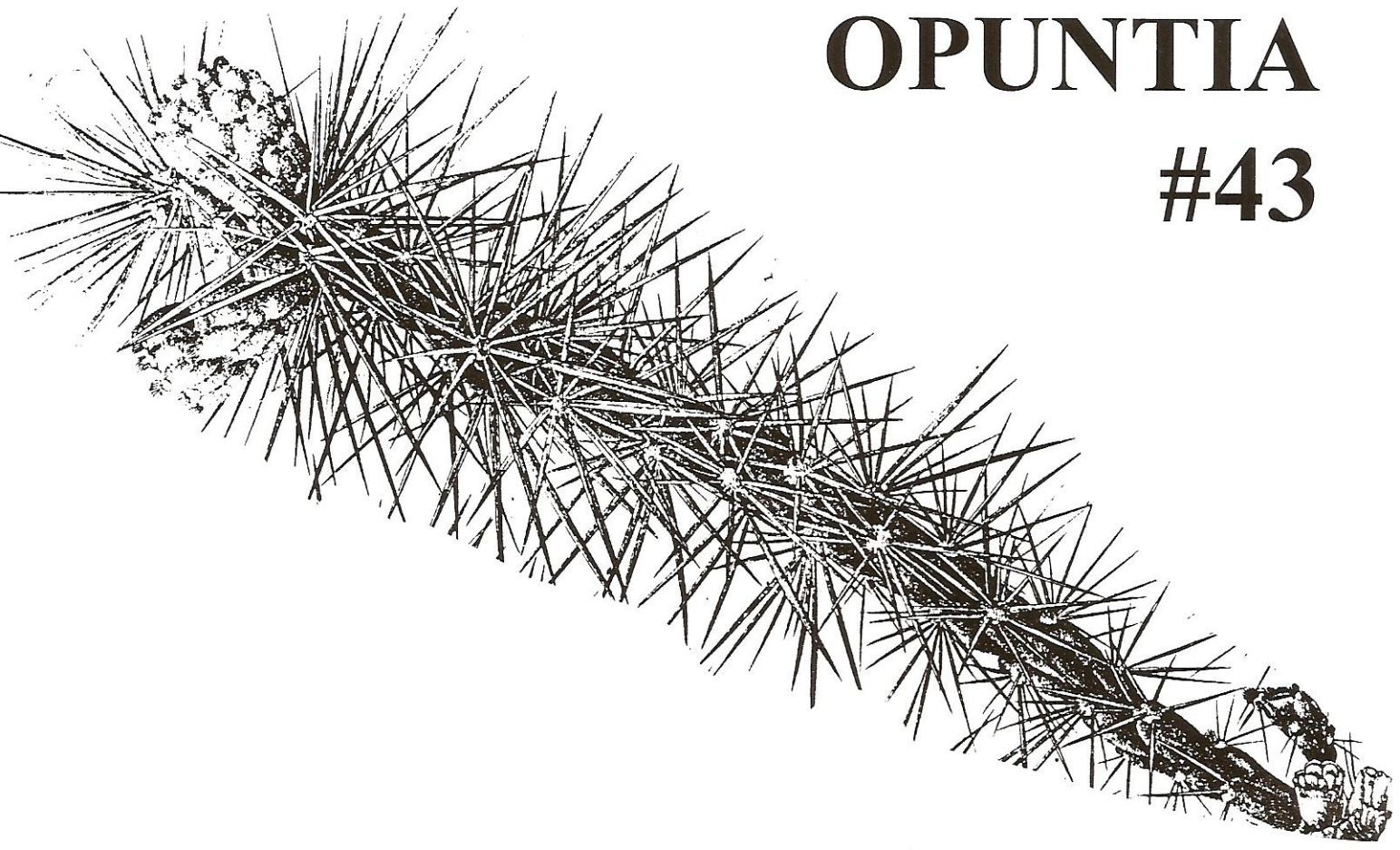


# OPUNTIA

## #43



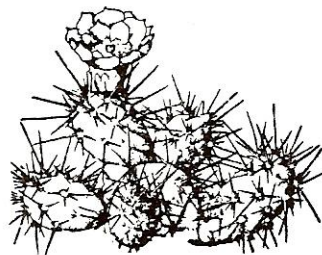
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Whole-numbered OPUNTIAs are sercon, x.1 issues are reviewzines, x.2 issues are indexes, and x.5 issues are perzines.

