

# Sci-fi fans flock to Toronto

## A convention first established in the 1930s and devoted to all things interstellar touches down in town tomorrow

BY SAHM ADRANGI, TORONTO

Science-fiction conventions typically conjure up images of bearded computer programmers peddling obscure comic books or debating who really is the captain of the universe, Spock or Skywalker.

This weekend, Torontonians can see for themselves whether the stereotype holds true.

From tomorrow until Monday, Canada's largest city will host the 61st annual World Science Fiction Convention, the biggest gathering of spaceheads this side of Jupiter. The convention, or "WorldCon" as it's better known by the futuristic faithful, will give more than 5,000 sci-fi enthusiasts a chance to hobnob with their favourite writers, artists and filmmakers — not to mention other like-minded earthlings.

"There's always been a quality to being a science-fiction reader," says Robert J. Sawyer, a renowned author from Mississauga and a Hugo award nominee in the best-novel category. "Usually, you're the only one in your class, or there are only one or two in your whole town.

You're always the guy who reads that strange stuff. Well, here's five days where all those people from all over the world can come together."

"It's a wonderfully emotional experience. ... Instead of being the weird minority, it's an opportunity to be the majority."

With a full pass priced at \$295 and day rates at \$55-\$125, festivities are reserved for the most ardent. WorldCons typically attract thousands of fans — many of them doctors, lawyers and engineers — from more than 20 countries. Torcon 3 will be Canada's fourth WorldCon, following on the heels of WorldCon of Torcon (1948) and Torcon 2 (1978), and Canadian, held in Winnipeg in 1994.

This year's event will offer art shows, role-playing games, Japanese anime, science exhibits, a dealers' hall full of esoteric memorabilia, themed parties and hundreds of panel discussions.

At centre stage will be the annual Hugo Awards Ceremony, which will celebrate its 50th anniversary this year. Slated for Saturday night, the gala honours the sci-fi world's top writers and artists, and will be

hosted by The Globe and Mail's very own Spider Robinson.

But for many fans, it's the impassioned panel debates and the gaudy costume parties that make WorldCon a mecca for serious enthusiasts. Aside from the Hugos, the grandest event will be Sunday night's Masquerade, where attendees can dress up as their favourite fantasy characters outside the privacy of their own bedrooms.

This year, the Masquerade will host a special "Salute to Canadian Costuming" and will grant \$500 to the best costume inspired by author George R. R. Martin, one of this year's five Guests of Honour. Also honoured this year will be artist Frank Kelly Freas. A member of the International Association of Astronomical Artists, Freas is "the most popular sf artist in the history of the field," according to the *Encyclopedia of Science Fiction*.

Yet WorldCon is as much about "fandom" as it is about the stars. Each year, an accomplished and devoted fan is selected as a Guest of Honour; the chosen one this year is Mike Glycer of Monrovia, Calif., who publishes the fanzine File 770.



TANNIS TOOHEY/CANADIAN PRESS

**Sci-fi author Robert Sawyer is nominated for a Hugo award.**

Fans also win Hugos, in such areas as best fan writer, best fan artist and best "fanzine," which refers to fan-produced science-fiction magazines. Glycer himself has earned a Hugo for File 770, which is named after an IRS tax form — the acclaimed space and fantasy buff works as an appeals officer for the Internal Revenue Service when he's not publishing his zine.

In a sense, Glycer embodies the WorldCon old guard. The original conventions were primarily gathering grounds for readers and writers. In fact, the first WorldCon in 1939 boasted a visit from a young writer named Isaac Asimov, who happened to publish his first short sto-

ry that same year.

Torcon 3 promises to remain true to its roots, even if that means reinforcing its nerdy image.

"This is not all about dressing up in rubber ears ... it's first and foremost a literary event. It's always been about the books," said Cliff Goldstein, a committee member for the Toronto convention.

As the frontiers of science-fiction have stretched beyond the literary world, WorldCon has also expanded its reach into more far-flung universes. This year, the convention will offer a staggering 500 panels, on topics as diverse as "Beauty in the Near and Far Future" and "Introduction to Alien Languages."

And for SARS-ravaged Toronto, the WorldCon invasion offers a perfect antidote to this summer's tourism meltdown. Some Toronto hotels are booked to near-capacity, and the convention will give a much-needed boost to local bars, such as the Peel Pub on King Street, which served about a dozen *Star Trek* fans on Monday.

"They called themselves Klingons and we made them special drinks — Romulan Ale and Blood-something," said Daniel Bradley, a waiter at the bar.

*Torcon 3, the 61st World Science Fiction Convention, takes place from Thursday through Monday with most events at the Metro Toronto Convention Centre and the Fairmont Royal York. For information: info@torcon3.on.ca*

2003-08-27

THE GLOBE AND MAIL

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