

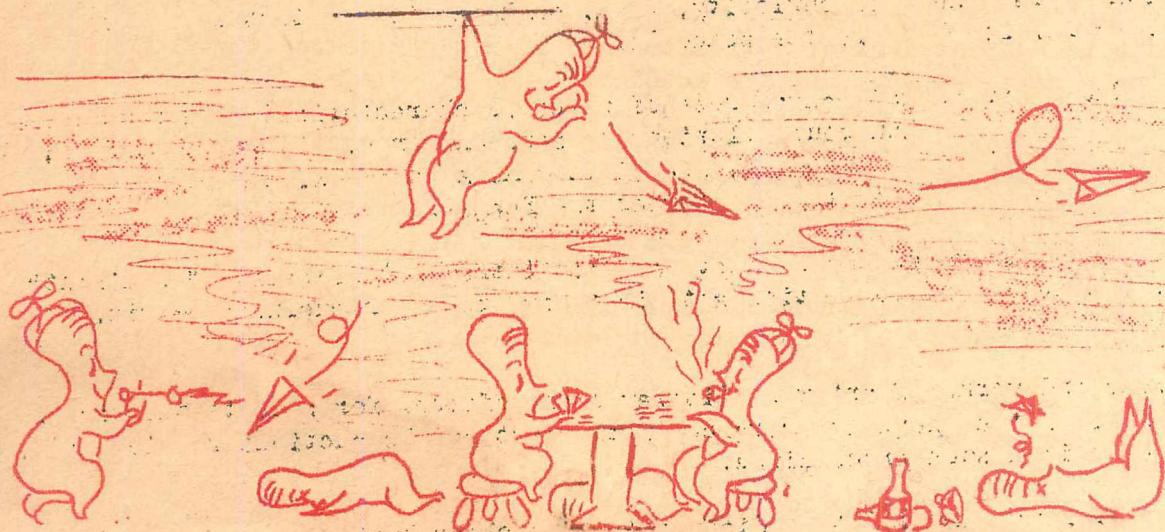
We requested a timely convention article from Robert Bloch -- and so:

HOW COVENTIONAL CAN YOU GET?

by

ROBERT BLOCH

being a special report via
time-traveling machine, on
the Philadelphia World Science
Fiction Convention of 1975



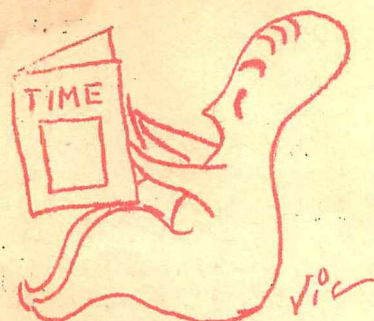
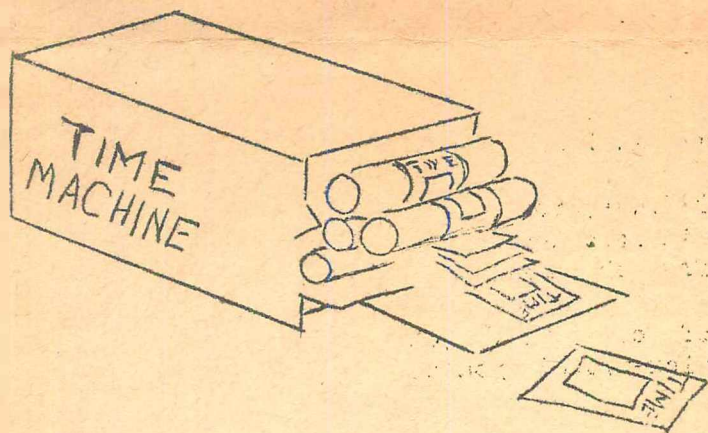
I have just returned from the 1975 Science Fiction Convention which was held at the same hotel used in 1953. As I recall it, in 1953 the hotel was called the Bellevue-Stratford. Since the war, of course, its name has changed to Shellvue-Stratford.

Before discussing the actual Convention procedure, it might be wise to remind the reader that this is the affair which has been in the making for over twenty years.

