

Arts & Entertainment

SF convention in Edmonton

by Dragos Ruiu

So, "there we were, a group of local fans, sitting around worrying about Science Fiction (SF) conventions getting away from literature and going to the fringe interests." Thus was born the idea for ConText '89 according to Bill MacLaughlin and Cath Jackel, two of the convention's organizers.

ConText will be a convention devoted to the literary and traditional interests of speculative fiction fans as opposed to the fringe elements that Robert Silverberg

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jokingly called "300 pounders in capes." A while ago, before Trekkies, Dr. Who's and religious gaming alcoholics came on the SF world like a plague, SF fans concentrated on the literature of Science Fiction/Fantasy. ConText will be for "those of us who are interested in published fiction and were crammed into the sidelines at other conventions."

ConText is being organized by a group called the Alberta Speculative Fiction Association, which consists of "devoted, local" SF fans. They are trying to cater to an audience for whom the films, TV shows, and the games are not as important as the lore of writing. "While we don't intend to discourage those fans for whom this is the major interest, we will have a relatively small portion of our programming devoted to their interests," is the caveat on the ConText brochure.

The convention will be held at Lister Hall over Canada Day weekend, with panel discussions, barbecues and workshops planned. They have lined up an all-star line up of SF/Fantasy writers, cover artists, and scientists.

Headlining among the guests are William Gibson, Charles de Lint, Diane and Leo Dillon, and Dr. Brad Thompson. William Gibson, whose novels include *Neuromancer*, *Count Zero*, and *Mona Lisa Overdrive*, has won scores of awards for his writing.

ConText will likely be the only convention he will be attending this year due to a busy schedule.

Charles de Lint is a Canadian Fantasy author who has many books to his credit. The Dillons are renowned SF/Fantasy cover artists, whose credits include just about every Harlan Ellison book cover. The science guest of honor is Dr. Brad Thompson from the Alberta Research Council. His NASA "vomit comet" (the nickname for their zero-g test KC-135) life support experiments will be part of an upcoming deep-space mission. He will also be hosting a panel discussion on whether our first contact with aliens will be friendly or not.

The organizers also hope that this convention can be "a writers' leaping off point" for the creation of a national SF writer's association. "There are a massive number of Canadian Science Fiction writers. We're going to be encouraging as many as possible to attend so we can build a useful and lasting Canadian organiza-

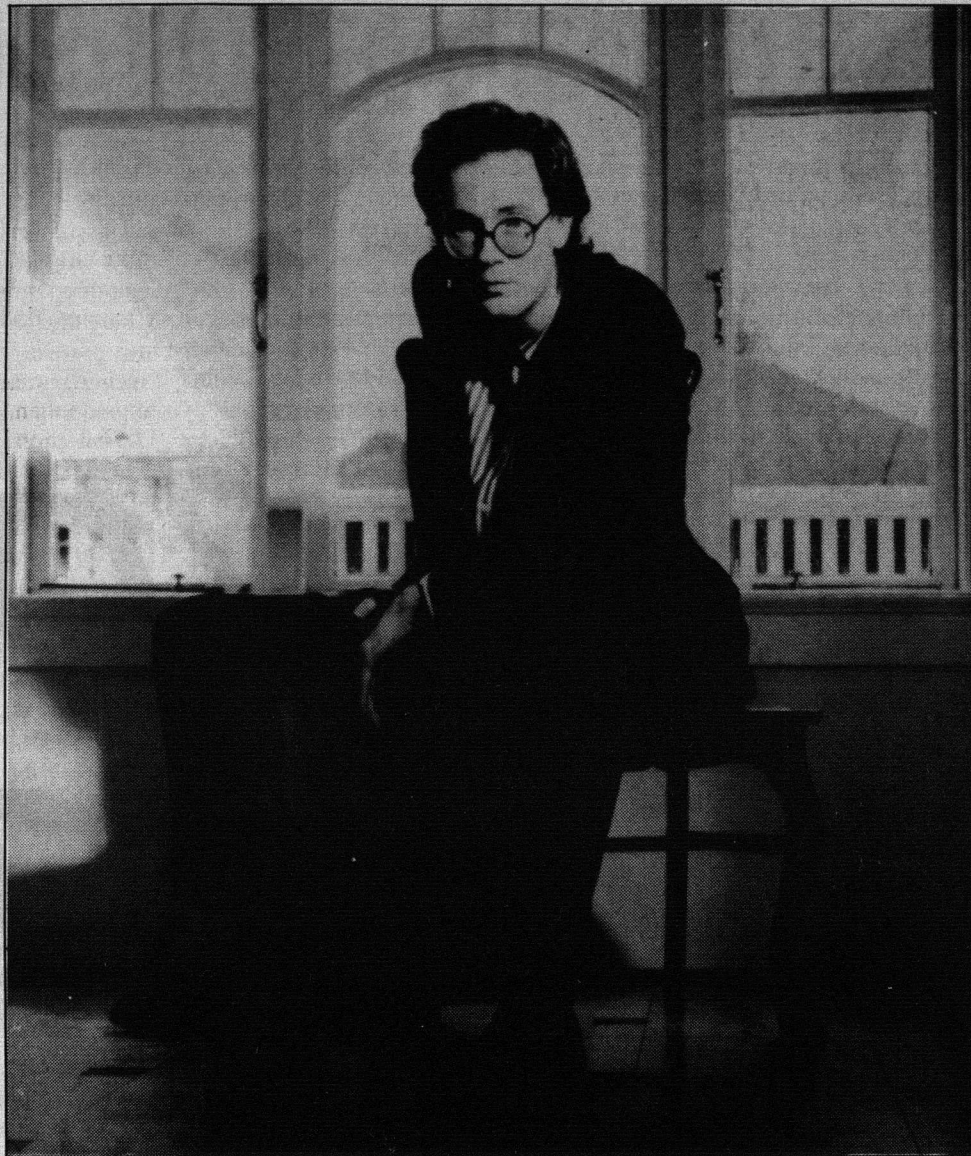
"...people will find something interesting to do at all times."

