



"Beam me up, Scotty!"

-By Sarah Wilson, Graduate of the Han Solo School of Action Without Thought (If I thought before I acted I'd never get talked into things!)

Editor's Note: For those of you who like me are a little slow on the uptake, a CON is a CONVENTION.

How do I write about SF for your basic student readership? Those of you who read the stuff are in all likelihood more knowledgeable about it than I am--and there must be all kinds of you out there, because it sells like cold beer on a hot day around here. Those of you who don't read it probably won't even read this article. Maybe it should be called "Chartered Accountancy Made Interesting" -- but then it would BE science-fiction. Anyway, since I'm not really qualified to give a thumbnail sketch of the field, I'll concentrate on one of its manifestations, the CON.

For the two or three people who publicly admit they read SF (occasionally I think that reading Harlequin Romances is more respectable) I have "Reality is for People who can't handle Science Fiction" buttons, and this piece of advice: Go to a Con! (Actually, this advice applies to anyone who reads SF at all.) A con is the best place in the world to meet people with your own peculiar literary or cinematographic bent--Star Trek and Star Wars fans take note. At a big con, you'll find almost anything and anyone, from Star Wars-struck twelve-year olds so thrilled to be there that they can hardly talk, to NASA experts willing to discuss the Space Shuttle and Voyager missions, to various alien beings (and I do mean Alien!). Everyone, regardless of age, sex, ethnic origin, or species is there for fun, and to expand both their knowledge of SF and their circle of acquaintances within it.

Cons are never dull. The hard-tech people--readers of Isaac Asimov, Larry Niven, Arthur C. Clarke, and others in that line--

buttonhole the technical experts and interrogate them at length. The fantasy fans and the Dungeons and Dragons gamers wander around dressed as barbarians, slave girls, warrior princesses, rich merchants, you name it. (At the last con I went to, two people showed up dressed as Clint Eastwood in the spaghetti westerns). The comic book fans, collectors of ancient Marvel and DC comics, hunt through piles of fragile pulp paper, carefully packaged in plastic (the papers, not, the hunters) and pay almost ludicrous prices for first editions and similar rare issues. (Yes, those comic books that have been piled in the attic for the last twenty years may be worth CASH MONEY!) At a con you can buy anything (almost) with a science-fiction bent, meet some of your favourite authors, see your favourite movies again, or some of the classics (eg. The Day The Earth Stood Still) for the first time, and find a party any time of the day or night, all welcome. (Some people go just for the parties.) You can even become enmeshed in the political side of SF-- the jeopardy of the space program at the hands of the Reagan Government and its predecessors is causing a great deal of concern in the SF community, and they're pulling out all the stops in an effort to save it, especially the continuation of the Voyager mission, now past Saturn and headed for Uranus. I could get very worked up about the relative merits of research into the Solar System and the myriad benefits already realized by the general public from the space program, versus those of the latest keep-up-with the Russians hardware (has anyone seen the latest figures on the amount of money the Pentagon gets every year?) but I will restrain myself. This is about cons, not a social commentary.

Now that I've calmed myself, we can return to the original topic. A con is a great place to get a whole dose of the weird in a single weekend--one con can keep me going for months, and provide the necessary relief when the academic life starts to strangle again. Of course, SF is not just cons. The backbone of SF is books--the printed word. Those of you who can't read can at least watch the

movies. The characters in the book may not match the classical definition of humanity--you know, two eyes, two ears, one head, etc, etc., but they are usually people for all that, and often provide a useful perspective on 'normal' people, sort of beings on the outside looking in. I CAN'T go into the literary aka social side of SF in the Bruns. Maybe someday someone will let me write a thesis on it and give me an M.A. for my trouble. (I doubt it, though).

Anyway, I said I'd write this for Anna, who needs features for her features section. I think she reads SF (all the best people do). If you really want to know more about cons, especially how to get to them go to Fantasy Forest, on Queen St., down by Neill's (this is not a plug), or look in the con listing in Isaac Asimov's SF magazine, or similar publications.

Thank you for your kind attention, and remember: "Put your money where your dreams are. Support the Space Program!"

