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## Surviving a con: Which way to the transporter?

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**C**onventions may seem alien at first, but there's always help. Larger conventions often have an early panel discussion on "How to survive a con" to help neophytes, while smaller cons tend to be much more manageable for the uninitiated.

The "Electronic Eggs" is a fan organization responsible for bringing access for disabilities to conventions before current law made it more commonplace. WorldCon and other cons routinely provide wheelchairs, scooters, Braille readers and other equipment either subsidized by the convention or at cost. Convention members volunteer to be "helpers" for those who need assistance. Spaces are reserved in prime viewing areas at events for people in wheelchairs. According to Esther Breslau of the Electronic Eggs, there are few organizations with such broad membership with this high level of access.

"Part of this is because fandom is very accepting," she said. "It is one of the reasons Electronic Eggs have been so successful — people are willing to look past the disability to help the person. Not every con has the same level of access, but most of the larger ones try. While there are always a few jerks who don't give you the extra two seconds to get out of their way, there are also jerks in wheelchairs."

Because of the distance many fans travel to WorldCon, many who can afford the time and money to go are older and have families. Worldcon usually has free day care, complete with licensed professionals so the parents can attend "boring" panels while their children have "cool stuff" like storytellers and art classes. Older children usually find their own interests in the movies,

at the 1997 WorldCon in San Antonio, Texas.

## tion convention to Earth

art gallery, part seminar, and all fun. Even the people there for business reasons have a good time.

"There's definitely a professional aspect of a writer going to cons," Bujold said. "(In the writing business,) there is this middleman of the editors, publishers, booksellers... cons give me immediate feedback about my work. No where else will you find such a direct link between writer and reader."

"It's thrilling to meet the authors I love to read," said Ray Lepine, a computer science professor at LSU. "It is exciting to just be around thousands of people who enjoy the same genre of books and movies. I always find a new book to read, movie to see, or place to go... I wouldn't have if I wasn't at the convention. It's fun."

"Having fun" is the driving force at a convention. You can see that just from reading the "party board," where a given night's room parties are posted. As many as 35 open parties occur any given night. Their themes range from Christian Fandom to the "Gaylaxians," or Gay Fandom, from parties dedicated to different TV shows to bid parties. The bid parties are often the best ones, where committees wanting to host WorldCon ply potential voters with food,



Exhibiting at 1997 WorldCon for the first time, artist R. Cat Conrad (that's his real name) paints starscapes and portraits, reflecting his love of science fiction and fantasy.

drinks, and all the benefits of coming to their city. The bid parties are so much fun some groups have "hoax bids."

Tom Ammon is a native of San Diego, Calif., and was part of a "Zha'ha Dun in 2026" bid, a hoax bid in reference to Babylon 5. During the convention he went by the name "Mondo" and sported the swept up fan of hair typical of the alien race Centauri from the series.

"The Centauri have gods just for parties and alcohol. I empathize greatly with these ideals."

Rebecca Smith, a New Orleans native and LSU graduate, said she is no stranger to parties and "WorldCon is one of the best parties, right up there with Mardi Gras."

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