**ART CREDIT:** The cover depicts *Opuntia davisii*, by an unknown artist in the 1856 House of Representatives (USA) REPORTS OF EXPLORATIONS AND SURVEYS TO ASCERTAIN THE MOST PRACTICABLE AND ECONOMICAL ROUTE FOR A RAILROAD FROM THE MISSISSIPPI RIVER TO THE PACIFIC OCEAN, Volume 4.



FROM: Carolyn Clowes  
5911 West Pay Drive NW  
Depauw, Indiana 47115

1999-06-15

Thank's for Lee Gold's informative history of filking. As well as parodies, borrowed tunes and lyrics, I've heard some completely original stuff too. The first Context, a literary SF con in Columbus, Ohio, had about 300 members attending. C.J. Cherryh was Guest of Honour. After what I thought was an exhausting schedule for her of panels, signings, and chatting with fans, she stayed up all night filking. Her songs were space chancies and ballads in the spirit of her books, the tunes and lyrics her own. A number of others sang their own material, much of it truly fine. We had panels with heady topics like "Will what we're writing now be important in a hundred years?". The filking had a sense of being for the future, so that someday on generation ships, sunjammers, and space stations far from home, people

might sit around and sing the songs we wrote, back when it was all a dream.

[Lee Gold wrote: "*They were by John Bristol, a pseudonym of Jack Speer. The one that puzzles me is a short piece which is said to be to "the obvious tune". I'll print it here just in case someone can recognize it. "We'll build a tempo-ship / And we'll take a little trip, / And watch a million years go by."*"] My guess for her mystery tune is "Gospel Ship". It's a traditional mountain gospel song, recorded by the Carter family in the 1930s, by Joan Baez in the 1960s, and still sung today. "I'm gonna take a trip / on that good old gospel ship / I'm goin' far beyond the sky / I'm gonna shout and sing / until the bells gonna ring / when I bid this world goodbye."

FROM: Michael Waite 1999-06-23  
105 West Ainsworth  
Ypsilanti, Michigan 48197-5336

The anecdotes in Gold's article are priceless. I can only imagine what it was like to be filking with the likes of Anthony Boucher and John W. Campbell Jr. [The tempo ship song to "the obvious tune"] I had no trouble singing to the tune of "As Time Goes By". That wonderful song from the Bogart/Bergman movie classic "Casablanca". The lyrics and music are by Herman Hupfield.

FROM: Sue Jones 1999-06-23  
89 Sutton Road  
Shrewsbury SY2 6ED, England

Re: the Year 1900 problem. I can remember seeing some postcards in my grandmother's album with the dates written as '02, '03, etcetera, but 1900 and 1901 written in full. Admittedly there were only a very few examples from those early years, but it seems that the Thomas family took two years to get comfortable with the change-over. Those zero-something dates looked very strange to me as a teenager, which was why I searched for an '00. Hard to believe that next year I get to use it myself.

FROM: Ned Brooks 1999-06-07  
4817 Dean Lane  
Lilburn, Georgia 30047-4720

I enjoyed the material on filksongs. When I became a fan in 1962, free-style bellowing was very much in fashion at the regional and WorldCons in Philadelphia, District of Columbia, and Baltimore, and also at the small cons in the south. Over the years the filking has become less drunken and more formal. Easier to get a good recording I guess, but not the same to me. I still have tapes of attempts to record singing at noisy room parties.

FROM: Lloyd Penney 1999-07-04  
1706 - 24 Eva Road  
Etobicoke, Ontario M9C 2B2

Once again all knowledge is contained in fanzines, and Lee Gold's history of filk was educational. We're not filkers, but we have worked with local filkers for the past nine years running the con suite and providing any other assistance at FilKONtario, the local filkcon.

FROM: Robert Lichtman 1999-07-20  
Box 30  
Glen Ellen, California 95442

I was in a serious automobile accident on June 1st (not my fault) in which I suffered three pelvic fractures, five cracked ribs, and a colourful variety of bruises and cuts. I was in hospital for 11 days, and have been at home many weeks since undergoing convalescence and rehabilitation.

[Best wishes for recovery from Cowtown!]

Lee Gold's history of filk was a most welcome read. I knew some of the early history of it, but Lee presents the grand panorama of filkdom in a coherent way I hadn't encountered before.

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**I ALSO HEARD FROM:** Harry Andruschak, John Held Jr, Joseph Major, Scott Crow, Ken Cheslin, Chester Cuthbert, Bill Breiding, Henry Welch, A. Langley Searles, Karen Johnson, Andrew Murdoch

## **NATIONAL SCIENCE FICTION ASSOCIATIONS**

By Bridget Wilkinson

[Reprinted by permission. Bridget can be reached at Ground Floor Flat, 8 West Avenue Road, Walthamstow E17 9SE, England.]