tion," says Bill MacLaughlin.

One of the more unusual aspects of the convention will be a do-it-yourself publishing computer room. Attendees will be able to put out their own newsletters, and a daily convention newspaper is planned.

Some of the other features of the convention will be an art show, and a one act science fiction play. Slide shows of Dillon artwork are planned along with many workshops. A "Blue-Pencil Cafe" for aspiring authors is in the works as well. "There will be two streams of programming so we hope that people will find something interesting to do at all times," says MacLaughlin.

Some of the seminars will cover Canadian SF history, and one entitled "Quick Zarkon, hand me that parsec." will discuss why Hollywood SF is so notoriously bad. A dealer's room, a bazaar of anything to do with science fiction, will be open to the



William Gibson, award-winning author of *Neuromancer* and many other books, will be a guest at Edmonton's first Science Fiction convention.

general public. To attend the other events it will cost \$20 for a convention membership. The group has reserved 200 suites in Lister for out of town guests.

So far, "reaction to the idea has been tremendous. If it fails, it won't be for lack of interest," says Cath Jackel. "We've been lucky, and there have been no snafus: It looks like it's going to work out really well."

Convention information is available from Context '89 at 10523-100th Avenue,

424-7764. Memberships cost \$20, and \$25 at the door.

The same group of people who are putting on the convention are also working with the Edmonton Public Library to bring in SF and Fantasy authors do readings at the Centennial Library Theatre. Scheduled are Spider Robinson on April 17th, Guy Gavriel Kay on the 18th, and Leslie Gadallah, and Dave Duncan on the 20th. Admission is free; all shows are at 7:00 pm.

Diviners is divine

The Diviners
Studio Theatre (Corbett Hall)
through April 8

review by Jennifer Vollrath

Studio Theatre lives up to its reputation for excellent dramas with its current production of *The Diviners*. The play is set in rural Indiana in a small town called Zion. When a stranger (C.C. Showers) comes to town, he befriends a young brain-damaged boy named Buddy Layman. Buddy and his friendship with C.C. is the key by which the rest of the town becomes involved. The townspeople are straightforward, simple folk who continue to act throughout the play with what they believe are the best of intentions.

Geoffrey Brumlik's portrayal of Buddy Layman electrifies the audience with its range of depth and emotion. Buddy has been through a drowning accident that resulted in the loss of his mother and gives him an unnatural sensitivity to water. Geoffrey doesn't make Buddy into a pitiful figure, but instead makes us realize that Buddy's seemingly ignorant way of talking in the third person is his way of distancing himself and coping with the pain of his mother's death.

Some of the funniest scenes in the play come from the two hired hands, Melvin and Dewey. Melvin is trying to teach Dewey all about life, girls and dancing so he can get a date with Darlene, a local girl. Also in Zion are Norman Henshaw, the town religious figure who is solidly convinced that C.C. Showers has been sent from God to be their preacher, Basil

Bennet, local farmer and a type of doctor and Jennie Mae, Buddy's older sister who takes care of him.

The set is plain, almost stark, using only a few props as support. Instead of detracting from the characters, as a more elaborate set would have, this allows us to focus on the action in the play. Where people are on the stage, or which groups of people are on usually determines their location with surprising clarity. Perhaps the best effect in the play is the river, represented by a mist coming from the floor of the stage. It provides the perfect setting for the climax. The lighting, the backdrop, and the music also serve to enhance the dramatic quality of the play.

The Diviners is well directed by Stephen Heatley, who keeps it going at a fast pace throughout: the action never slackens at any point. The dialogue is witty and keeps you laughing. The play could have easily been overdone and become corny and overacted, but it wasn't. The actors keep a firm grip and the result is a wonderfully funny play which also has a poignant story to tell. *The Diviners* has many things to say about the world, such as the ridiculousness of religious zealots and the belief that where there is life there should be hope, as with Buddy.

The play has everything you could hope for: comedy, drama and a strong storyline. The cast all do well in their respective roles, but the highlight is Geoffrey Brumlik's performance as Buddy. Nothing was artificial or overly melodramatic. *The Diviners* is easily one of the best plays I have seen.



The Diviners

Studio Theatre's current production gets a thumbs up from our reviewer. Left to right: Declan O'Reilly, Glen Gaston and James MacDonald.

Colin Northcott