

Cosmicon III packed house

# Lacklustre Con still proved entertaining

By WARREN CLEMENTS

The panels were disappointing, and the scheduling was infuriating, but Cosmicon III still emerged as the entertainment highlight of the York year.

Students Anne Scotton and Paul Leonard, together with a crowd of volunteers from Winters College, sacrificed every spare minute since the Christmas break to organize the three-day fantasy, science-fiction, horror and comic book convention.

By far the most popular attraction was the film room, which offered 30 movies from First Men in the Moon to The Omega Man. The most popular were the Charlton Heston Sci-fi jaunts, but the crowds packed the Winters junior common room for all of them.

Special guests at the convention included Will Eisner, artist and creator of The Spirit comic strip from the 40s Bill Gaines, publisher of Mad magazine, and artists Vaughn Bode, Jeff Jones, Mike Kaluta and Berni Wrightson.

## Hot dope from Mad

Arthur, the ragged-looking plant which pops up continually in Mad magazine, is actually an avocado.

Not only that, but there are only six people on the editorial staff of Mad Magazine, not counting three subscription girls and a stockroom boy.

Bill Gaines publisher of Mad, let these and similar gems fall into a sparse Sunday morning crowd during his Cosmicon slide show and question period.

Asked whether Mad cartoonist Don Martin was as insane as his work would indicate, Gaines replied that he is "a handsome, mild-mannered gentle guy with a weird mind."

He also revealed that most of the models in Mad's ad take-offs are members of the staff, including the editor's daughter and a stock clerk in one "because they worked cheap".

Gaines showed slides of rare covers and issues, commenting that a complete collection of Mads dating from the 1950s is worth \$3,000. Other rarities included a "New Frontiers" cover showing mascot Alfred E. Neuman in a rocking chair, which was changed immediately after Kennedy's assassination to a shot of Neuman sitting in a covered wagon, being stopped by a traffic cop.

The highlight of his presentation was a film clip of a former US army general from Oklahoma who called the magazine an insidious publication offering comfort to the Communists.

Gaines sued for \$2 million dollars and the soldier retracted his charge.

Gaines was originally scheduled to speak at 2 p.m. Sunday, but although the organizers knew a week in advance that Gaines would have to speak by noon in order to catch his plane home, there were no signs posted to this effect. He spoke at 11 a.m., and a large contingent of angry con-goers missed his talk.

### NEW CRISIS

Th panel on the crisis in Canadian comics proved only that there was a crisis in Canadian comics panels. Art Cooper, creator of Freedom Fighter, talked half the time and did Ed Sullivan impressions, while Derek Carter, a commercial artist, talked for the other half.

"At the end of the second world war," said Carter, "with the influx of new materials, Canadian comic books died."

In recent years, attempts have been made to start a Canadian comic book, such as the ill-fated Fuddle Duddle, but only one has succeeded. That is Capitaine Québec (sic), a 44-page comic edited and drawn in Montreal by Pierre Fournier, who describes his creation as a "funky super-hero".

"He's dressed in an old St. Jean Baptiste T-shirt and uses a towel from a box of detergent as his cape," Fournier said.

Since its appearance last fall, Capitaine Québec's first issue has sold 12,000 issues and made a \$500 profit, unheard-of on a first effort.

"We started with number eight," said Fournier, "so that we can have our 10th anniversary as soon as possible."

### NATIONAL HERO

Carter commented that Capitaine Québec works because it appeals to a "separatist" audience.

"You mean a French-speaking audience," shot back a Quebec delegate. "And the only reason you (Canada) haven't got a national hero is because you the artists haven't created one."

"A friend of mine took a humour strip to a Canadian syndicate," commented artist-moderator Ron Sutton, "and was told they wouldn't buy it because it was Canadian humour, and that Americans wouldn't understand it."

On the censorship panel, DC writer Steve Skeates discussed the Comic Code authority, a comic watchdog which vetoes everything from navels to nipples.

"I know one production assistant who spent the whole day changing the size of Tippy Teen's breasts," he said

### NEW STANDARDS

"The modes change. A couple of years ago they let one super-hero take a shower, so for two months all the super-heroes took showers."

Panelist Bill Gaines, EC horror comics were a main target of the 1954



Youthful dealer balances comics against cash at Cosmicon III

senate sub-committee hearings into crime and horror in comic books, which resulted in the Code's formation.