How many national SF associations have you got? Well, the normal answer is one or none. Poland has a national association



of SF clubs, while the USA has no national organization, except for the ghost of an organization which co-ordinates NASFIC when the WorldCon is not held in North America. Germany in effect has one and a half: the highly efficient Science Fiction Club Deutschland (SFCD), originating in the pre-1990 Federal Republic, and a loose association of ex-Democratic Republic SF clubs, rather on the Polish model. Each talks to the other, but they don't always understand each other.

Why would you have more? Well, in Romania after 1990, several different groups started up national associations on the basis of, errm, philosophical differences (sometimes political, sometimes more personal). There is an umbrella organization (well, pseudo-organization) now which covers the whole country despite the East/West, media/written, youth/adult, and political issues which initiated these controversies.

This aside, why? On the far left-hand side of Europe, looking north from Africa, are a terminally confused set of little islands. Between the two countries there they now have four national associations, and counting.

In The Beginning was the BSFA (well, back in the late 1950s actually). The British Science Fiction Association was set up to increase awareness of SF, and to distribute information on SF by

the publication of journals (their present manifestations are MATRIX, VECTOR, and FOCUS).

They have not, and have never had, any connection with the running of Eastercon, which is co-ordinated by an ongoing disorganization with no written rules. Ken Slater said that in the first flush of youth the BSFA did indeed try to take over the Eastercon. After a couple of years and a lot of wrangling, the forces of disorganization won against the forces of organization, and con and association went their separate ways.

The Irish Science Fiction Association (ISFA) was set up to co-ordinate SF activities in Ireland, publishing a magazine, and organizing meetings and a national convention Octocon. David Stewart told me that by contrast, despite the Octocon and ISFA committees frequently having almost exactly the same personnel, there was never a formal link between Octocon and the ISFA.

More recently there was a fannish dispute within the ISFA, so it disbanded itself, and a new organization called Science Fiction Ireland was created. Octocon continued, after a short hiccough, despite the death of its parent organization. What its relationship with SFI is, I haven't the foggiest.

I was more than a little worried when  
I first heard that a Scottish

Science Fiction Federation had set itself up. Many years back, a Polish friend had asked me if English SF, and by implication the BSFA, had been oppressing Scottish fans. Gulp, not as far as I'm aware, had been my reply.

My first enquiries about it were very oblique, then much more confident as time went on. Why set up a Scottish SF Federation? Their constitution makes it clear that no group is to be excluded from any event organized by a member club. This rules out exclusion of sassenachs (English) for starters, but the real reason had nothing to do with the English at all. Disagreements have long been a part of Scottish fandom. This had reached the point where conventions run by one group would not mention others, or would even try to dissuade fans from attending events run by other organizations, to the long-term detriment of all.

The SSFF is an umbrella organization of clubs and conventions, more like the Polish federation of clubs than the individual member basis of the BSFA and SFCD. All subscribe to a set of rules designed to promote SF within Scotland and provide a forum for the arbitration of disputes. It has not been as active in recent months as it might, as it has been extremely successful in its second aim, and yet has to concentrate upon its first. It covers written SF, media groups, and just about any other SF/fantasy related interest that you might care to mention. If you want to see them in action (or inaction) try Hogmanaycon

at the end of the year. (Hogmanaycon, c/o 26 Avonbank Road, Rutherglen, Glasgow G73 2PA, Scotland).

Schismatic nationalism on a friendly scale has been part of the British political scene for the last ten years, but my first reaction to a newsletter from the Welsh Science Fiction Association (WSFA) was disbelieving laughter. I all but ran over (difficult in the Florence Nightingale pub on the first Thursday) to ask the distributor what this was all about.

The problem in Wales is not feuding, it is a crippling lack of communication. Questions about Welsh fandom have been likely to get you blank looks or separate references to Cardiff, Aberystwyth, Bangor, and a few other places. You only have to look at the map to see why. There is neither railway nor motorway running north/south in Wales. A Cardiff/Aberystwyth rail journey has to be taken via England. An Aberystwyth/Bangor rail journey must involve the Ffestiniog narrow gauge steam railway; great fun, and I can recommend it as a day out, but hardly a practical means of travel.

The WSFA was set up to promote communication between the various SF groups in Wales. The constitution was taken wholesale from the Scottish Science Fiction Association; no more than a few words have been cut out or changed. The WSFA is

publishing the newsletter DRAGON'S TALES. Their address is WSFA, GFF, 32 Theobald Road, Cardiff CF5 1LP, Wales (SASE to be sent).

And an English Science Fiction Association? Well, I guess it would have to formulate a reason for existing first.

