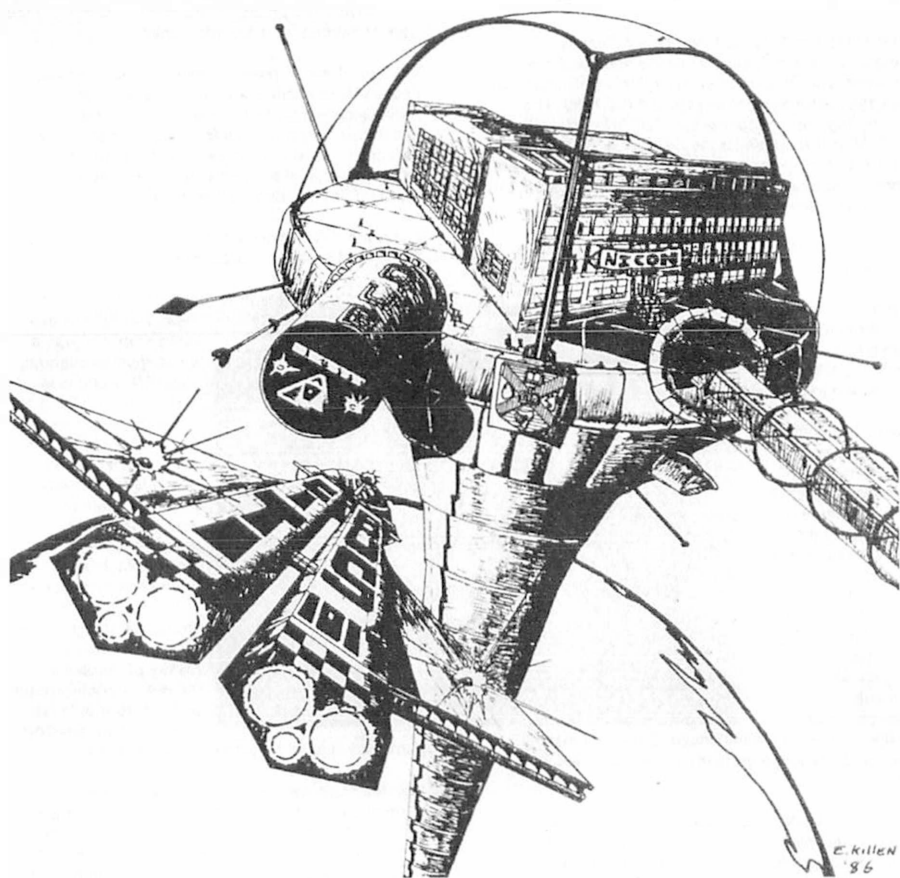


NICON 86 Remembered



NICON 86 Remembered

Introduction

Twenty years ago two young men went to Science Fiction conventions in Glasgow – not the same one mind – but both came back full of the Sensawunda. Fanboys to the max, they decided that this convention organising can't be that hard, let's have a con in Belfast. Shortly afterwards NICON 86 was announced.

Since that time Eugene Doherty and Tommy Ferguson have helped to organise and run three more conventions, culminating in the very successful National University convention U-NICON 89. The catchy tag line won us the bid: 'NICON – all we need is U' After a short hiatus the next generation of convention organisers came along and Mecons were born – and have continued to be a great success. But what was it like back then?

Well the guests were a lot younger, as this picture can testify.

It must have been this youth which drove me to start the thing in the first place. Eugene recently brought along some my archives, which he is keeping in a safe place given the number of times I have moved over the years. They contained masses of preparatory material for the convention: drafts of documents, plans, charts and even, for some of the later conventions, original application forms to join the convention and names of people who attended. Some of those brought back some great memories and filled in a lot of gaps.

