

By MICHAEL WALSH

Vancouver's first Science Fiction Convention, a weekend gathering of serious fans, critics, authors and would-be authors, wound up on a note of high-spirited irreverence Saturday.

Following two days of panel discussions and carefully considered lectures, the convention established the Science Fiction Worst Awards, presenting trophies in four newly-created categories.

Mike Bailey, member of the UBC Science Fiction Society and a computer programmer for the federal government, introduced the idea explaining that some people think "99 per cent of all science fiction is crud."

In order to "recognize the vast majority" the convention had decided to award an Elron, a bronzed lemon on a plywood base, to the year's least outstanding efforts in the science fiction field.

(The name "Elron," Bailey said later, should really not be confused with L. Ron Hubbard, the former fantasy writer who turned some of his fiction into the controversial, though lucrative, Scientology cult. Recently Hubbard was quick to threaten suit when a long-established science fiction magazine published an anti-Scientology article. The grievance was settled when the magazine, Amazing Science Fiction Stories, agreed to run a pro-view. But the Elron doesn't take its name from L. Ron, say its creators.)

Voted Least Promising New Writer was Robert Moore Williams, author of 21st Century Vigilante whose "unremembered Zanthar easily made the famed Lancer Easy Eye series."

Williams beat out Canadian-born A. E. Van Vogt for the award although Van Vogt, an author who sometimes works on 30 books simultaneously, was described by Bailey as "the penultimate hack."

Worst Novel of the Year award went to the former "dean of science fiction," Robert Heinlein, proving, said Bailey, that "an author who really tries can reach the pinnacle of failure."

Selected passages from the nominated novels were read, to hilarious advantage, by Paul Green, a UBC creative writing graduate and freelance broad-

caster who recently completed a series of radio shows exploring cycles in science fiction for CBC-FM.

The film, Beneath the Planet of the Apes, scored as Worst Melodramatic Presentation and Lin Carter, writer of painfully derivative sword and sorcery novels, was voted the Elron Hall of Fame for his "consistent standard of poor writing."

The convention, jointly sponsored by the UBC and SFU Science Fiction Societies, attracted fans from as far east as Regina and as far south as Fairfax, California. It served to bring local buffs in direct contact with the growing international fraternity of science fiction fans.

Lawrence Ehman, 20, a Calgary photographer, hitch-hiked to Vancouver for

the meeting. A member of the Alberta Science Fiction Association, he reported that his club, with some 60 members, will be sponsoring a convention of their own at the beginning of June.

News of events in the fans' world can travel by many means but the most usual is the privately printed fan magazine, the "fanzine." Regina's Leland Sapiro, a mathematics lecturer at the University of Saskatchewan, edits one of the most respected, the Riverside Quarterly.

A good fanzine, like a good convention, attracts the best minds as contributors and often professional talents will use them to speak their minds to the hard-core fans.

Another source of information is the "letterzines." Frank Denton, Director of

Vancouver Science Fiction Convention

City hosts international fan f

fraternity

Instructional Resources at the North Seattle Community College, serves as one of five directors of the National Fantasy Fan Federation, an international association that acts as an informational clearing house for its members.

Established more than 20 years ago, the NFFF has two mimeographed publications, *The National Fantasy Fan* and *Tightbeam*, which alternate from month to month weaving the fan network together.

According to Denton there is no truly representative profile of the average science fiction fan.

His publications, which go to fans on every continent except Antarctica, reach people whose politics run from far left to far right, whose religions range from

atheistic to fundamentalist and whose education can be very, very much or just barely literate.

The Vancouver gathering tended towards the highly educated end of the spectrum, Denton said, and he agreed with Sapiro that this convention was one of the better ones he'd been to. "It's certainly a lot more scholarly than a lot of the American conventions," he said.

The tone of the convention, one of literate appreciation rather than fascinated adulation, was set from the beginning by the science fiction sophisticates from the sponsoring clubs.

The formal events began Friday evening with a panel discussion of pet likes and dislikes within the genre. The three student panelists, UBC's Rob Park and Brent MacLean and SFU's Bill Dodds, quickly attacked some of the most widely-known works of science fiction immortals Isaac Asimov and Robert Heinlein.

In the lively discussion that followed many of the conventioners crowded into the 12th floor hotel suite showed how far beyond a fascination with space opera they really were. Most were critically involved with such "serious" science fiction artists as Roger Zelazny, John Brunner, Kurt Vonnegut and Philip K. Dick.

On hand as the convention's guest of honor was another serious author, Ursula K. Le Guin. Mrs. Le Guin reflected the generally academic background of the conventioners.

Daughter of the famed American anthropologist A. L. Kroeber, she was herself a Fulbright Fellowship winner and is married to Charles Le Guin, professor of history at Portland State.

Her recent book, *The Left Hand of Darkness*, won science fiction's two highest awards, the World Convention's Hugo and the Nebula, voted annually by the 350-member Science Fiction Writer's Association.

Although Mrs. Le Guin missed the World Convention, she accepted the local invitation because "my husband wanted to see Vancouver." The Le Guins and their three children, Elisabeth, 13, Caroline, 11, and Theodore, 6, motored up from Portland and Mrs. Le Guin delivered her "maiden speech" to any convention Saturday morning.

Her topic was *The Crab Nebula*, the *Paramecium* and *Tolstoy*. Speaking beneath the crystal chandeliers of the Georgia Hotel's York Room, she took a deftly organized look at art, science and the uses of science fiction.

Writers' group meets

A two-day science fiction convention will be held on April 9 and 10 in the Hotel Georgia.

Panel discussions and a special mystery event will be featured at the meet, sponsored by the B.C. Science Fiction Association. Guest speaker will be Ursula LeGuin, author of *The Left Hand of Darkness*.

Convention rates are \$3.50 before April 1 and \$5 after that date or at the door. Persons wishing to attend may phone 228-4395 or write Student Union Building, Box 75, University of B.C., Vancouver

Mrs. Le Guin argued that from the microscopic atom to the astronomical vastness of the Crab Nebula, nature shows a tendency to order. So too living organisms, from the simple, single-celled paramecium to the complexity of man, show the same general order, a generally lawful way of operating.

"Art does what the universe does," she said. Her definition of art: "The rearrangement of experience in an orderly fashion."

With Copernicus people learned that their tiny planet was not the centre of the universe. Today, Mrs. Le Guin said, we are learning that humanity is not necessarily the centre of the intricate web of life.

"The revolution that began in astrophysics ends in the human spirit," she said. Science fiction takes its place in the scheme of things by asking the questions important to our times just as Tolstoy asked the questions important to his.

Science fiction, at its best, asks: Who are we? How are we to make our way in this greater universe?

Afterwards Leland Sapiro asked if he might reprint the text of her talk in his *Riverside Quarterly*. Of course, Mrs. Le Guin said. But only if he threw in a subscription to his fanzine in the bargain. After all, everybody at the convention was a fan.