## CON-VERSION 16

by Dale Speirs

**SF Fans Are Actually Hotel Fans, It Is Said.** Calgary's annual SF convention was held July 23 to 25, 1999, at the Carriage House Inn. The convention has been held here from time to time in the past, and I was glad to see it back in this place. There are only about three hotels in Cowtown capable of hosting an SF or philatelic convention at reasonable cost, so everything keeps going around in cycles. Since SF fans and stamp collectors are not the boozehounds that hotel management fondly imagine, they tend to wear out their welcome after two or three years and have to move to another hotel. The big money is in Shriners and wedding receptions.

Fortunately Calgary hotels constantly change ownership, so by the time the cycle is completed, a new one can begin with a fresh set of managers. The Carriage House Inn is a family-owned hotel

that does not rotate managers, but seem tolerant of SF fans. The hotel is a bit small, but I consider this a plus, as the convention seems livelier with a denser crowd rather than the empty spaces of sprawling hotels like the Coast Plaza, formerly the Marlborough Inn, and which has been through at least four owners in the last two decades. The Carriage House Inn also has excellent food and the most popular Sunday brunch in town, partly because it is the only hotel with kosher cooking.

**The Convention Itself:** Con-Version 16 had Ben Bova as the main Guest of Honour. Fantasy GoH was L.E. Modesitt Jr, Canadian GoH was Tanya Huff, and Science GoH was Gregory Bennett.

Most panels had a good turnout, partly from skill in selecting topics, and partly by having only three tracks to concentrate the audience. It was interesting to note how many of the panelists would refer back to other panels earlier in the convention and have the majority of the audience understand the allusions because they had been there as well.

Each panel was introduced by a moderator who was prepared and well briefed on the panelists biographies and the topic for the introductions to the audience. The moderators asked leading questions to get the conversation going and to keep in on track.



Con-Version was a sharp contrast to many conventions I have been to where the panelists were left to their own ends in starting off and the discussions veered away from the topic at hand. While many SF fans consider this sort of thing a “fannish tradition”, I consider it a cheat, because audience has the right to expect to receive things from the convention as advertised. There was none of “I don’t know why I was assigned to this panel”, as the panelists had some connection to the topic, either via their fiction or their day job.

I followed my usual method in dealing with the problem of how to attend two panels at the same time. I attended one panel for the first half-hour, then left and went next door for the last half-hour of the other panel I wanted to see.

L.E. Modesitt Jr was the best panelist I have seen at any convention. He was always well prepared with notes and obvious advance planning, unlike the norm which is for the panelist to show up poorly-prepared and/or hungover. At the Guest of Honour speeches, his was thoughtful and useful advice on writing SF. I recommend him to concons looking for GoHs.

When I first walked into the consuite, I thought for a moment I had mistakenly walked into the wrong room because of the airline stewardesses present. The women in business suits, however, turned out to be Scully impersonators from The X-Files, with only

their FBI badges separating them from Air Canada flight attendants. There were no Klingons in the hallways of the convention, Star Trek having mostly died out in Cowtown.

I did see a Xena. Unfortunately 45-year-old women do not look well in such a skimpy costume when they have leathery skin from too much suntanning, and while not actually obese, have a thick waist and cellulite thighs. She did, however, close out the parties and drink everyone else under the table. I went home for some sleep and a shower, came back at 04h30, and she was the last one going in the consuite at 08h30 when I went off for breakfast before starting the day’s round of panels.

**Nosferatu To Angel: How The Image Of Vampires Has Changed:** This was the first panel of the convention and the first I attended. The panelists were Tanya Huff (a pro writer from the Maritimes who has published vampire novels), Jena Snyder (editor of ON SPEC magazine and minor writer), and Katie Harse (local fan involved in writers’ groups, who is doing her Ph.D. thesis on 19th-century speculative fiction, with particular emphasis on Bram Stoker). I’m not a vampire story fan, but I try to select a few panels at each convention on subjects outside my usual range of interest in order to force myself out of the rutted track. Snyder started off by remarking that vampires are characterized more sympathetically nowadays than they used to.



Huff agreed, but felt this lessening of their dangerousness meant they would also lose some of their seductive appeal. She said that aging Baby Boomers are becoming more fascinated by death, morbidly so, as they reach their 40s and 50s, and hence an increase of interest in vampires. She noted that vampire fiction readers, like romance readers, are an extremely loyal, strong market. I happened to be looking around at the audience for this panel and noted that it, like the romance market, was strongly female, with only a few men present.

