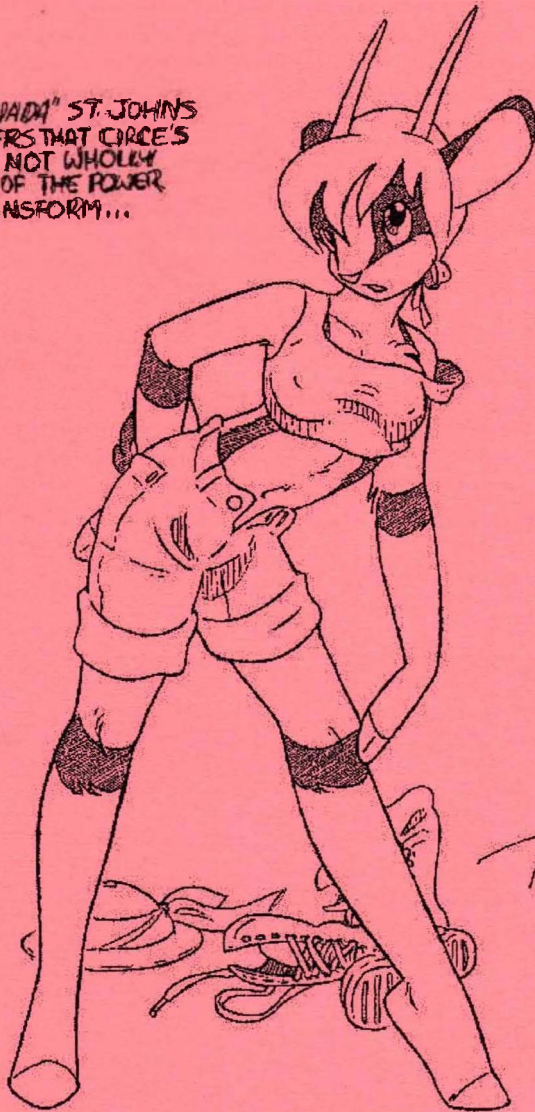


Royal Swiss Navy Gazette #11

November 2003

DR. "NEVADA" ST. JOHNS
DISCOVERS THAT CIRCE'S
CAVE IS NOT WHOLLY
BEREFT OF THE POWER
TO TRANSFORM...



Colophon

The Royal Swiss Navy Gazette #11, November 2003, being an occasional yet generally belated personal fanzine by Garth Spencer, produced in Vancouver, B.C., Canada, available either through P.O. Box 15335, VMPO, Vancouver, BC CANADA V6B 5B1, or via e-mail from the editor/publisher at garthspencer@shaw.ca, or downloadable in the fullness of time from his website at <http://www.vcn.bc.ca/sig/rsn>

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Interesting Stuff

An interesting thing happened at Orycon 24 (Portland, Nov. 2002). A friend had invited me to set up the fan room at Orycon, which worked out surprisingly well despite my being out of state (even from outside of the U.S.) I had more fun, and met more interesting fans, and enjoyed more intellectually stimulating, fannish conversation at the fan room that weekend, than I had enjoyed in the previous three months; perhaps in the previous three years.

At the same time as I thought *this* was what I was missing, by living in Vancouver ... I also wondered if I was up for this social set. The last time I was at a convention avowedly for fanzine fans, I had a strong sense of being out of my league; that I could not grasp their aesthetic for fanpublishing and fanwriting; of being in company that had a much better idea of their game than I had.

More Interesting Stuff

The next interesting thing that happened was in February and March this year. Alan Rosenthal asked me to work on progress reports for Ditto 16, which is to be held in Eugene, Oregon; and Paul Carpentier asked me to do similar work for VCon 28, to be held in Vancouver, BC. As it happens they will both be held on the *same* weekend in October 2003, so I thought the first progress reports for both cons were due in February or March. In fact, I was just running a month early for Ditto.

There was more of a delay in getting information on VCon 28 – the venue was only decided in early June. Granted that the hotel is settled now, still I wondered why there was a delay. Since I am also editing the monthly clubzine for BCSFA, I was impatient anyway to get some news to report. I was starting to provoke people by nagging them about PR information.

BCSFA

By the time you read this, in mid-November 2003, the B.C. Science Fiction Association should have a new executive. This may mean that I will have to hand over the reference materials for the club's monthly publication. I won't complain.

BCSFAzine

For one thing, I seem to be demonstrating the faults that I hate. Most of my life I've resented people who made wrong assumptions or omitted information I needed. I now discover I'm doing it myself; I could have made it clearer when I was paraphrasing e.g. the newbits that Ulrika O'Brien featured in

Chunga. And I could have attributed my sources more correctly. The hell of it is that all this was while I was *trying* to display fanzines and fannish material to local "fans", BCSFA members, who apparently don't give a shit. Oh, sometimes somebody says they appreciate the work I put in, and I have regular fanzine and book review contributions, but only two people are regular loccers, and only two people regularly contribute art.

And I believe I haven't given enough care and attention to tasks like editing, or layout; Really this means I have not been quite in control of any of the programs I use: e.g., for some reason my release of PageMaker kept cutting down the cover illustration to the upper left-hand quarter. E.g., something happened to my MSWord settings recently, so BCSFAzine kept saving in Acrobat 2.1 instead of 4.0, so some recipients are requesting the paper, rather than the online edition. Also I'm trying out a chapbook (5.5x8.5") format, like you see here, and I'm finding it rather more attention-intensive.

Often I've wondered whether I would really be an addition to the population at Ditto or Potlatch. Perhaps not. Call me paranoid but I think I would be gauche and out of step with real fannish fans.



PAUL CARPENTIER

V-Con Society

At VCon 28 we held an election meeting, which gave our convention overseeing group a somewhat different executive. For one thing, Paul Carpentier from Bellingham ended up as President of the V-Con Society, and Clint Budd, the incumbent, succeeded me as Secretary; as a result, I sent a big boxful of records and secretarial materials to Clint Budd.

VCon 28

I had intended to attend Ditto 16, but due to more expenses and less income than I expected, I attended Vcon instead. Vcon these days runs to about 300 members, and this year was held at the Days Hotel in Surrey, where it has been held before. Guests of Honour included Nalo Hopkinson, the rising star in CanSF from Toronto (and now Writer in Residence at



FRUVOUS

the University of British Columbia), and Esther Friesner, the Northeast writer and editor best known in recent years for *Chicks in Chainmail*, and subsequent anthologies in the same vein.

Vcon was ... low-key. Maybe that was just my experience; I spent a lot of the convention in the dealers' room, minding a table where I tried to sell a chunk of my library. Michael "Fruvous" Bertrand, a furry fan and a recent newcomer to FRED, helped me mind the Stop Press table.

