

AltaCon 83: Artists

by Gilbert Bouchard

"It's like gathering 500 crazies in one room, it's fun, really fun." That's how Bruce Thomson of Darkstar Collectables described the Alta. Con 83 (The Alberta comic convention) held last Saturday and Sunday at the Northwoods Inn.

Thomson and his partner Bill Morocick organized the convention and have spent the last six months selecting and booking hotel space, hunting up artists and comic scene personalities, plus generally coordinating a dozen or so private comic dealers from B.C., Alberta, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and as far away as Montana. Not to mention the quarter of a million comic books dating as far back as the 1930s, and 50 to 100 thousand dollars that changed hands in the two day period.

COMIC BOOK CONVENTION

There was definitely something for everybody's tastes, including comics ranging from Uncle Scrooge to the last issue of the Fantastic Four to a guy dressed up in a Gorilla suit. The whole atmosphere of the do was close to that of a carnival, people were there to have fun first and foremost as vendors sold t-shirts and pocket books, fans dressed up like favorite comic characters, and people got autographs and sketches from their favorite artists. Mayhem and confusion were the order of the day.

Nevertheless while the convention might have been lighthearted and a divertissement, comic collecting can be a very serious endeavour. In fact according to Steven Hefforth, a comic collector and dealer at the convention, comics are the third best collectables on the markets (after stamps and coins) and "are more stable than stocks."

Collecting can also be very profitable indeed, or as Hefforth himself mentioned he bought an old X-men comic for twenty cents that now is worth over \$70! Seems lucrative n'est pas?



Bruce Thomson, Bill Murucick and a close friend of Lord Greystone. We couldn't figure out who's who so it's up to you readers.

Photos by Bonnie Zimmerman

Dave Sim is the creator and artist for *Cerebus* the barbarian aardvaark. *Cerebus* is the only Canadian (created, drawn, and published) comic around, and really owes its success to direct sales outlets and a diehard group of fans with a taste for a bit of unique comic adventure.

While *Cerebus* may not be everybody's cup of newsprint it has made great inroads for both Canadian comics and viable direct sales in general.

Gateway: How did you break into the comic industry?
Sim: Breaking into comics depends on what you want to do, if you want to get into Marvel, or work regularly for any of the big comic groups or like in my case by-pass them totally and go directly to the fans via the direct sales stores.

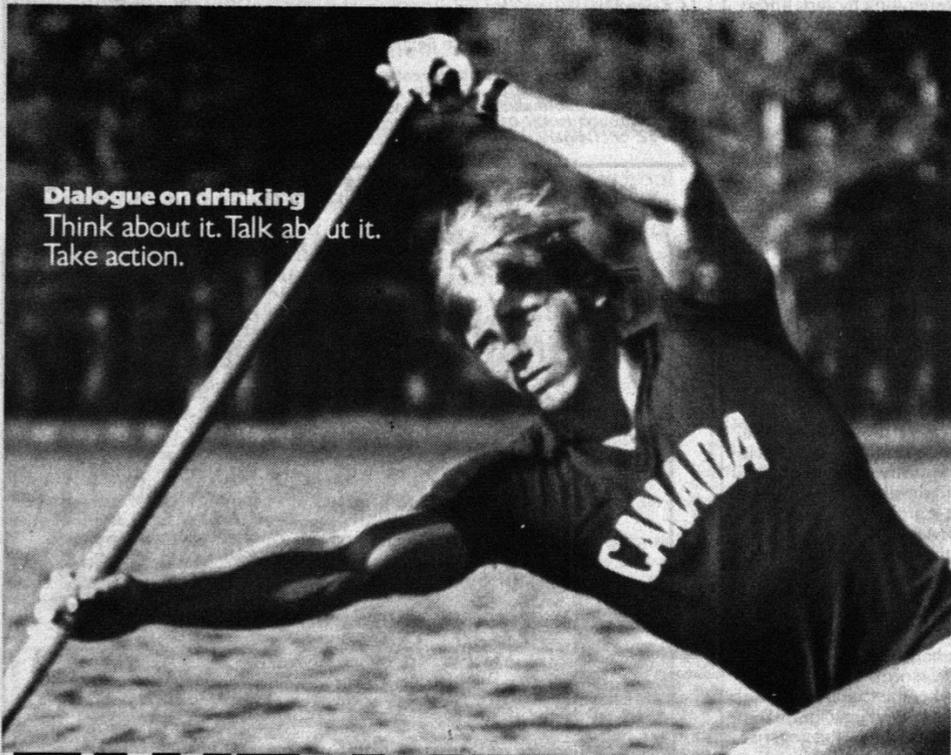
Gateway: Are direct sales comics taking over the industry?
Sim: There are other books, but the basic focus of what's going on now is that the fans have very specific tastes. Most of these fans are in their late 20's and 30's and are looking for very specific stuff. This group is growing and as the market gets more and more tired of the old crap the cream of the comics will rise to the top.

Gateway: Why did you decide to publish *Cerebus* yourself?
Sim: In the short term I could have made money working for the big comic publishers but in the long term you get yourself in a situation of control if you publish yourself. And you need faith for the beginning - lots of faith - but you do get a sense of satisfaction out of it.

Gateway: Do you do any outside work?
Sim: I do some outside stuff, but not a lot of it. But there's a certain ego satisfaction to do stuff for Marvel. It's something to do and I just walk in the door and get some work there. As far as longterm outside work goes, no, I just do stuff that's different that gives me a sense of doing different things.

Sim: It's very different to access where things are going, there's still quite an inertia towards superheros. If new stuff is going to develop there's a long history to overcome, 86 hero titles compared to 3 or 4 other titles. It's like being Robert DeNiro who's popular with the critics but who's last three films die, while *Revenge of the Jedi* will pack people in. I'd rather be a little less commercial and do what I want to do.

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Dialogue on drinking
Think about it. Talk about it.
Take action.

TAKE ACTION ON OVER-DRINKING.

"I like the taste of a cold beer on a hot day, but I certainly don't think you have to get the gang together with a couple of cases of beer just to celebrate the fact you've had a bit of exercise."

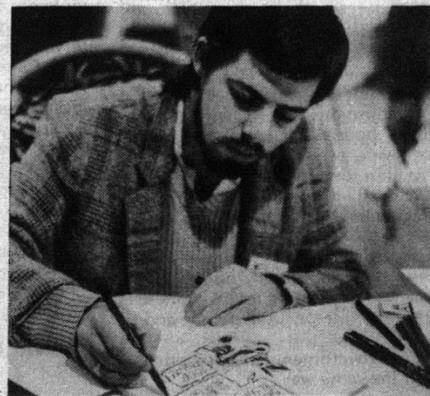
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Dave Sim