**Mars Or The Moon?:** A false dichotomy, said Ben Bova (SF novelist and ANALOG Mafia), for he felt we can do both. The Moon is favoured by economics for colonies. Mars is suitable only for exploration because we cannot establish viable colonies in any reasonable time but the search for life is important. Whether funded by government or private entrepreneurs, whomever pays the bills will cause all kinds of trouble for those doing the actual work. Dr. Alan Dyer (Calgary Science Centre and Planetarium) doesn't like the idea of a Mars trip because it would turn out like the Apollo programme. He prefers to make Moon colonies a priority since it would mean we would go out into space for good. J. Brian Clarke (SF novelist who lives in Calgary and like Bova was wearing a button advertising himself as part of the ANALOG Mafia) said we should walk before we run, and build up an infrastructure of space stations and lunar colonies before going to Mars.

**Why Have Manned Space Flight?** was the question the following day, and as with the Mars versus Moon panel, the contestants, pardon me, panelists, agreed this was a false dichotomy. Edward Willett (SF writer from Saskatchewan specializing in young adult novels) favoured manned flight for the romantic urge to satisfy human curiosity to know what was beyond the next horizon. His practical reason was that humans are better at dealing with unexpected situations and equipment failures than robots. Dr. Alison Sinclair (pathologist in her day job and SF novelist on the side) felt humans were becoming more vicarious and cyberpunkish since the dawn of the television age, and sending robots out in their place was a natural progression. J. Brian Clarke agreed with robots first, but from economic reasons. Blair Patterson reminded us that Earth is in a cosmic shooting gallery. When, not if, the next big rock comes in at us, we need to be diversified through space. Tanya Huff said we need astronauts for marketing purposes. Willett agreed with this, saying that when people criticize manned flight as a public relations exercise, the response should be "Yeah, so what?". There is nothing wrong with good PR; everybody does it and so should the space programme.

**Visual Pulp:** Janis Svilpis, of the Department of English at the University of Calgary, teaches courses on SF and fantasy. He

gave a slide show on SF pulp magazine covers, illustrating selected examples and discussing how the artist chose to emphasize strangeness. Strangeness is a quality used to point out differences while not going too far beyond reality to scare away the novice reader at the newsagents. An example was putting pointy ears on humanoid aliens (long before Mr. Spock, of course) so the reader knew it was not just a human. Most techniques were standard throughout the graphics industry. Speed lines to suggest motion were borrowed from comics. Gender representation stereotyped strong men and beautiful women for the male audience of the pulps, what Svilpis termed homosocial, not to be confused with homosexual. He noted from his own studies that for some reason severed heads had a higher than expected rate of appearance on pulp covers, usually associated with technology, the latter to keep the former alive. Many characters on the cover could be moved without change to a different background for some other type of pulp cover, such as a jungle scene for adventure or Arizona mesas for westerns.

**Dinosaurs In Fiction:** Alberta is the richest source of Late Cretaceous dinosaur fossils in the world, so each year there are panels on the subject. Dr. Phillip Currie, Curator of Dinosaurs at the Royal Tyrrell Museum of Paleontology (Drumheller, Alberta; it is the largest fossil museum in the world) covers the fact end. Dr. William Sarjeant, a paleontologist at the University of Saskatchewan, covered the fictional representation of dinosaurs.

He writes SF under the pseudonym of Antony Swithins. The scientific concept of dinosaurs originated in 1841, and the first mention of them in fiction was in 1853 by none other than Charles Dickens. Sarjeant showed slides of novels about dinosaurs written in the early 1900s. He advised us to save the trouble of hunting them down, as they are all unreadable today.

In North America and Europe, Edgar Rice Burroughs had the greatest influence about dinosaurs, and in Russia it was Obruchev's hollow-Earth novel *PLUTONIA* (reviewed in *OPUNTIA* 23.1A). As a sidelight, Phillip Currie is an ERB fan and in his teenaged years published a fanzine about his work. Dinosaur fiction is often responsible for perpetuating misconceptions and errors about them, sometimes due to changing paleontological thought, other times due to ignorance by the author. Modern dinosaur fiction often features alternative history, such as the dinosaurs co-existing with humans.