Some time before Vcon, I learned about some changes in the Canadian SF market scene. Correspondence with Don Hutchison established that the *Northern Frights* anthology series was discontinued a while ago. Karl and Stephanie Johanson in Victoria have launched *Neo-Opis* Magazine. At the con, I was surprised to learn that Edge Publishing (Calgary) has bought Tesseract Books (the imprint formerly published out of Edmonton).

VikingCon veterans held a "VikingCon Search Party" at VCon 28. VikingCon (Bellingham, Washington) has been in suspension for a year or two, like Moscon in Idaho.

Undercurrents

Some people are less than enthusiastic about VCons. A local comics personality (now he supplements his income by holding semi-quarterly one-day comic swap meets), conceived an idea about twenty-five years ago that BCSFAns or VCon organizers were conspiring against him. The fact that he was reputed to stir up shit at VCon venues might have had something to do with that impression. But it doesn't actually make sense for Len to refer to VCon organizers, however far in the past, as "betrayers". A former BCSFAn lost a power struggle over BCSFA about five years into its history and "served" as WCSFCCA secretary for several years (he was almost impossible to find during that time). The same man who was deprecating about the financial irresponsibility shown by Westercon 44 had failed to submit financial reports on WCSFCCA to BC's Registrar of Societies, so the non-profit society was defunct, and so was the limited-liability protection it afforded us. This is one of the reasons why the whole overseeing organization for VCon was revamped.

Someone Had a Dream ...

Ray Seredin, a longtime BCSFA member, was talking on the Northwest Con League listserv about the recent Olympic bid, and



somehow transmogrified to the mooted (that means, only discussed) Vancouver bid for Worldcon in 2011. (Apparently it wasn't clear to all which year was in question.)

Some of you know that I'm a skeptic about the whole concept of Big Cons, say anything bigger than a middle-sized Westercon. I won't rant about that. I *will* ask, what does it *take* to run a Worldcon? Apparently there has been rather more documentation and discussion about running a Worldcon than the much more numerous local, annual conventions that fans run.

Some of you are going to think of the SMOFCon game as soon as I ask what a really big con takes. I've already seen the game and I want to ask the **next** question.

What are the intangibles that make or break a con's feasibility - things like goodwill, or credibility, or local enthusiasm and willingness to work - and what fosters these intangible assets?

One

Time for a New Fan Book?

Last August there was some discussion on the SF Northwest listserv about the need for a guide to contemporary fandom - like, where the conventions are, and what the fannish terms of reference mean, for people just discovering the subculture. (The whole thing was kicked off by someone mentioning DragonCon, someone else going "eeeww", and not being understood.) For a while there I was wondering about compiling such a guide ... except I don't have most of the anime and gaming contacts. (As far as covering basic lists of cons, fanzines, clubs and writers' resources are concerned, Jack Beslanwitch's Northwest SF Resources page does a bang-up job.)

Now, I ask you ... what *should* we reasonably expect relatively new fans to know, about conventions or fandom generally? or what explicit information *should* be made available to all? There have been "Fannish 101" or "So this is your first convention" *panels*, at numerous conventions. Unfortunately (in my experience) they tend to be scheduled only once, early on Friday evening, rather before the bulk of congoers have arrived. Also, these panels can be superficial or beside the point, addressing information that older fans *think* newer fans need, and not the newer fans' actual questions. This is not effective.

So: what kind of questions did you have, or does anyone have, the first time you run across SF or fantasy, in film or video or magazine or paperback format? What questions need to be answered about anime, gaming, costuming (or clubs, or fanzines, or conventions)? What *are* the first entry points to fandom anyway, now as opposed to thirty years ago?

I wrote at the time, "When I think of fandom, instead of anime and gaming, I think of clubs, fanzines, and conventions. This is one of the marks of a somewhat outdated view of fandom, and of the way a lot of fan guides are outlined."

Meanwhile, Back in Reality

Not too long thereafter Jack Beslanwitch invited me to be his Western Canadian correspondent; in fact he is soliciting local correspondents to set up their own pages on his website, describing local fandom and fan activities.

Again, I'm not so sure I have enough information. I've been looking over the information in the last BCSFA members' handbook, and other information I accumulated ... and it's extraordinary how *few* clubs, conventions, fanzines there are in Western Canada, of *any* description.

At least, to my knowledge, so far ...

Letters

Somehow I neglected to run the following letter from Al Macintyre last issue:

Al Mac macwheel99@sigecom.net, July 1, 2002

[There is] a fascinating story universe (*sic*) I encountered at one con was with the fandom of Anne McCaffrey's Pern novels, where a bunch of local clubs play act at being in a place of dragons or crafts or whatever. For example, at one hospital where many nurses are McCaffrey fans, their "crafthall" is nursing. Now these various local clubs communicate with each other as if they are Pernese institutions, and they get together at SF cons to have "dragon hatchings".

There are several game simulations in which YOU are placed in CYBERNETIC SUSPENSION for whatever reason, and when you wake up it is to the ruins of a world devastated by some inexplicable war; and now your game simulation adventure begins.

You speak of the behavior of creating elaborate fantasies, a behavior that many of us indulge in. You also mention in passing [the] reality of having records so disordered that we cannot always find things in a timely fashion. This is a plague epidemic for myself and many people that I know, which is one reason I am particularly interested in Knowledge Management, or a science of the tools of organizing information. There are tons of practitioners in KM who have created elaborate fantasies about how the

problem can be solved, so keep your wits about you if you ever look into this topic.

Lloyd&Yvonne Penney, penneys@netcom.ca, 1706-24 Eva Rd., Etobicoke, ON M9C 2B2 - October 17, 2002

I wish you were coming out to Toronto for Ditto 15 ... I think you'd enjoy it. I'm making the badges for everyone to wear, and Murray Moore has been keeping me up to date with who's coming or not, so I expect about 25 to 30 people will be there. I plan to write up a report on it, and I am not expecting to write the same kind of Corflu report Max Lehman has been writing in various zines. ...

Perhaps Bush is a product of the silver screen, same as Ronald Reagan ... the movie industry has unwittingly provided (*sic*) the public with the inability to tell the difference between fact and fiction, and the television industry has provided an ineffective opposition to all this nonsense. ... Objectivity has become a thing of the past in that industry.

I have enjoyed Taral's fanhistories of Toronto fandom right up to the 1980s. His objectivity up to that point made for entertaining and informative reading. ...