For it was a good twenty-odd years ago that fandom began to take a dim view of the typical Science-Fiction gatherings. I remember the complaints about Los Angeles, Toronto, Portland, New Orleans, Chicago, and the old Philadelphia Convention. It seemed to be a regular fannish pattern of the three As ---- anticipate, attend, and attack. Year in and year out, fans looked forward to the annual get-together, went to it in high hopes, and returned to mimeo their disappointment, disillusion, and dissipation.

The program was wrong. Too many movies, or too few. Too many technical speeches, or not enough. Too much frivolity, or too little. Too many pros, or -- nope, come to think of it, nobody ever complained there were too few pros. On that, at least, they agreed.

(continued next page.)



But as early as 1950, serious constructive fans began to take cognisance (while the other kind of fan was still taking scotch and plain water) of the fact that Conventions must be organized on a sound, business-like basis. These gripes and complaints must be (pardon the expression) eliminated.

Science-Fiction had outgrown the juvenile stage, they argued. It was time to present an adult convention and dispense with all the silly horseplay and slipshod methods. Year after year these earnest fans went to these things, hoping for the best. And what did they get? Year after year, the spectacle of a bunch of pros hopping around on the platform or staging get-togethers of their own. It was an affront to intelligence. Something must be done.

Well, as you all know, committees were formed. Plans were made. Systems were organized.

But home wasn't burned in a day, and all this took time. Again and again the serious constructive fans tried to impose their will upon various convention committees -- only to find the same old recurrent spectacle of parties, skits, bull sessions, poker games and gaiety.

It wasn't until this year that the millenium arrived. The 1975 Science-Fiction Convention was the first affair run according to the principles and precepts so carefully laid down by those who have our welfare at heart.

I attended with a great deal of curiosity, and I am happy to say that I was not disappointed. Here, roughly, is the schedule.

OPENING DAY: The chairman made an address of welcome, characterized by a refreshing absence of the usual stale humorous allusions to fans and pros. He dwelt instead, and at length, on the importance of Science Fiction As A Way Of Life, and the sacred responsibilities conferred upon those who wear the Beanie.

Following his speech there was no attempt made to "introduce" so-called "prominent" fans or pros. Instead, the Convention got right down to major business -- viz, the Auction.

Rare manuscripts and works of art were displayed and offered for sale to the highest bidder, with none of the cheap irreverence on the part of the auctioneer which had formerly characterized such proceedings.

The EVENING SESSION was devoted to a discussion of nuclearphysics, as was only to be expected -- but no longer was the stage monopolized by the "pros". Instead, the entire symposium was conducted by three fans, aged 14, 15 and 4. (The 4-year old was really 16, but it turned out he'd been born on February 29th of a Leap Year.)

The Second Day Afternoon Session consisted of the Science-Fiction Panel -- in which editors and writers formerly participated. But in keeping with the new policy of "fancons for fans" the editors and writers did not hog the platform. Again, fans took over and presented such interesting gambits as the relationship between Kornbluth and Kierkegaard, Gold and Gide, Kafka and Kuttner, and Philip Farmer and Louisa May Alcott. To hear such profound expositions from a group of 12-year-olds was indeed stimulating in the extreme.

The Second Evening brought the Banquet and the Presentation of Awards. Insofar as the convention rules barred attendees from entering the bar, ordering liquor in their rooms, or congregating upstairs in groups of more than five or less than three, the Banquet was the logical time for conventioners to really "let off steam."

Again, the fans took over. Instead of a fatuous toastmaster introducing a miscellany of pros for entertainment purposes, the entire affair was conducted by little 8-year-old Harlan Ellison III, who introduced and awarded prizes to:

JUNIOR TUCKER -- youngest fan present. (As a matter of fact, he was born during the Auction the previous day)

SHELLEY VICK -- charming daughter of an oldtime fan, for her outstanding fan magazine, PURE REASON

WILTER WALLIS -- fan from the British Isles, for his crusade to stamp out frivolity in fanzines and bar magazines containing females from the mails.

Each of the three made a charming little speech of acceptance. (Junior Tucker being remarkably precocious that way, and extremely quick-witted; you never know what's going to pop into one of his heads next).