**Booming Explosions In Space:** All those scientific gaffes that nitpickers love to jump on in novels and movies were the subject of this panel. Alan Dyer said he was recently at an astronomer's conference where the light entertainment was the movie *ARMAGEDDON*, where everybody had fun spotting the blatant errors. He was not entirely unsympathetic to Hollywood, mentioning as an example *Star Trek*, which had to have warp

drive and transporter beams to move the characters and plots along faster. Visible phaser beams in space are needed to show the audience which ship is firing at what enemy. These things are not good science but can be tolerated to keep the story understandable to an audience. What annoyed him was a starship suddenly accelerating into warp drive, which implied inertial dampers to keep everyone inside from being flattened into a thin film of blood and powdered bone. So far so good, except that every time the starship took an impact under enemy fire, the crew were tossed about wildly instead of the inertial dampers kicking in. Ed Willett's favourite was people outrunning explosions, usually fireballs that apparently had no radiant heat. Numerous suggestions were received from the audience, such as the fact that radiation kills in the real world but only mutates organisms on Hollywood studio lots. Other popular nitpicks include heroes with the ability to dodge laser beams, space fighters twisting and turning in dog-fights, and no circuit breakers in spaceship control boards.

**Water On The Moon:** Recent satellite surveys have shown there is a possibility of water on the Moon at the poles. The overriding importance of water on the Moon is that no lunar colony will be successful without it in large quantities, even with recycling. Some mountain peaks at the South Pole are always in sunlight, an important point for running solar power to any colony. Dave Duncan (SF novelist who lives in Calgary) was not as optimistic

about the satellite results since the actual evidence is for H<sub>2</sub>O. Gregory Bennett (former NASA engineer now working for Bigelow Aerospace on spacecraft design) said there do not appear to be any sheets of ice, just scattered water molecules in the lunar dust, but there may be ice deposits below the surface to be mined at some distant date. However, it is not cost effective to mine ice for a newborn lunar colony, and it would be cheaper to ship it from Earth.

**The Non-Economics Of Fantasy and SF:** Moderator Glenn MacIntyre (Con-Version committee) said that this was basically a followup to yesterday's panel on booming explosions in space. It started off first with bad economics in science fact, but then finally shifted to fiction. Dave Wolverton (SF writer and workshop instructor) said people don't mind buying lottery tickets to support a charity but object to the space exploration budget. L.E. Modesitt Jr said readers are often vocal about technological veracity of books but express no similar concern for economic veracity. Modesitt was a venture capitalist before becoming a writer, and said that investors want at least 25% return on investment. Space hasn't provided it other than communication satellites. Ben Bova was sitting at the back of the audience but refused to be drawn into any arguments about privatization in space. Modesitt mentioned that in a society of immortals, compound interest would not be paid, since it only works in our



kind of world where few people invest for the really, really, really long term. Interstellar trade would be minimal since it would be cheaper to manufacture everything in the home system, although information might be traded. There would be no currency exchange rates between stellar systems with only sublight technology. Any economic expansion into space requires massive and new energy production to succeed.

**Is Technology Changing Our Values And Our Morals?** The panel started off with J. Brian Clarke remembering how it was when he was young just before World War Two when nuclear families stayed together. Now the children scatter across the continent as a matter of course, not just as an exceptional thing such as emigration. Conversely, however, the Internet is helping families communicate better and more often by e-mail. There is more letter writing than ever before, except it is done by computer. Ed Willett said technology will require the basic morality of not doing something that will hurt others. Since high technology is developed by the West, the moral imperative is on us to think things through, but unfortunately this is almost never done and is subject to random politics. An audience member commented that one reaction to technology is attempts to be anonymous on the Internet. Gregory Bennett came in late to the panel at this point, and unaware of Willett's statement, repeated that Do Not Hurt Others is the only rule that should be applied to technology.

## **The Technology Of Magic:**

### **How Much Breaking Of The Rules**

**Of Physics Will Readers Actually Accept?** The panelists agreed that a book's world of magic requires rules to allow proper suspension of disbelief. The familiar invocation of Clarke's Law was cited: Any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic. The panelists then deduced from this that science is therefore a special case of magic. Just as there is too much danger in hard SF of the author lecturing the reader, so it is that fantasy authors have to be careful not to lecture on the rules of magic while, of course, ensuring the reader has a fair chance of deducing how the book's world works.

**Is There Anything New After Cyberpunk?:** L.E. Modesitt Jr said cyberpunk was the latest dead end in a long series of literary dead ends. All such extremes fail to amount to anything but do help to push out the boundaries of the genre a bit. He named a new trend called techno-pornography, nothing to do with sex but rather a false glorification of a technological world. (Too bad Ben Bova or other members of the ANALOG Mafia weren't there.) He felt that many writers killed their careers by writing too many books that depress the reader and make him give up early on the writer's books. Another panelist said writers do not consciously start a movement or get together to co-ordinate a trend. It happens and is recognized later, assuming, of course, that it is an actual trend and not just false correlation.