Go for founding the NRP...the New Rhinoceros Party. Political cartoonists stab and twist at their politician victims, but these days, that's just not enough. We've got to jest at them on their own turn, the electoral hustings. I don't think we need anything like the Raving Looney Party in our political machinations, but we do need something that will put a well-deserved smile in the middle of this process which puts most normal people to sleep.

One sage fan some years ago described fannishness succinctly...it's weirdness raised to an artform, with that tinge of SF. I can only speak of more modern times, but I believe that while conventions brought us together physically, and fanzines gave us a common knowledge and attitude, the Internet keeps us apart and divides us into small and small groups, and weblogs isolate us further. That's my comment right now...I am trying to find out more about weblogs to see if they do bring people together as some say.

Robert Sacks died, I believe, just before the Chicago Worldcon. He was a fixture at Worldcon Business Meetings, setting the standard for picayune points of order and even more petty corrections and adjustments. (I guess my brain isn't as fried as it was then.)

Thanks for getting in touch with Chris and Martin. They're good folks, with dedication to their industry, and to getting further into it. They moved from Toronto to Vancouver to look for more work, and Martin is now working on the second X-Men movie. Christina has found more acting work in Vancouver, but it's still a struggle to find it. I'm always hoping for her to get that big break.

My second loc...in the job in which I was called Number 2, Number 1 did not work out, and I did get a call, which told me that they'd be reopening the job to the general public, and that I would still be considered. I haven't heard from them since. It's difficult to stay positive, and not think that any interviewer you might meet as a potential employer is a damned liar. I'm so tired of the unsuccessful job hunt; c'mon, 6/49, put me out of my misery...

Taral raised valid points about availability of SF and comics in this country. He's got several Hugo nominations, and well-deserved, too, but the Hugos are 90% nominated and voted upon by Americans who may have access to his fine work. I haven't seen his work in Canadian publications, fan or pro, over the last few years, and some Canadian SF consumers may not even know that he is Canadian. Taral gets my vote for Artistic Achievement Aurora most years; there isn't a Fan Artist Aurora for him to win.

I am satisfied that the Fan Achievement (Fanzine) Aurora now excludes clubzines so that there is no chance of a block vote from a club skewing the vote. Unfortunately, it also excludes the hard work of its editors. I am thinking of those who produce the clubzines for BCSFA, OSFS, MonSFFA and other more honest clubs with members who understand that the award is for excellence in what you do, not for hijacking and giving to a friend who produces your clubzine. To punish one, others are penalized, too. There is more justice than injustice in this move, but there is injustice nonetheless.

(NOTE: Zines like BCSFAzine, Warp, and the Ottawa SF Statement can still be nominated for the Fan Achievement [Other Aurora.])

SFRevu's Asta Sinusas is quite correct in her opinions of the Aurora Awards. I guess she found it inexpensive to fly to Calgary. I think a lot of people did not. I didn't, and I had thought to go out to Calgary for the convention. The estimated costs discouraged me; even with changes in the Canadian airline industry, there's no such thing as a cheap flight. I also think there's a lot of Canadian fans and pros who are desperately saving to go to Torcon 3. Even with not having to worry about any exchange rate between currencies, it's going to be tough saving for some. I think attendance at CanVentions will go up either at Torcon, or afterwards. I sincerely hope there is a group out there who would like to stage the CanVention in 2004. ...

Eric Lindsay fiawol@ericlindsay.com, December 20, 2002 6:00 PM

Looks like Jean [Weber] collected this paper version at Orycon, and thus it (eventually) reached me here.

You are doing a lot better than I am in getting fanzines out. I managed only two this year, and almost didn't manage the second.

(I keep over-planning these productions. And I keep trying to make of this both a humour fanzine, and a personalzine. Since I have been edging up on a mid-life crisis, it has been difficult to boil down my inner life to something concise and humorous.)

Given that Hollywood is the best possible method ever invented of exporting a (distorted) image of the wonders of capitalism to a grasping world, TV isn't going away.

I fail to see the validity of Lloyd Penney's complaint about the Internet demanding instant response. If you want to wait for a day or a week or a month prior to responding, what is preventing you from doing so? If the general content of lists isn't worthwhile, don't stay where the signal to noise ratio is so poor.

Unlike Lyn McConchie, I think our culture is actually far less violent than in the past, despite the despicable excesses of Hollywood movies. Perhaps someone should check the actual statistics for violent crime? The older we get, the more insecure we regard the world, and the more fearful we get. However the older we get, the less likely we are to fall victim to violent crime.

The Art of the Con

This is my attempt to consolidate onto one or two pages some of the critical things I've read, heard, or been told about cons ... and that some neofans desperately need to be told.

Since I strictly limit my own con participation to things I know I can handle, **you** are free to pick this apart or recommend additions, if you will. My sources are listed at the end.

- **Examine your assumptions**, even before you take your first steps. Do you think "success" means a large attendance and a large profit? Do you consider a convention primarily a social event for fans; or a show starring some TV or film actor; or a business, constituted by SF merchandise dealers (for the profit of Paramount, maybe); or do you model your con on the variety of events you see at every other con? Most of these are entirely legitimate assumptions, but you are well advised to examine them and make them clear. For your committee, and for your attendees, and for yourself.

- Conventions make or break themselves on **three bottom lines, finances, manpower and "goodwill"**. You need some of each, to start out with, and you hope to gain more of each, to end up with. A successful con can lose on two out of three bottom lines, but not all three.

- **Start small and work up**. The size of a convention roughly dictates the resources you need, including start-up money, core committee, and the general willingness of people to attend. You're

not going to start out with massive resources, and people are not going to give a lot of credit to a new convention start-up that announces vast whizzbang plans.

- **Memberships, not tickets;** a lot of fans, perhaps a majority, are used to buying memberships from the concom, rather than tickets (say from Ticketmaster). That means that they expect to go to a participatory event, where they are free to see and participate in programming, videos, the masquerade, dances, and the consuite, at any time, without limitation; and where they are expected to volunteer a certain amount of their time - SF cons depend on volunteer labour to keep costs down to what fans can manage. You may choose to sell tickets, rather than memberships, but you should expect to get static from fans who thought you were holding a convention, rather than a show. And if you're selling tickets to a show, you probably won't get volunteer labour.

- **First steps** do *not* include advertising a vast whizzbang multimedia convention with a whole bunch of Guests of Honour, including actors. First steps include putting together a four-figure sum of seed money, even before you get any memberships; making a budget, finding a core committee, finding a hotel and at least making a deposit on a booking, finding a Guest of Honour and at least reaching a tentative commitment. Then, you can advertise. If you find you just can't cover the hotel fees and the Guest of Honour honorarium, even before getting any memberships, you have still accomplished a first step - finding out how much it will take.

