

written by John Foyster for Charlie Brown's LOCUS

July 22, 1970

I guess the most important thing to notice about the rules governing Worldcons, whether they be the rules as set up at St. Louis or elsewhere, is that in practice they mean less than they say. For example, there's a rule which says that any bidding committee promises to follow the WSFS constitution (3.05, for the technically minded). But the HEICON committee is ignoring two of the rules of WSFS (at least): the rule requiring the constitution to be distributed with the Hugo nomination ballots (4.03) and the rule requiring that 'No Award' be a mandatory entry in each Hugo category (2.13 - well, it got left off that ballot, which tends to lessen the meaning of 'mandatory'). That's just the current Worldcon, of course, and no doubt others in the past have happily ignored duties they promised to carry out.

Under the circumstances, one would be entitled to wonder just what the Worldcon rules are worth, and indeed some have done just that. But there are some rules which have to be observed with circumspection, simply because they allow the whole thing to function - the others are just frills.

The rules describing the sites of Worldcons are in this category. (And by the way, 4.01, which states: "Any change to the foregoing rules may take effect no sooner than the end of the convention during which such change is adopted." - makes it plain that the cities currently bidding for a 1972 convention are bidding for a Worldcon, no matter what happens at the HEICON.) And there seem to be some changes in the air. I should think that before making any such changes it would be worth asking a couple of questions.

1. Are North Americans satisfied with the present rotation plan (a five year plan)?
- and
2. Are non-North Americans satisfied with the present rotation plan?

My impression, and it may be wrong, is that no real attempt has been made to find the answers to those questions, fundamental though they be to the whole problem. It may be that the HEICON will search for the answers but how likely is that search to be successful - in Heidelberg at 9.30am on the Sunday morning of a convention?

I want to do two things: try to estimate useful answers to the questions, and suggest what could be done in the light of various answers. As a non-North American, I filed the second easier to answer. There are probably some non-North Americans who are dissatisfied with a 20% share - it is always possible to find people who want a bigger slice, no matter what the side effects - but I have yet to hear a single person give a reason (apart from sheer greed) for having more than one Worldcon in five outside North America. There have been some loudmouths who talk about fairer sharing and so on - but talk is all that one hears. (I'm not referring to the Swedish fans, who obviously are doing more than talking.) At the moment, in fact, there are just two bids hanging fire from non-North American countries - Australia for 1975 and Sweden for 1976 (the Swedes were previously quite happy to bid for 1980, but have been a victim of a widespread hoax to the effect that the new/current rotation plan is a two-year one (actually it is, in a sense, but that wasn't changed at St. Louis - there has been for quite some time a normal five-year plan with an option for a two-year rotation in exceptional circumstances)).

The available evidence - the number of overseas bids - indicates that the answer to question 2 is 'Yes'.

Given that that is the case, does question 1 arise? I should like to think not. After all, one of the most widely-stated reasons for adopting a change has been that the non-North Americans want more conventions. If this is not the case (and I claim that there is little or no evidence for it) then this reason has no application to the problem.

But suppose there is more to it than that: suppose that there would still be, in North America, a move for change. It has been suggested, for example, that as the U.S. does not have a national convention, as so many other countries do, it could acquire the present Worldcon as a national convention (described in the St. Louis rules as a NAmSfic - tough on the Canadians, I suppose, unless there's some thought of a North American National convention). Under the St. Louis modifications, as you know, the present Worldcon becomes one which stays in North America, while a new 'Worldcon' is created which then floats around the world.

I think this idea that the US must have a national convention is based upon a slight misconception. When other countries have conventions, they have to be national conventions - there is no other way of getting enough fans together. Australia, by the way, is a rare exception to this, in that this year, for example, it has been possible to mount two successful conventions, only one of them really 'national'. Swedish and British and Australian and German conventions are 'national' simply because they have to be. This is obviously not the case in the US (by contrast), where many regional conventions are far larger than the overseas 'national' conventions.

~~But it is equally true that what has been called the 'national' convention long had really been the US national convention in - not-very-clever plastic disguise. Overseas Worldcons have been the local 'national' convention with a few visitors (where 'few' is a rather larger number than one normally thinks of....). The need for a US national convention doesn't arise - unless the 'Worldcon' (in case that name) moves out of the US frequently.~~

My opinion, then, is that by and large the answer to both questions is 'yes', and that consequently there is no real need for change. Let us propose some alternative situations.

- (a) The non-North Americans want more Worldcons and the North Americans don't want a change. Solution: Tough for the non-NAs - the North Americans have the numbers.
- (b) The North Americans want change and the others don't want to hold more conventions. Solution: Tough for the North Americans - it is hard to make people run conventions....
- (c) Both want change of the same kind. Solution: Not possible anyway, so why concern ourselves with it.
- (d) Both want change, but of different kinds. Solution: Blind in the streets, or at least lengthy repercussions.

It seems to me obvious that every effort should be made to find out exactly (or as exactly as possible) the answers to the two questions I've proposed. To hurtle ahead at Heidelberg without bothering to stop and ask would be ridiculous.

What to do?

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