Following the Banquet, the guests adjourned to the BIOLOGICAL SESSION, where Doctor Barrett (son of the oldtime physician, fan, and raffle-winner) held a fascinating lecture on HUMAN ANATOMY, climaxed by the actual dissection of a body in front of the

audience. Interest was heightened by the fact that he had been able to procure, as a subject, one of the last of the old "renegade" or "outlaw" elements in fandom -- that profane, vulgar, cynical Joel Wydahl, whose alleged humor (?) did so much to disrupt fans from their serious mission in life in the old days. The dismemberment of the corpse was frequently interrupted by loud cheers from the pious.

THE THIRD DAY featured a "playlet" by well-known fans, and it proved to be a skillfully-written drama with a serious message. It showed the career of a typical editor of a science-fiction magazine who started out with only two objectives -- to print what he thought were good stories, and to make money enough to keep in business. He continued on this selfish path, until a group of true fans approached him and showed him the light. Whereupon he dropped the offensive "girlie and monster" covers, tossed out most of his writers, and expanded his letter-column to 88 pages. The playlet ended with the magazine folding and the editor happily going off to join fandom and crank a mimeograph for the youngsters whose brilliant, incisive criticism he so admired.

THE LAST EVENING was the MASQUERADE. Insofar as attendance -- as at all other sessions -- was mandatory, on pain of being expelled from the hotel -- everybody showed up, and in costume. It was wonderful to see the change; no longer was there a spectacle of a lot of half-dressed girls pretending to be Venusians and stupid louts running around as spacemen. Instead there were such costumes as A Square Root of 137 and Barge on a Martian Canal and an outstanding Spirit of Nuclear Fission (an Einstein getup, with an atomic crater in the middle of his head).

Cookies and milk were served to one and all, and the Convention officially closed.

It was certainly a revelation, and a tribute to the Serious Constructive Elements in New Fandom.

Oh, I forgot to mention the total attendance. It reached the gratifying total of 19.

Next year's site will be San Francisco, again. They're planning to hold it in a phone-booth...

... bob bloch

this MADness is contagious — — — !!

By now, it's hardly news that the MAD idea in comics caught on. Might be this is heralding a new era -- as they said in the first issue of MAD: "Comics that are FUNNY." We've had EH! and we've had CRAZY -- and now, the publishers of CRAZY have brought out another, WILD.

MAD, of course, is the best -- best art, best reproduction, bast writing -- and everything. But CRAZY has come up with a few good ones; perhaps not as subtle as MAD, but still showing promise. And the second issue of EH! seems to be far above the first, so it's improving. ...of course, considering the first EH!, it would almost HAVE to improve, if it did anything at all. The artwork in the first was generally poor, the humor silly, and topped with amateurish attempts at 'being different' like having little men popping up between the panels, and all that.

CRAZY began with a parody on TOM CORBETT, SPACE CADET. This was entitled, TESS ORBIT, LACE CADET. And I must admit that Tess made far more interesting looking than Tom could ever... Of course, some of the puns were a bit strained (like an atom-station attendant purring admiringly, 'What an atom y!'. But then there was one about a shaving brush taking off, and 'a close shave' that passed muster.

And methinks a certain SLANT story -- SWORDSMEN OF VARNIS, I believe the name was -- had been read by whoever wrote the script for a story in CRAZY #2. In it, the boy fighting the dragon is reading instructions from his handbook. It tells him what to do with his sword (while the dragon is chomping it to bits) and then ends with, "...when all else fails, blast him with your Space Disintegrator Ray Gun." Or words to that effect. Of course, whoever adapted the story DID make it a bit different by having the dragon holler 'FOUL!'...

...seems that a batch of other script-writers got kinda mixed-up. Lately there has been a rash of duplications -- CRAZY comes up with THE FOUR MESSKITEERS. EH! comes up with THE FOUR MOUSQUITOES. CRAZY comes up with FRANK N. STEIN -- MAD gives with the same.