- **Go to conventions,** and volunteer at conventions, for a span of several years, before attempting a convention. Ask a lot of questions. Find and read conrunning guides and articles - there are some on the World Wide Web, and references to more resources, on paper.

- **Quiz the congoers** and find out what they want in your area; it may not be enough to hold the kind of convention you want. A lot of concoms don't realize this.

- You are well advised to incorporate a registered society, to protect each individual concom member from potential financial losses, or from legal actions against the convention. Most conventions are sponsored by a registered society, which is not itself the convention committee.

- **Trust the hotel but get it in writing.** Usually you deal with one person on the sales staff first, then the staff turns over within six months, and you're dealing with someone completely new - and completely uninformed. Then, when the sales staff turn you over to the actual management, they may get boom-all information on the contract. Also, the hotel security and cleaning staff actually working in the hotel may not know - or care! - that

the contract agrees to room parties, and hall signage, and a wet bar in the con suite, etc. Above all, hotels are used to big-ticket conferences, rather than modest social conventions; even hotels who like you, benefit from SF cons mostly in the off-season - and some hoteliers **dislike** SF cons and try to soak them, as by blaming them for other guests' damage.

- **Guests of Honour** should reasonably expect airfare to and from the convention, a ride from and to the airport, free memberships for themselves and family/travelling companion, paid hotel accommodation, meals and drinks. (Actors expect at least a four-figure speaker's fee. Evaluate the distinction.)

- A new convention, or a bid for a travelling convention, will suffer from a whispering campaign; this may mean nothing more than uninformed fans imagining things. Ignore it.

- You will need at least a Chair, a Treasurer, a Registrar, and a Hotel Liaison, to start out with. The core concom in particular will need previous experience working on SF cons.

- You are well advised to have different people serve as Chair and Treasurer.

- Misunderstanding and inattention are normal parts of communication. Expect people to misunderstand anything that can be misunderstood, and a few things you didn't expect. First, you have to tell people what you think the convention includes. Then, you have to tell people what that means for their job. Then, you have to remind them what you expect them to do ... Just be ready to make the effort.

- Trust the committee but keep asking for progress reports. That is, **let** your people get work done, but keep getting reports on what has been done and what is going to be done. When everything is going **well**, about a quarter of the concom shoulder most of the workload, and one or two people perform like supermen. This is just normal.

- Don't just take volunteers for granted. Some concons offer volunteers who work all weekend a share in a pizza at the dead dog party. Some concons **offer volunteers something in exchange**, such as a unique T-shirt after about four hours of volunteer time. Evaluate the distinction.

- Security tends to attract people who aren't good for the job; some cons bar clubs from volunteering for Security, **as a costumed group**, in an attempt to keep some younger congoers from going overboard and pushing people around.

- **Program intelligently**; people **do not** get up on con weekends before 11 a.m., however interesting the panel; lots of panels, such as World-Building, have been done to death; "So this is your first con" should not be held just once, on Friday at 5:00 p.m., before most people arrive; program participants regularly get booked onto

panels they know nothing about and for which they have no preparation.

- **Someone always complains** about something at a bouquets- and-brickbats panel, **even about the things you did right!** Just a few people will have positive suggestions. Use some perspective when you take their feedback.

(People who contributed to these opinions: Jackie Wilson Barclay, Ed Beauregard, Paul Carpentier, Bill Donaho, Bruce Farr, Don Fitch, Lisa Girling, Marci Malinowski, John Mansfield, Donna McMahon, Bruce Miller, Lloyd Penney, Doe Poirier, Robert Runté, Ian Sorensen, Kevin Standlee, Taral, Diane Walton & Rick LeBlanc, Eva Whitley, and a bunch of people I've forgotten)

Some Evaluations

One of the first things I learned about special interest groups is that people want to share their interests; they form clubs, they start newsletters ... and they start holding local or regional conventions, of some sort. This is as true of stamp collectors, political action groups, Wiccans, evangelical Christians, feng shui practitioners or women's choral groups as it is of SF fans.

The first or second thing I learned about SF fandom was that it was distinguished by *more* self-published small periodicals, by the 1960s and 1970s, and later on by *more* annual gatherings of like-minded fans, than many other interest groups.

Now, granted, there may be a whole lot of comics conventions, or annual Society for Creative Anachronism events, or anime and FRP gaming and funky robot conventions ... but I suspect their concept is derived from SF conventions. And SF conventions are not like other "conventions" or conferences as the hotel industry knows them.

Consider: a hotel manager or conference sales person will probably think of "conventions" in terms of five categories – Scientific, Military, Educational, Religious or Fraternal (think SMERF for short) – none of which precisely fits the three-ring circus or indoor county fair that many SF conventions resemble. I have also seen "cons" compared to Shriner's conventions and to boat shows. A professional conference, largely consisting of one series of daytime panels, will be organized by one business or non-profit organization (meaning, in effect, one overworked secretary) for a gathering of out-of-town delegates, and it may occupy a calendar week or more. The attending delegates may pay *one* (large) lump sum for attendance, accommodations, meals, and any programmed banquet or entertainment incorporated into the program.

Compare this to even an average, local or regional SF con. The first you hear of a con, from a newsletter or the Internet or a

printed flyer, is a big bold name for the event (traditionally based on the syllable "con"), followed by the dates bounding one long weekend; this will be followed either by "Guests of Honour", and the hotel and city, or *vice versa*. A well-designed flyer will then include some small type about the range of activities and programming. The bottom of the flyer will mention "membership" rates. More detailed literature, *i.e.* progress reports, will detail hotel room rates for the convention; that might not be on the flyer.

When you attend a local fan-run SF convention, as the vast majority of them are, you get progress reports and (at the convention registration desk) program information. You find that a crew of amateurs – some of whom are well-prepared and experienced, some of whom are not – are hosting the event, on a volunteer basis. In fact the members who pay to attend are invited and expected to participate, too, at least in basic lifting and carrying and cleaning up. A variety of things are available for interested attendees, ranging from two or three tracks of hour-long panels in the daytime to a video room and merchant's ("dealer's") room, open all day, to a video room and hospitality room which are open almost round the clock. At night, many of the attending members are hosting room parties, where they may be serving their own liquor, promoting their own conventions or causes, and taking money.

Towards the end of the con, on Sunday, there may be a "bouquets and brickbats" or "roses and onions" panel, with some compliments and, rather more often, some criticisms of how the con was run. (Occasionally it is acknowledged that any of these events *will* have some shortcomings and pratfalls; and very occasionally, it is acknowledged that some people will complain about *whatever* you do, no matter how well it was done.)

