

Science fiction convention

Fens flock to Toronto

By ROB ROWLAND

Fan Fair II, the first science fiction convention held in Toronto in 22 years drew 448 fen (meaning fans) to the King Edward Sheraton Hotel on the weekend of August 21, 22 and 23. Featured guests at the convention were Isaac Asimov, Alexei Panshin, Keith Laumer, Ann McCaffery, Judy Merrill, and Alexis and Doll Gilland.

The convention, which was sponsored by the Ontario Science Fiction club, attracted little of the attention that the 1948 con did. On the day of the convention in 1948 the Globe and Mail headlined a front page story by George Bain with "Zap! Zap! Atomic Ray is Passe With Fiends"; the Star came out in the afternoon with "Don't Wake Up Screaming, Horror Boys Invade City!"

The Torcon, as it was called, shocked old Toronto the Good with stories of werewolves and underground fan newspapers called Zombie and Macabre. Science fiction fans had to legitimize the genre by pointing to the atomic bomb story printed in a science fiction magazine which brought out the FBI in a secret investigation, fearing the Manhattan Project had been leaked.

Discussion at Fan Fair II, however, centred around more serious topics, including the future of science fiction as literary art, the space program, the U.S. political situation and, to a small extent, Americanization of Canada.

Critic Alexei Panshin said that science fiction was the creation of Hugo Gernsback, the early author and editor. Panshin added that early science fiction was "let's pretend" using science. "Science fiction is really the creation of fantasy," he said. "Instead of 'science' the word is distance fiction. Creative fantasy is all science fiction since 1926 and includes such other works as George Orwell's 1984.

Anti-establishment

Although the convention attracted all types of people from freaks to Middle Americans, the tone was anti-establishment. Books such as The Pig Society sold beside Dune or Foundation. Keith Laumer was complimented for his Retief books a satirical look at U.S. foreign service through the medium of a 27th Century James Bond.

Isaac Asimov said in an interview that the greatest problems in the world were hate, technology and the population explosion. Asimov noted that he was always in a minority group, first as a science fiction writer, and now as a scientist who is a science fiction writer.

"In ten years," Asimov said, "all the dooms now on the horizon will be apparent. All the problems we have now will move into insignificance as the population problem gets more and more severe."

"Students are the hope of the world. They're the ones whose world is falling apart," he said. Asimov, who is a professor at Boston University, added however that he feels much of the discussion about solutions by students is a cop out. "We don't have time to investigate all that will happen," he said. "We must have a solution — if we work on a solution, then we just may find it."

Spaced Out Library

Judy Merrill is a well known American critic who now lives in Toronto. She had been disillusioned by the worsening situation in the United States for sometime. Then, in August 1968, Judy Merrill was caught in the middle of the Chicago Riots. Soon afterward she decided to move to Toronto. In her first months in Toronto she thought the city was like an American middle west city. Now it surprises her almost every day. Judy Merrill works with Red White and Black and helps students in S.E.E.D. Currently, Miss Merrill is working with the Toronto Public Libraries at SOL — the Spaced Out Library — which will hold her entire donated collection of science fiction books, documents and correspondence. Madge Morton who teaches a science fiction college tutorial for College E is librarian at the Spaced Out Library.

Judy Merrill, unlike many critics feels that Science Fiction is out of date as an innovative literature. Now she is interested in speculative literature and recently published an anthology of it called England Swings SF. Science fiction will continue she said now that it is commercially OK and academically acceptable.

Canada a suburb

When asked about the tendency for American science fiction authors to anticipate an American takeover of Canada into the North American Union or Confederacy or Federation, Miss Merrill said, "Most Americans think of Canada as a suburb of the United States since very, very little is taught about Canada in the U.S. It takes a lot of effort to convince them it's different." While many of the younger Americans at the convention found Canada different, the older ones did not. Miss Merrill's statement was borne out when Alexei Panshin thought the question of the North American Union was a joke. He said that he didn't question an artist's creative aides and thought that an Arab-Israeli science fiction story with Canada and Mexico as Egypt and Jordan and the U.S. as Isreal would be good.

Only 125 people at the convention were Canadians. Peter Gill, Ontario Science Fiction Club secretary who organized the convention said that for the first convention they wanted to have people who were really involved in science fiction.

The convention also displayed selections of original art work including many illustrations from magazines. Some of it, including the original sketches for Dune Messiah were auctioned. Movies were also shown at the convention. One feature pointed out how the villains changed in the past few years. When the governor in the 1940 serial The Mysterious Doctor Satan announced that the National Guard had been called out to stop Dr. Satan the audience booed.

One of the most popular shows was an NFB short, The National Film Board of Mars presents What on Earth, where Martian astronauts take cars for earth's inhabitants.

People interested in joining OSFIC should write for information on a postcard to Mr. Peter Gill, 18 Glen Manor Drive, Toronto 13. Information on the Spaced Out Library can be obtained by calling 536-9776.

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