But of NICON 86 itself I must say my memories of the con include some very sketchy games: the pint sinking competition: where I challenged Eugene I believe to who could sink a pint of Guinness the quickest. Naturally I won. There was also the Cream Cracker eating contest which, as the photos below



show was a popular event. I'm not even too sure if the location, the Fitzwilliam Room, even exists any more in the Student's Union. All of these exciting events took place in the evening and my memories of the day's more Science Fictional items remain hazy.

I do know that we dragged in all our friends, girlfriends (we did have those in them days) and even, in my own case, my landlord and his wife. We even have more photos to prove this – check out the links at the end for more information.

We didn't have a dealers' room – but we had two dealers Waterstone's with their entire SF and Fantasy collection and Crane's, and we did our best to conceal their presence from each other. An art collection – which the cover illustrates one of four, I believe, pieces of art on display. There were also guests. Did I mention we had guests?

For a one day convention to have three guests was – and probably still is – quite impressive.

Anne McCaffrey was probably the lead guest – she drove up from the depths of Ireland as far as I can remember and was a good sport throughout. Peter Morwood was a bit of an unknown to us all at that time, but turned out to be a great guest, funny, sociable and taking time to speak to everyone. James White was, as always, completely wonderful. He was such a gentleman and took all of the madness in his stride. He also provided a great link with the history of fandom in Ireland – certainly north of the border at least. Check out the timeline published later in the zine for more information.

I'm sure there were panels and discussions with all three of our guests, as well as readings and more informal discussions in the bar. I'm sure – if poked and prodded enough – some of those people who were there may be able to remember more about it. For now though here are some of the comments we got on the convention which are very interesting.

NICON 86 Remembered

"For a £3 attending membership one day convention they have provided a lot of good material. GoH was Anne McCaffrey with Peter Morwood and Jim White also in attendance. I believe that Albacon II was Thomas's first con, and Eugene was blooded at XIIcon, so it is gratifying to see that they managed to give a very good overview of fandom in the Programme Book, highlighting the social aspects of conventions (apart from drinking) with the advice to "let your hair down, talk to people and basically just get involved in whatever is happening" All I can say is that I wish I had been there - it would have been nice to be caught up in the obvious enthusiasm of this dynamic duo."

Ian Sorenson, Conrunner

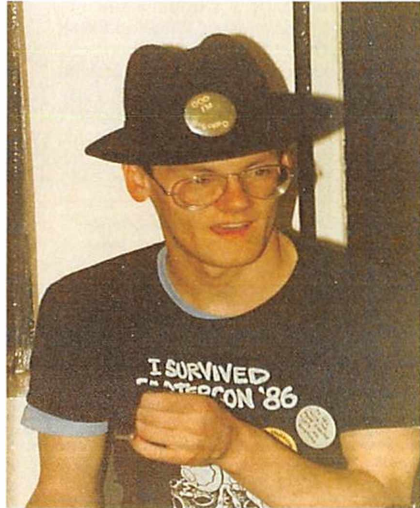
To be honest this is a rosy view of how the thing came about, although sprinkled liberally with the truth. After the event both Eugene and I wrote to Ian who, at the time, published a fanzine for people who ran conventions – giving helpful advice etc. Our own views were a bit more honest:

"We were not without our little upsets such as losing speakers, running late, poor media coverage etc Media interest was very limited (very!) The Union fined us for making a mess (disputed), and when in September we went to confirm our pro-lem booking of the main hall, we found that the union president had pre-empted us and got it for a political rally. Yes, very annoying!"

Looking back on it now, and with the aid of some of the pictures, all I seem to remember was feeling really cool in my hat and badges, having a good time with a whole bunch of friends I never knew I had and getting caught up in the whole event. Meeting the authors, whilst very important, still seems to me these days as a lucky happenstance, a bonus. I was not the only weirdo in town, and there were even professional weirdoes as well – what more could a young fanboy about town ask for?

I hope your experiences of Mecon 9 are equally as liberating – who knows, in twenty years you could be writing this about yourself! Go on, get out there, let your hair down and enjoy yourself. I know I did and will this weekend as well.