Irritating Questions

After entering fandom, some of us are in a frame of mind to absorb whatever kind of fandom is around, and conform to whatever the norms of standard behaviour seem to be. (You may feel differently.) I have been in fandom for over twenty years, specifically in the Pacific Northwest but with correspondence, and a few convention trips, as far as southwestern California, and eastern Canada (Quebec and New Brunswick); after these many years, I think I can raise some sceptical questions.

Why do we do conventions the way we do them? That is, on a volunteer basis, with a different crew of amateurs every year, *catering to such a wide variety at once* of the subgroups within fandom?

(To some extent I can answer this first question, based on the history of fandom. But that history by itself doesn't explain why we continue to do things in a way that, let's face it, creates difficulties –

or why the avowedly profit-oriented events called "professional" cons have been greeted with horror. I know why such events should be abominated, but the reason why is not historical.)

Why do we hear recurring tales of frictions with hotels? Or Guests of Honour? Or why are some conventions so much more successful, even "professional", than others in their dealings with hotels and GoHs? For that matter, why will the same convention in the same place, even with many of the same people on the committee, deal well one year with hoteliers and writers, and deal poorly with them another time?

(To some extent this second question is answered by the changing, amateur basis of convention committees. But again, not entirely. As a matter of course, the competent fan who serves as hotel or GoH liaison one year may not be available, may not be doing the same job, or may have something mitigating their competence, in another year. Also, and this has also become a matter of course ... hotels are in a business; they make money from function room rentals, from liquor sales and from banquet functions, far more than from accommodations; fan-run conventions bargain for more service at less revenue than a hotel desires, so they represent at best a modest return on the investment of labour demanded from the hotel.)

The foregoing are fairly mild, and fairly common issues in the field called "conrunning". It took the better part of two decades for me to realize it, though.

Why do space cadets sometimes jump into conrunning ill-prepared?

A more serious, but fortunately far less common question, arises when some naïve fans think they can just announce a convention, base their hotel booking and Guest of Honour announcements purely on hope, promises and preregistration revenues (if they hype it enough); you have to ask, "Can such people exist? Can't anybody give them a clue, expose them to a dose of reality?" Well, yes, they can exist; and no, you can't give them a clue, once they've committed themselves.

My first exposure to conrunning problems – and this is not a very obscure experience – was that some bizarre, naïve fans really decided to jump into conrunning in my home town, although they had *no* conrunning experience, *no* capital, *no* particular reputation or credibility to trade on in fandom; in fact, *no concept* of how to set up a con, except pure hype; and when anyone tried to point out some realistic budgetary limitations, or other cautions, the naïve fans reacted with paranoia, as if they had been attacked.

What happens when conventions keep the same, experienced volunteers doing the same job for a matter of several years?

This has been done, in fan groups as far apart as Oregon, Alberta and Massachusetts ... with varying results. You can get a lot of continuity of memory, and consistency of performance in handling dealers, artists, guests and hotels. But there is some question as to how long you can keep this up, or with what results.

For one thing, fans get older, and get tired of doing the same thing, and get more family and professional responsibilities ... and although a fan can get more and more proficient, a lack of variety starts to tell. It shows. (Forgive me if I'm belabouring something obvious.) For another thing, and this seems to develop far more quickly, new fans coming into a fan group can very soon resent the "glass wall" that seems to prevent their entering the core committee, taking on more responsibility, and participating in decision-making. In fact the "glass wall" can be more imagined than real, and still be resented. This is how fans start turning away from a local con's committee, until it has to be suspended for a few years; this appears to have happened in Moscow, Idaho, and may have happened in Bellingham. This is how splinter groups end up starting their own conventions for their own interest groups; something like this happened in Calgary, it may have happened in Edmonton and Seattle, it may be happening in Portland.

What happens if experienced conrunners record some documentary guidelines for their conrunning procedures?

In my experience – and in the experience of other fans, such as E.B. Frohvet, Donna McMahon, et al. – the documents probably get lost, or ignored, or both.

This part is difficult for me to write. Give me any problem and I'll try to *write a document* to solve it. Give me a document, and I'll pick it up and start analyzing it for pieces I can use.

But apparently, less than 5% of the population thinks this way. Apparently, if you tell someone that one way to write to prospective GoHs *works* for a successful convention, and another way just doesn't, what they actually *hear* is "I'm telling you what to do". Whether this is actually a response to a verbal form of aggression, or merely a kind of adolescent insecurity at work, I'll leave the reader to contemplate.

I actually had a *veteran* organizer of Fabulous Edmonton Fandom of the 1970s telling me, with like his bare face hanging out, that written guidelines would suffocate any convention, would put it in a straitjacket that would keep it from adapting to new conditions. I really don't know how grown adult fluent English-speakers can fail to understand something I write quite plainly. Particularly any who have a degree.

The issue is *not* whether a convention is rigidly directed to *mail* its first progress reports to all of its last convention's attendees, in the age of e-mail; nor rigid directions on how you set up a *film* room, in an age of videotape and anime.

If you read what I actually wrote above, you probably grasp the *real* issue; it is whether fans new to conventions are *willing* to learn what worked in the past, *invited* to compare it to present conditions in the hotel/writing/acting fields, *welcome* to take on increasing responsibilities – and decision-making – in an existing con, and *made aware* of the steps to accomplish in starting a new convention.

Why do some fans, working on conventions, do counterproductive things even when they should know better?

That's a leading question, of course, and so were all of my questions. I have an hypothesis, but I admit it's just an hypothesis.

Garth's Hypothesis: Fans Hold Cons in order to Do Their Own Thing, Their Own Way.

Some fans are obviously territorial about their convention department, or "their" convention. Sometimes older fans, as in Edmonton and possibly Portland, are seen as treating a local convention as their private property. On a number of occasions, newer fans coming into a group with an established convention feel dissatisfied and start a new con to meet *their* own interests. (Often enough, the "new ideas" turn out to be old ideas that didn't work the first time, either – inviting an actor GoH – to a con that can't afford the speakers' fee, let us say – but the lesson wasn't documented or was forgotten.)

It says a great deal about the background many fans come from, that an attempt merely to communicate what turned out to work, and what turned out not to, is generally seen as *dictating* to them.

What's the upshot?

The upshot is that you can't tell people what they won't hear. Some things, people are too stubborn to learn except through direct experience. And other old saws.

This makes sense of some of the remarks conrunning fans make, about "reinventing the wheel" and "the fans who need a guide won't use it, the fans who would read it don't need it".