Modesitt said the most dangerous trend is that few publishers now accept unsolicited manuscripts. The result is a small in-group selecting via agents and editors, but the only way to find new talent is via the slush pile. He attributed Tor's rise to the top of SF publishing to them being one of two major publishers who still accept unsolicited manuscripts.

**Teaching SF In School:** A vigorous panel of educators faced off against/with an equally vigorous audience of whom many were schoolteachers who could quote chapter and verse of the Alberta Ministry of Education curriculum. A very participatory panel indeed. The general consensus was that things are better than they used to be because the optional reading list of the curriculum now includes many SF and fantasy titles. Teachers can thus sneak a lot of it into their classroom time, but it leaves quite a bit of variability in a student's chances of being exposed to literary SF. It is wisest to refer to it as speculative fiction, not science fiction, and certainly not sci-fi.

Janis Svilpis stirred up a firestorm when he remarked that a major difficulty he has teaching SF at the University of Calgary is that many of his students are ignorant of science and history. As most of the schoolteachers in the audience were the Calgary ones supplying him with his students, there was palpable resentment against this slur, but it did not divert attention from the topic.

**The Commercialization Of Space:** The 1967 Outer Space Treaty prohibits sovereignty but not property rights. Gregory Bennett's day job with Bigelow Aerospace is to design, with a time frame of 15 years, a cruise ship capable of going around the Moon. They are not in the launching business and therefore leave plans for a booster to other companies. It is expected to carry 100 passengers plus 50 crew, remain in space permanently, and be supplied by shuttles. Ticket prices are estimated at \$100,000 to \$200,000 per person. Since launch technology runs at about one loss per 100 launches, it is wise to buy travel insurance. All through the panel, Ben Bova kept bugging Bennett "But what about the booster?".

Space hotels would be a voracious consumer of resources. Bennett said to note the loading dock of any hotel and the constant stream of delivery trucks in and out, then think about getting all those supplies into orbit. For space industry, the only effective place is the Moon, where factories can mine the resources and ship products up out of a shallower gravity well. Currently the major commercialization of space is communication satellites, but Bennett predicted their eventual extinction because fibre-optic cables and microwave towers are cheaper and better quality.

**Writers At The Improv:** This trashsport is an annual tradition at Con-Version, courtesy of the  
Imaginative Fiction Writers

Association, a Calgary workshopping group. IFWA members write a story based on words called out by members of the audience. For each word, the panelists have a few minutes to write a sentence incorporating the word, or, better yet, a pun distorting it. After time is called, the sentences are read out and the audience votes for the most popular one. The process is repeated to build up a short-short. For the final sentence, the panelists had to use as many of the suggested words as possible. This is not a serious event, to put it mildly. This year's story is as below; the underlined words are the ones suggested by the audience.

"The crimson-kilted Irishman, Reggie O'Lith<sup>1</sup>, stormed through the doors of McGinty's Pub, screaming "Where is that damned girl?". "I'm right here, and I'm not deaf!", Alberta O'Saurus<sup>2</sup> told him, emerging from the back room with her hair in disarray. "Get your hair out of dat array", said Reggie, "for we must now find the Doll of Infinite Evil, before the world comes to an end!". Alberta eyed the ravens nesting in the pub: "Might as well; I hate the way this place has turned into a crow bar, anyway." "But there's such an ocelot of distance between us and the Pit of Sober Despair<sup>3</sup>", said Reggie wryly. Pausing only to pick up her ocelot and tuck it into the breast pocket of her suit<sup>4</sup>, Alberta swept out of the pub with Reggie close behind. The evil scientist, shocked at the two stepping from the transdimensional gate, exclaimed "Jumping Jehosephat, there has been an error. Your clothing has

been reversed. The woman is wearing a suit and the Irishman a dress, oh ... um, nevermind." <sup>5</sup> "Is that an ocelot in your suit pocket or were you expectorating us?", asked Alberta of the evil, hirsute, sober scientist. "Ooh", groaned the scientist, reeling from the bad pun; Alberta took advantage of his weakened state to hurl the ocelot at him. The ocelot poked the man<sup>6</sup> with its claws as sharp as Roger's <sup>7</sup> wit. Reggie winced as he watched the horrible death of the hirsute scientist, while Alberta laughed with satisfaction. Using the transdimensional device, she quickly retrieved the Doll of Infinite Evil. "Ravens or no ravens", she said to Reggie, "McGinty's our home. We'll return to the crow bar and stuff the doll with an ocelot of liquor and end its evil ways. The sober scientist has been destroyed.""

<sup>1</sup> Actual word suggested was 'regolith'.

