wanted to develop it as a video game for licensing to Atari or Coleco. If it ever had an arcade life, it was so brief I'm not aware of it.

This leisurely stroll down Memory-Hole Lane has gone on long enough. Next I'll be reminiscing about the Good Old Days. "Remember," I'll say, "back before the Nielsen Haydens became the ruthless editorial team behind *New Age SF*, and could be found in any room party mixing with common fans? When Greg Pickersgill was still elitist, and hadn't moved to California yet, to make his fortune selling Amway products? And that time when Bill Bowers announced his body-building program, and demonstrated six months later his 300-pound bench presses? How about the day Jeanne Gomoll 'admitted' she was Spike Parsons, and how only the Hugo committee didn't get the joke? (Jeanne had to return it.) What about the time both Dave Langford

## One Swell Foop #4

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*and* Chuck Harris went up to accept the same Hugo because they were both hard of hearing?"

I fondly remember the time when there was no sales tax collected on TAFF and DUFF auctions. When Scientologist money didn't buy a Nebula for one of its puppet writers every year. (And when Chris Priest and Michael Moorcock weren't barred from the SFWA suite on unspecified moral grounds.) When there weren't 'smoking' and 'non-smoking' memberships at most conventions, and a 'no-smoking' sign *only* meant tobacco.

See? I'm starting up. But if I allow myself to indulge in remembrances, I'm apt to turn into another Ted White. Come to think of it...

Remember Ted White?

### **L'Esprit d'Escalier**

You will notice that, once again, I am anticipated by the calendar: this May-June issue comes to you in the middle of July. So sue me.

And once again I have foregone doing fanzine reviews. Honestly, I think Dale Speirs has the right idea, and I've got to dedicate a whole issue to reviewing other fanzines (as well as the news in Greater Fandom).

I'm not sure what's going on with me; but it seems to be one of those growth and maturation processes. About damn time, my hair turned grey a couple of years ago already. Am I a grownup yet?