Two problems remain. One is that the kind of fans I called "space cadets" are still out there and are still liable to mount fiascos which can blacken the names of fans *totally unconnected* with the fiascos.

Another is that, quite outside the cherished illusions of some space cadets, there may be mounting challenges facing SF conventions, little regarded even by experienced conrunners. One set of challenges I might lump together as "economic": that is, is it getting harder to hold cons? To mount new ones? To draw existing fans? Is disposable income among fans shrinking? Is the cost of seed money for a con, either to raise by yourself or to borrow, getting higher? Another set of challenges I might relate to,

say, the hotel industry: is it getting harder over the years to persuade hotels to host SF conventions? These challenges don't even seem to be discussed, but I haven't yet scoured the Internet news groups to see whether these topics have been raised and settled. Another set of challenges seems to be part of common folklore – the “sociological” challenges, i.e., the commercial mindset of newer, TV-raised fans, who only expect to buy a ticket and see a show, not to participate in an event and do some volunteering.

Some members of contemporary large conventions have reported kids “ghosting” conventions (crashing them, without paying membership) under the delusion that the con must be making big bucks for the organizers, and they're trying to “get some of the money back” for themselves. God only knows what other delusions are circulating.

The Ultimate Spam?

FROM:PRNCSS. L ORGANA

DEAR friend.

I AM PRINCESS LEIA ORGANA ONLY SURVIVOR OF THE ROYAL FAMILY OF ALDERAN

I AM MOVED TO WRITE YOU THIS LETTER, THIS WAS IN CONFIDENCE CONSIDERING MY PRESENT CIRCUMSTANCE AND SITUATION.

I WAS FALSLEY IMPRISONED UPON THE IMPERIAL BATTLESTATION (“DEATH STAR”) WHEN MY PLANET WAS HIDEOUSLY DESTROYED AND ENDED BY THE BVERY BAD SITH LORD VADER.

I ESCAPED ALONG WITH THE AID OF BRAVE REBELS AND WOOKIES, AND AM NOW I AM LYING LOW DUE TO THE SITUATION IN THE 4TH MOON OF YAVIN TILL WHEN THINGS GETS BETTER.

I HAVE CONTROL HERE OF THE SUM OF \$25, MILLIONNN IN IMPERIAL CREDITS DEPOSITED WITH A SECURITY COMAPNY FOR SAFEKEEPING ON TATOOINE.

THE FUNDS WERE SHIPPED BY A COURIER SERVICE AS DIPLOMATIC ITEMS OF HIGH VALUES TO PREVENT THEM FROM KNOWING THE CONTENT.

WHAT I WANT YOU TO DO friend IS TO INDICATE YOUR INTEREST THAT YOU WILL ASSIST ME BY RECEIVING THE MONEY ON OUR BEHALF ON TATOOINE AND ASSIST IN INVESTING THIS MONEY IN ANY LUCRATIVE BUSINESS LIKE MOISTURE FARMS AND STOCK IN MULTI-PLANETARY

COMPANIES AND OTHER SAFE LUCRATIVE INVESTMENT IN YOUR SECTOR.

MAY I AT THIS POINT EMPHASISE THE HIGH LEVEL OF CONFIDENTIALITY, WHICH THIS BUSINESS DEMANDS, AND HOPE YOU WILL NOT BETRAY THE TRUST AND CONFIDENCE WHICH I REPOSE IN YOU.

IN CONCLUSION, IN THE EVENT YOU ARE INTRESTED TO ASSIST ME I WILL LIKE YOU TO CONTACT MY LAWYER WHO I HAVE STATIONED IN MOS EISLEY TO WITNESS THE TRANSACTION TO IT'S CONCLUSION.

YOU CAN REACH HIM ON HIS DIRECT LINE VIA MAIL bob.tucker@beams.org,* HIS NAME IS WATTO THE TOYDARIAN, I HAVE THE FULL TRUST IN HIM.

FINALLY, I HAVE SET ASIDE 15% OF THE TOTAL SUM OF THE FUNDS FOR YOUR ASSISTANCE, AND 5% FOR ANY ESPENCES THAT SHALL BE INCURED DURING THIS TRANSACTION. PLEASE BE FREE TO DISCUSS WITH MY LAWYER.

I SINCERELY WILL APPRECAITE YOUR ACKNOWLEDGMENT AS SOON AS POSSIBLE.

HELP US, friend, YOU ARE OUR ONLY HOPE.

BEST REGARDS,
PRNCSS. L. ORGAN"

** Note- Bob Tucker is a well known SF Fan who has been around for many years. His claim to fame is taking a sip of Beam's Choice and saying "Smoooth" with a complementary (non-rude) arm gesture.*

(Forwarded by Elizabeth Schechter in the SCA, thence by Daniel Pawtowski to the SFNorthwest listserv, thence downloaded by me)

Frong!

by Garth Spencer

It might have occurred to you by now that I anticipate a not-very-fantastic future development, right here in Vancouver - a cultural clash, basically between our secular, individualist, largely market-



driven society, and new Canadians from highly traditional, and particularly religious societies. Of course, *that* conflict has really been going on for decades. (For example: How often have you heard about the grown children of Hindu or Sikhs who get harassed, even killed, for resisting arranged marriages?)

It might *not* have occurred to you what also escapes the hostile observer: that a society like ours is so far from being a unit, it might better be described as a *lot* of subcultures. (Using "subculture" to mean just one part of a *society* is one of those word-confusions we just have to put up with.) Only some subcultures are the social classes, religious groups or ethnic groups you're familiar with; some of them are institutions like Religion, Government, Corporations, Smallbiz, Artsculture and Sportsculture. (Observe the jocks, and science students, and humanities faculties at a university, and *try* and tell me they aren't different cultures.) Sometimes they interact peaceably, a lot of times they wrestle for dominance or relative advantage, sometimes communication breaks down between them, and sometimes they erupt into armed conflict.

It seems obvious that what one subculture values most is meaningless to another subculture – the misinformation and contempt that, say, contemporary leading Government and Corporation cultures exhibit about the subcultures they combat should be a matter of legend, by now. Equally, the Corporate dedication to enhancing shareholder value by all means, up to and including flagrant sexual innuendo in public advertising, shows no regard even of our own parents' sense of good taste, not to speak of new Canadians.

It also seems obvious that a completely market-driven society is ill-adapted to the real, physical world; witness real estate developers' traditional paving of farmlands, or the current controversies about genetically-modified foods, e.g. farmers being sued because their crops have been colonized by patented strains.

If it's an obvious fact, it's probably superficial.

What isn't so obvious is, how would you *change* a society, or its culture ... or can you scrap the whole shebang and start over?

