

Science fiction

Hope for the future

by D.J. Hornsby

Science fiction has in recent years become the subject of increasing commercial and academic interest. The volume of s/f sales is growing steadily and in high schools and universities science fiction is gaining acceptance as a legitimate literary genre. In response to this interest, Halifax held its first science fiction conference. Dubbed Halycon One, the conference took place March 11-12 under the auspices of the Dalhousie School of Library Service.

The conference opened Saturday night with a lecture by Judith Merrill, well known science fiction writer and anthologist. Merrill's talk, entitled "Ask Another Question", turned out to be not so much a lecture as a discussion period. Although the questioning at times lacked direction, the evening was largely successful, because of the presence of an enthusiastic surpris-

ingly vocal audience of one hundred and fifty. The main thrust of the discussion centered on the concept and role of science fiction. Although Merrill declined to offer a precise definition for s/f, she did suggest that contemporary science fiction might be more properly termed speculative fiction. "S/f", Merrill said, "is about asking the next question. The answers are irrelevant, it is the asking that is important". If Halycon One could be said to have a theme, — this would be it.

As is perhaps inevitable at any gathering of s/f enthusiasts, a considerable amount of attention was centered upon the popular T.V. series *Star Trek*. The merits and faults of that program were discussed at each meeting, although no consensus was reached. Saturday saw a brisk trade in *Star Trek* posters, puzzle books, manuals and calendars. Canadian Trekkies were



represented at the conference by a delegation from LOST, the Loyalists of *Star Trek*. Undoubtedly for many attending, the highlight of Halycon One was the ten minute *Star Trek* **Blooper Film** shown Saturday. A collection of discarded *Star Trek* footage, the blooper film was both hilarious and fascinating to the genuine Trekkie.

In addition to the blooper film the conference screened Stanley Kubrick's *2001* and *The Forgotten Planet*, two classic s/f films. Unfortunately both were shown without comment, therein passing up a golden opportunity to discuss the non-literary potential of the genre. The conference also offered a series of displays relating to science fiction. These included an exhibition of French s/f literature from the private collection of Allein Chabot and a demonstration of war

games by the Atlantic War Gaming Association. Of particular interest to local participants were a display by Kosekin Books, a Halifax mail order house dealing in small press s/f items and a series of nineteenth century fantasy prints by Schooner Press.

Saturday from nine to five the conference offered a creative writing workshop. True to the mood of Halycon One, this workshop was not so much an examination of literary technique or style as it was an exercise in extrapolation and problem posing. Whether this activity was of value to the budding s/f writer can only be assessed by the participants themselves. Some reservations were expressed concerning the usefulness of the workshop, however the prevailing mood seemed to be one of satisfaction.

The conference closed Saturday night with a banquet and an address by Spider Robinson, Nova Scotian writer and critic. In his speech Robinson emphasized the importance of science fiction in the modern world. To survive in present times, Robinson said, it is necessary to speculate, to consider alternate realities. Only thus can contemporary man hope to deal with the rapid social and technological change he faces. Robinson also pointed out that science fiction serves a cohesive function in modern society, bridging the gap between science and art, between classicism and romanticism. As he expressed it, only in the field of s/f do "engineers and poets hang out in the same room".

It is difficult to judge the success of Halycon One. At times too informal, the conference suffered from a lack of direction. Despite the emphasis placed on asking questions there were no burning issues raised. Yet what Halycon One lacked in depth and focus it made up for in enthusiasm. It brought together people like tastes, it kindled discussion, it stimulated interest. Halycon Two is already in the works. One is left hoping for bigger and better things in years to come.

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 Saturday, March 26 - 8:30 p.m.
 Sunday, March 27 - 2:00 p.m.
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It is being held in Auditorium B and C - Seton Academic Centre. Tickets are \$2 and are available at all "New Sound" locations, the Art Gallery, the Students' Store and the Bookstore. Additional information may be obtained by contacting the production representative, Nancy Gilbert, at 443-3935.

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