Gaines said he tried to buck the Code for a few issues, but suffered an 80 per cent drop in sales, since no distributor would touch a comic not approved by the Code authority.

"I just had a story bought, drawn and then stopped because someone in this production department found out that a dog was eaten in the story," said Steve Skeates.

"He felt this was cruelty to animals."

### FOTO FUNNIES

On yet another panel, Vaughn Bode revealed that National Lampoon's

Foto Funnies section was dropped because "it was always done in the back room at the last moment."

"They don't have enough space for all the material they're getting, so they thought if they had to axe something, that would be the thing to axe."

And in a slide show in Winters junior common room, Will Eisner was discussing his motives for drawing The Spirit.

"I firmly believe a comic strip is a film on paper," he said. "Timing, mood and emotional impact are vital."

"I expect my reader to give me his full attention, to believe what I'm saying, and to read my strip carefully."

He added that after years of non-

comic work, he was invited to return to drawing the Spirit in 1966 for the New York Herald Tribune.

"It was so successful that about three months later, the Tribune folded," he said.

Throughout the speeches and movies, the dealers' room sold, traded and bought all sorts of comics. An Action comic with the first Superman story ever published valued at \$3,000 lay on one table, while a \$750 first issue of Superboy comic lay on another.

The collector's spirit was so pervasive that this writer even shelled out a horrendous price for seven Pogo comics from 1952.

Like the man said, it was a good Con.

## Fantasy the best alternative to rekindle the human spirit

By RICK SPENCE

"When you wish upon a star,  
Makes no difference who you are  
Anything your heart desires  
Will come to you."

### WALT DISNEY'S PINOCCHIO

What is it that makes grown-up, well-educated adults and teenagers shell out amazing sums of money for old comic books? What is it that brings them together to cheer as the man in The Time Machine fights off the Morlocks, to cry out in horror at the Invasion of the Body Snatchers, or sing along with Jiminy Cricket in Pinocchio?

The answer is not merely nostalgia. Who can be nostalgic about the future?

Nor can all the ppeople at Cosmicon

be described as merely seeking escape. Comic books today are no longer just escapist reading material. They've been involved with bigotry, drugs and pollution for years now. Movies such as Charlton Heston's Soylent Green are not escapist films.

Perhaps the best explanation for the attendance and interest of Cosmicon III's participants is their common love of fantasy. The human imagination has been badly abused in this century, to the point where millions of North Americans spend evening after evening in front of the ubiquitous television set, gazing passively as they are lulled to sleep by dreary, repetitive family comedy and detective shows.

### PASSIVE TUBE

In the medium of television, one

need never react; just sit back, relax, gaze, absorb, and then forget. But comic books and science fiction do not call for such passionless absorption. They appeal instead to the dormant "sense of wonder", that tiny part of the human spirit which has resisted the apathy and tedium that now engulfs us all.

These media act as an alternative to the dull worldliness of today's society, where all frontiers are pushed back, where all is tedious and common. At Cosmicon, if one can look beyond the shallow commercialism of such places as the Dealers' Room and its itinerant hucksters, one finds an environment in which, if only for one weekend a year, the fire of the human spirit is rekindled, and we can once again "wish upon a star."

## Cheech Wizard lives

By WARREN CLEMENTS

National Lampoon cartoonist Vaughn Bode peered at the crowd assembled in the McLaughlin dining hall.

"Last night at 3 a.m., I was on the balcony of Winters watching The Night of the Living Dead," he began. "That wasn't the movie. That was the audience."

Above him on a huge screen, projected cartoon slides, showcased such prized Bode creations as Cheech Wizard, the Talking Hat. The occasion was Bode's Cartoon Concert, a synthesis of comic strips and live mimicry of his characters' voices.

"If I try to jerk off in 90 degree below weather," squeaked a typical lizard, buried in a snowdrift, "my thing gonna break off."

The crowd applauded wildly when Bode announced a forthcoming Cheech Wizard T-shirt.

"There's a kick 'em in the balls one," he reported, "and a more conservative one for when you go out."

He mentioned offhand that he expected his wizard to become "the pornographic Pogo of the 70s." He invented the name, he said, while staring at a can of Italian chi-chi nuts.



Cheech creator Vaughn Bode



Peter Hsu photo