This is the line of reasoning that led me to think: If it's embarrassing to be an Anglo, if it's alienating and unfulfilling to live in our modern post-industrial culture, if it's ultimately futile to follow market-dominated culture's ways ... why not give it up and start a whole new culture?

Why not, say, found my own *new ethnic group*?

For those of us who want to, I propose founding *The Frong*. We'll have our own values, our own code of manners, we can brainstorm ideas about lifestyle and diet, and I've even got some ideas about

folk art and interior decoration to try out on people. Maybe we should start a coffee group or a listserv.

Also I say "Frong" and similar drivel when I'm embarrassed or nonplussed or baffled, but that's just me.

How to Be Evil

by A. Nonymous

For all of you who occasionally have a *really* bad day, and you just need to take it out on someone: don't take it out on someone you know, take it out on someone you don't know. I was sitting at my desk when I remembered a phone call I had forgotten to make; I found a number, and dialled it. A man answered saying, "Hello?" I politely said, "This is F-- --, could I please speak with R-- --?" Suddenly, the phone was slammed down on me. I couldn't believe that anyone could be so rude.

I track down R--'s correct number, and called her. (I had transposed the last two digits of her phone number). After hanging up with her, I decided to call the wrong number again. When the same guy answered the phone, I yelled, "You're an asshole!" It always cheered me up.

I wrote his number down, with the word "asshole" next to it, and put it in my desk drawer. Every couple of weeks, when I was paying bills or had a really bad day, I'd call him up and yell, "You're and asshole!" It always cheered me up.

When Caller ID came to our area, I thought my therapeutic "Asshole" calling would have to stop. So, I called his number and said, "Hi, this is John Smith from the telephone company. I'm just calling to see if you're familiar with the caller ID program? He yelled, "NO!" and slammed the phone down. I quickly called him back and said, "That's because you're an asshole!"

So, one day I was at the store, getting ready to pull into a parking spot. Some boy in a BMW cut me off, and pulled into the spot I had patiently waited for, I hit the horn and yelled that I had been waiting for the spot. The idiot ignored me. I noticed a "For Sale" sign in his car window, so I wrote down his number.

A couple of days later, right after calling the first asshole (I had his number on speed dial), I thought I had better call the BMW asshole, too. I dialled and someone said, "Hello?"

I said, "Is this the man with the BMW for sale?"

"Yes it is."

"Can you tell me where I can see it?"

"Yes, I live at -- -- Street. It's a -- house and the car's parked right out front."

"What's your name?" I asked.

"My name is D-- --," he said. "When's a good time to catch you, D--?"

"I'm home every evening after five."

"Listen, D--, can I tell you something?"

"Yes?"

"D--, you're an asshole!" Then I hung up, and added his number to my speed dial, too. Now, when I had a problem, I had two assholes to call.

After several months of calling them, it wasn't as enjoyable as it used to be. So, I came up with an idea: I called Asshole #1.

"Hello"

"You're an asshole!" (but I didn't hang up.)

"Are you still there!" he asked.

"Yeah," I said.

"Stop calling me," he screamed.

"Make me," I said.

"Who are you?" he asked.

"My name is D-- --"

"Yeah? Where do you live?"

"Asshole, I live at -- -- Street, a house with my Beemer parked in front."

He said, "I'm coming over right now, Don. and you had better start saying your prayers."

I said, "Yeah, like I'm really scared, asshole."

Then I called Asshole #2:

"Hello?" he said

"Hello Asshole," I said.

He yelled, "If I ever find out who you are..."

"You'll what?" I said.

"I'll kick your ass," he exclaimed.

I answered, "Well, asshole, here's your chance. I'm coming over right now."

Then, I hung up, and immediately called the police, saying that I lived at -- -- Street, and I was on my way over there to kill my gay lover.

Then, I called Channel X news about the gang war going down on -- Street.

I quickly got into my car and headed over to -- St.. There, I saw two assholes beating the crap out of each other in front of 6 squad cars, a police helicopter, and news crew.

Now, I feel better.

*(Email humour passed on via Carol Krushnisky
and someone named "Gary K", Nov. 2002)*

Zine Reviews

Alexiad vol. 1 no. 5 (Oct. 2002), c/o Lisa & Joseph Major, 1409 Christy Avenue, Louisville, KY 40204-2040 USA, jtmajor@iglou.com

The fun thing about *Alexiad* is not only the selection of fan news that Joseph Major reports (e.g. Worldcon news, Hugo nominees and why the worthy are generally overlooked), but also the kind of book reviews he does; about half of the works are ones I know, such as the recent release of Randall Garrett's stories, *Lord Darcy*.

Ansible, David Langford, 94 London Road, Reading, Berks. RG1 5AU, U.K., Ansible@cix.co.uk, www.ansible.co.uk. For the past several years I have only seen *Ansible* online, except when I go to fanzine rooms as at Orycon. David Langford presents the most fan news in the least space, physically, and gets away with the most impudent humour about fan and writer friends alike, of any faneditor on the planet. I think. It must be a Welsh thing, I don't understand it ...

Burnaby Writers' Society Newsletter, 6584 Deer Lake Ave., Burnaby, BC V5G 3T7, tel. 604-421-4931, lonewolf@portal.ca, www.bws.bc.ca. This legal-length bimonthly newsletter lists a great deal of interest and importance to its members, writers in British Columbia and abroad; sometimes it lists market news we might benefit by noticing.

Chunga #5, August 2003, c/o 1013 North 36th Street, Seattle, WA 98103, U.S.A. Now this is what a fanzine can be ... excellent production and layout values, excellent articles on Blish and TAFF and alternative history, funny fanart, in short, "your one-stop source for Futurian slash porn and speculative history", as the sidebar in *Chunga* says. God I wish I could do this stuff.

De Profundis, Marty Cantor ed., c/o LASFS, 11513 Burbank Blvd., N. Hollywood, CA 91601, hoohah-pubs@earthlink.net. Your basic Los Angeles SF newsletter, distinguished by satirical meeting minutes and Ted White's fanzine reviews.

File 770, from Mike Glycer (705 Valley View Ave., Monrovia, CA 91016) has been a major fan newszine since at least the late 1970s or early 1980s. In recent years F770 has appeared less regularly, and I think its news has focused increasingly on the world of American conrunners and fan fund people. (mglyer@compuserve.com)

FOSFAX #205 (July 02), from the Falls of the Ohio SF association (P.O. Box 37281, Louisville, KY 40233-7281) was a big, thick, densely printed, highly political clubzine from rather a small group of people. Now suspended, or at least greatly reduced in frequency.