Also you can join us in our further fan-related shenanigans every other week at the Errigle bar, the new home of Belfast SF fandom. Details at www.terracon3000.org.uk/errigle.htm



Tommy timing the Cracker eating contest. (Get that hat!)



Eugene asleep on the job. Of course it could be SF charades ...

NICON 86 Remembered

Timeline of NI Fandom

Northern Ireland fandom is traditionally thought of as the day James White and Walt Willis got together, "Irish Fandom Day." Obviously relating solely to Northern Ireland, the name is somewhat of a misnomer. This timeline is the start of a much larger project to put together a history of the conventions, and their place in how Northern Irish fandom has developed. I'd like to put together a much larger publication for next year – the sixtieth year of Irish Fandom – and hold a one day event on Irish Fandom to celebrate. More information will be published later in the year.

For now I'm keen that this kick off a few memories for people and that they can add more to this as we go along.

Please contact me with any updates, more information or stuff that I've simply completely missed via:

<http://belfastsciencefiction.org.uk/>

1947 26th August - James White meets Walt Willis. Irish Fandom is born.

1948 SLANT fanzine first published. Walt Willis

1952 Hyphen fanzine first published. Walt Willis & Chuch Harris

1965 May: Irish Fandom an era drew to a close in 170 Upper Newtownards Road: Oblique House.

1970 James White teaches writing class Belfast Tech for the WEA class meets afterwards in White's Tavern and Belfast science fiction group/society is born: 'New Irish Fandom'

1975 Dave Patterson forms the Northern Ireland SF Association (NISFA) which immediately becomes NDSFG (North Down Science Fiction Group)

1981 XIMOC comic published Davy Francis, Hilary Robinson. First writing and art of Will Simpson, John McCrear, & Peter Morwood amongst others

1986 March QUB science fiction society founded by Tommy Ferguson

1986 Nicon 86- first Northern Ireland SF Convention

1986 Thingy – First QUB SF Society newsletter. Tommy Ferguson

1987 Belfast group moves to Monico Bar, across the way from White's

1987 Hyphen 37 – celebrating 40 years of Irish Fandom produced. Walt Willis

1987 Nicon 87- second Northern Ireland SFConvention

1987 TASH (The Amazing Sentient House) fanzine first published. Tommy Ferguson

1988 Nicon III - third Northern Ireland SF Convention

1988 Götterdämmerung fanzine first published. Mark McCann, James McKee & Tommy Ferguson

1989 QUB SF Soc and QUB Prisoner society appear on Kelly's People with James White

1989 Nicon IV/Unicon X. QUB hosts national University scifi convention

1989 Antrim & North Down Dr Who Appreciation Society

1990 Cortex gets the QUB SF soc banned in perpetuity from Irish cons after some unpleasantness at Octocon V

1996 Monico/ The Monocle fanzine Eugene Doherty

1998 Mecon 1 (All in Senior Staff Common Room, Queen's University, Belfast)

1999 Mecon 2

2000 Mecon 3

2000 The Flaneur fanzine first published. Joe McNally

2001 MeCon Delta

2002 Mecon V

2003 Mecon 6

2004 Mecon 7

2005 Mecon VIII

2006 Mecon 9

2008 Mecon X / Unicon 22

2011 TitanCon 2011

2012 First Belfast Science Fiction Group Summer cinema trip, Forbidden Planet @Excelsior Cinema, Comber

2019 TitanCon 2019 (Eurocon 41)

Prepared by Eugene Doherty, Tommy Ferguson, Malcolm Hutchinson, Joe McNally, PJ Holden and Rob Hansen.¹

<http://www.dcs.gla.ac.uk/SF-Archives/Then/>

Links:

Belfast Science Fiction Group

<http://belfastsciencefiction.org.uk/>

Ansible:

<http://news.ansible.co.uk/>

Fancylopedia 3

<http://fancylopedia.org/belfast>

Fanzines Online:

<http://www.efanzines.com/>

Tommyworld:

<http://www.tommyworld.info>