<sup>2</sup> Actual word suggested was 'Albertosaurus'. Writers at the Improv had immediately followed a talk by Phillip Currie on new dinosaur discoveries.

<sup>3</sup> One of the IFWA contestants had kept trying to introduce the Pit of Sober Despair, but his previous sentences were passed over by the audience in favour of others. He finally succeeded with this one.

<sup>4</sup> Actual word suggested was 'hirsute'.

<sup>5</sup> One of the IFWA contestants was of Irish descent and was wearing a kilt.

<sup>6</sup> Actual word suggested was 'pokemon'.

<sup>7</sup> Roger was one of the IFWA panelists who was especially successful. Not the Irishman but he did introduce the Pit of Sober Despair.



**Immortality: Would It Be A Freedom Or A Curse?** When moderator Katie Harse introduced the topic, Dave Duncan got a good laugh from the audience when he acted shocked. He pretended to be under the impression that the topic was supposed to be “Immorality”, and acted disappointed that it was nothing so interesting.

Ben Bova said “I wrote the book on the subject: I’m an expert.” (laughter from the audience). His latest book is in fact on that subject. Dave Duncan replied: “I haven’t read the book; I’m waiting for the movie.” (more laughter). The panel was mostly a dialogue between Bova and Duncan, the former optimistic and the latter skeptical. Bova kept trying to reassure Duncan (whose day job is being an old-age pensioner) that immortality would not make him a feeble 200-year-old fool but healthy as a 20-year-old. Bova mentioned that it is already possible with existing techniques to extend life to a healthy 100. Hayden Trenholm (playwright and SF writer) pointed out that the rush to immortality may be stymied by patents on human genes. Although patents expire, trade secrets don’t. The net effect may be to slow down the arrival of immortality.

**Guest Of Honour Speeches:** Tanya Huff noted that Calgary has more Ph.D.s per capita than any other Canadian city. This explained to her why she found Con-Version took the most rigorous approach to SF, both panelists and audience, of all the

conventions she attended. L.E. Modesitt Jr said he is the most widely-published anonymous author in SF. He has not yet graduated to the stage of people asking him “Didn’t you publish a book somewhere?” despite his millions in sales. I should note that throughout the convention, Modesitt dressed in a three-piece suit and looked like the stereotype of an accountant or middle management. He re-affirmed Huff’s remark about the sercon nature of Con-Version.

Instead of the moderator (there was no Toastmaster this year) introducing Ben Bova, Modesitt did the job, paying tribute to Bova by publically thanking him for starting him on his career by publishing his first story. Bova had a humorous account of what he called his personal FAQ, the questions non-SF people ask him when they discover he is a writer. This included such classics as “Where do you get those crazy ideas?” to which Bova replies that they come from Schenectady, New York, where a man sends him a batch of ideas once a month on a subscription service. Other questions are: “How long does it take you to write a book?” (A year at least but I type it faster.); “Have any of your books been made into movies?” (Bova then told a hilarious story about how a Hollywood studio plagiarized the Bova/Harlan Ellison collaboration “Brillo” for the television show “Future Cop”; the studio settled out of court after four years of legal stalling); “What is your favourite novel?”

(“That’s like asking what is my

favourite child.”); and “How do I get published?” (by following Robert Heinlein’s famous rules about first you must type something on paper, then circulate it through editors).

**Annual General Meeting:** The last item of the schedule on Sunday was the AGM of the Con-Version Society. This year’s event had 450 paid members, about average for this convention. The committee for Con-Version 17 was elected. That event will go July 21 to 23, 2000. Details to follow later I’m sure, but Mike Resnick was confirmed as Toastmaster.

**Other Conventions:** There were other SF conventions advertising at Con-Version. On the Thanksgiving weekend this coming October 8 to 10 will be NonCon 22, originally an Alberta con but now a western Canada regional. This year it will be a relaxacon at Radium Hot Springs, British Columbia. Historically NonCon has been a sercon style convention but the only people bidding for the 1999 year wanted to have a relaxacon. Who pays the piper calls the tune. The convention is limited to 60 people, advance only, no memberships at the door. Send \$15 to NonCon, 9807 - 79 Avenue, Edmonton, Alberta, T6E 1R2.

Further down the road is Costume Con 19, hosted by the Western Canadian Costumers’ Guild in Calgary from May 25 to 28, 2001. Attending membership is C\$85/US\$60 from Box 20001, Calgary, Alberta T2P 4H3.



To support Toronto’s bid to host the 2003 World Science Fiction Convention, send C\$20.03 or US\$15 to: Toronto in ‘03, Box 3, Station A, Toronto, Ontario, M5W 1A2.