Made in Canada newsletter, c/o Don Bassie, 25/12 Lankin Blvd., Orillia, ON L3V 6T2; current email canadian-sf@rogers.com. Don seems to have his attention fixed primarily on southern Ontario SF writers.

Metaphysical Review/SF Commentary, Bruce Gillespie, 59 Keele Street, Collingwood, Vic 3066, Australia. There's more book reviews and critical, intellectual analysis in Bruce Gillespie's thick, infrequent sercon fanzines than I see anywhere else in the course of a year.

So of course I misplace these prime fanzines somewhere where I can't find them later.

Opuntia 50.1A (Jan. 02), 51.5A & 51.5B, c/o Dale Speirs, Box 6830, Calgary, AB T2P 2E7, a personalzine and fanhistoryzine. Dale's interests range from native cacti, stamp collecting, cychlid fanciers, and alternative history, through fanhistory and the parallels between technologies introduced in the 19th century and the reception given the Internet. Keep reading this and you, too, will be convinced that All Knowledge is Contained in Fanzines.

Pulsar, the monthly newsletter of the Portland SF Society (P.O. Box 4602, Portland, OR 97208). Now edited by Kris Piclo (editor@PorSFis.org).

Steam Engine Time, Bruce Gillespie (as above) and Maureen Kincaid Speller and Paul Kincaid (60 Bournemouth Road, Folkestone, Kent CT19 5AZ, U.K.) I would like to see us produce something like *Steam Engine Time*, I really would: a fascinating, time-consuming genzine that goes into in-depth SF criticism, but also features entertaining fannish writing. Appears only too infrequently.

Thyme, Alan Stewart ed., POBox 222, World Trade Centre, Melbourne, Vict. /ACT 3005, Australia. I keep being confused: is this, or is *Ethel the Aardvark* the newsletter of the Melbourne SF Club? They look nearly the same, have nearly the same address, and I'd swear Alan is editing both of them. *Thyme* always seems to be dated a year behind its actual date of production, or the dates of the letters in the loccol. Go figure.

Westwind, the monthly newsletter of the Northwest SF Society (P.O. Box 24207, Seattle, WA 98124), regularly features reviews, topical

articles and Northwest SF news. Not so long ago we received a catch-up package of three *Westwinds*, whose dates showed that the newsletter had been coming out irregularly.

Xenolith 49, April 2003, from Bill Bowers, 4651 Glenway Avenue, Cincinnati OH 45238-4503, <xenolith@one.net>
Xenolith@Outworlds.net. Notes on Midwestern and British fanhistory, an obit for Harry Warner, and many locs from many hands ...

(I know I've got these issues filed/piled/on disk somewhere ...)

Gegenschein 93, Christmas 2002, Eric Lindsay, PO Box 640, Airlie Beach, Qld 4802 Australia; *Gremflod/Poliad/Twink* #27-30 (final), from E.B. Frohvet; *It Goes on the Shelf* #24, Ned Brooks; *The Leighton Letter* (Oct. 2002?), Rodney Leighton; *Littlebrook* (another primo genzine), Jerry Kaufman; *Monster Attack Team Canada Newsletter*, Stan Hyde; *Nice Distinctions* 1 & 2, Arthur Hlavaty; *TommyWorld* #60, Sept. 2002, Tommy Ferguson, 30 Ava Park, Belfast, BT7 3BX, Northern Ireland, tw@tommyworld.net, <http://www.tommyworld.net>; *Visions of Paradise* 91 & 92, Robert Sabella; *Warp x*; *The Zine Dump* #2, Guy H, Lillian III * P.O. Box 53092 NOLA 70153, 504/482-7083 * GHLIII@yahoo.com, GHLIII Press Pub #947 * Oct.'02 - Feb. '03

Books in Review

((Previously published in BCSFAzine 364))

The Action Hero's Handbook, by David Borgenicht and Joe Borgenicht. Philadelphia, PA: Quirk Productions, Inc., 2002.

I've always wondered how James Bond and Lara Croft keep bouncing out of one desperate situation after another. Evidently they read this book, ate their broccoli, and kept up their exercises. From this little book you can (a) learn the Vulcan Nerve Pinch, (b) gain the power to cloud men's minds, (c) survive a climb on the faces of

Mount Rushmore, and (d) generally survive impossible situations, just like in the movies.

If you believe the advertising.

Subsequent release: *The Action Heroine's Handbook*, now at a bookstore near you.

The Art of Shen Ku, by Zeek. New York: Berkley/Penguin, 1999. coffee-table paperback.

I picked this up while searching for the Life Instructions Textbook that everyone was issued in high school (except me); I found this tome in a local Books Warehouse, beside a translation of the Chinese classic *The Know Everything Book*.

Shen Ku presents itself as a getting-along-on-Earth handbook for aliens, casting life mostly in terms of How to Travel. I can't tell if the tips on health, sex, food, exercise, etc. are meant seriously, or meant as a takeoff on Chinese traditional medicine, T'ai Chi, and oriental cosmology. Maybe it works either way!

How to be a Villain, by neil zawacki. San Francisco: Chronicle Books LLC, 2003. (Paperback-sized but hardbound, like *Action Hero*)

Like the supervillain instructional essays linked to TheToque.com online, *How to Be a Villain* offers a breezy, informal, easy-to-digest survey of Evil as a career path (for those of us who can't qualify for Superhero). Refreshingly, this manual doesn't stick to vague generalities, like "The Concept of Evil" and other starting points, but offers sidebars on practical material points ("Getting Started" lists "Realign the moon's orbit ... Turn a popular landmark into a gelatinous ooze ... Release a demonic hoard (sic) on a peaceful township ... Learn to play the pipe organ and volunteer at church functions ... Broadcast your evil plans on public access television"). As well as listing the Benefits of Being Evil, offering helpful hints on Choosing an Evil Name (and the trademark implications thereof), and how to expand your apparent resources, i.e., fleshing out your limited band of mindless zombies with cardboard cutouts, the author lists various careers in evil, ranging from "night manager" and "mad scientist" to "telemarketer".

Unlike the more dated guides to evil, which concentrated on black-knight careers and ended with the outdated mad-scientist option, this author explores the corporate-bastard and marketing-executive paths now available, and does not fail to mention the avenues of shadow governments and secret societies to obtain world domination.

Above all, this guide is distinguished by its analysis of heroic nemeses and how to thwart them. This was a serious omission of previous works in the field, such as *The Necronomicon* (tr. 1532, Olaus Wormius, ab *Al-Azif*, ca. 891 A.D.?), and even the classic *Clavicula Salomonis* (ca. 1300 - 1450 A.D.?).