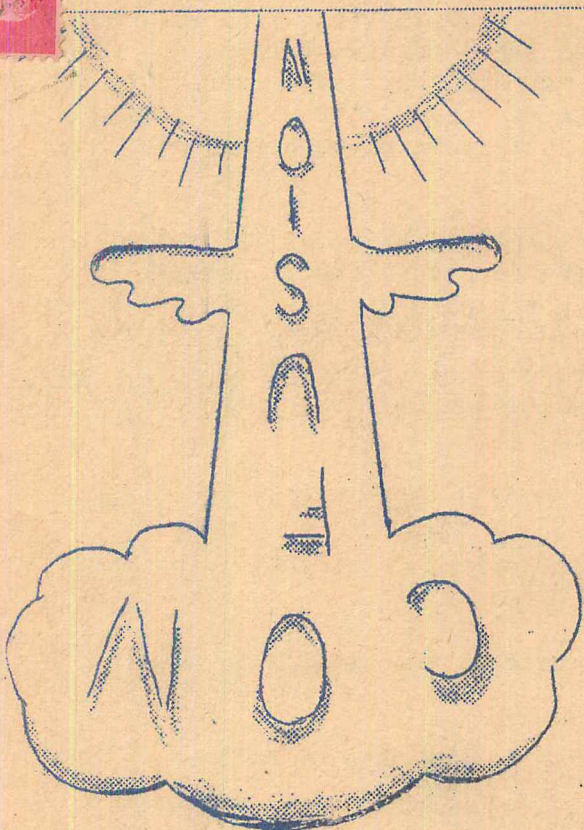
And so on...

Oh, yes; one serious objection. In EH!, particularly. They stick in little signs, little things for side jokes -- and they make them SO little, you can't read 'em. You'd never see that mistake in an EC Comic!

MAD marches ON!

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It looks like I'm going to have to fold cf., after all.

Absolutely.

Y'see, I had long thot that a zine about to fold could be quite clever by running the last issue with a border of black.

Well, as you know, QUANDRY has pulled its hole in after. An era of fandom has been completed. What was, for a long time, the top fanzine, is no more. There

is no vacancy left behind, however; that is, no hole left to be filled. No zine could ever take the place of Q.

--BUT that was a LOUSY black border!

I'm going to have to fold cf., just to demonstrate what a black border should look like.

CONFESSING FUSION

shelby

Gotta admit it -- we done you wrong. Maybe not all of you but lots of you, definitely. There are no telling how many nice peoples out there what have sent in monies for cf., and have recieved noddings. Not even a notice that their money arrived safely. Well, now I give with excuses, apologies and explanations.

To begin with, I suppose most of you know that I had polio -- poliomyelitis, I believe that specific virus was known a s. I recovered fully, (so it seems) but it took a few months. First of all, I was unable to do any stenciling or letter-writing -- and then, when I started recovering, I was too busy keeping up the exercises (skating, hiking, archery, golf) to have fanning time. And then, just when I was getting in shape, and my fanning ambitions were waxing strong, along came a spare-time job with the City of Lynn Haven, working on their tax records, sending out cards, etc. Until the last few days, nearly all my home time has been taken up with either that, or mimmy-o work, or my FAP activities. And now, a little more time is going into this Publicity Issue-type thing to explain the situation to all.

Next issue of cf. will be run off by a real wonderful gal -- Nan Gerding, who not only is going to run it off, but will also assemble it and mail it. All this, and she types stencils, too!

--but I wanted to explain. Nan's machine doesn't take material quite as wide as the one I use, so the material on the stencils already typed is liable to be a bit unreadable around the edges. Just wanted to explain that this is MY fault, not Nan's.

Considering the time lapse between issues of cf., I'm afraid that my fanzine reviews would be way, way out of date. What's more, it would take a good fifteen pages just to list 'em with the editor's name & address, and a one-line comment. So the 'And So, Fourth...' subtitle in the Midst next ish will either be something else, or else will be reviews of zines recieved since this effort goes out -- if enuf zines come in, in the interim.

Want to explain and apologize about the appearances of this cf., too. First, I am using a cheaper grade of stencil than usual. I think it will work out okay, after I get used to it, but yet, I am not. Also, as you may note, white paper is being used. A cheap brand of white paper. Is, of course, a MASTER product. Called Chesterton. Letter-sized sells at \$1.02 -- in lots of 20 reams -- peream. And they pay the postage! Takes a lot of money to buy 20 reams? So wot! Figure just how long 20 reams will last you. A mere 20-page zine would use two reams for 100 copies. 20 is only enuf paper for five issues. And plenty of money is saved. Master Products, 330 S Wells St, Chicago 6, Illinois, ought to pay me a commission!