

It seemed to me that most of them liked it pretty good...

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Four years ago I came back to convention fandom, at the Discon, and now the NYCon III is memories. The predominant memory for me is pleasant, but there are some darker overtones.

NYCON III Memorial Issue.....

I was going to save some of my irritations, etc., for Lilapa, but it has occurred to me that if I have things to say, I might as well say them out. Most everybody else in fandom does.

Why not start at the climax -- the Awards Banquet, and the Guest of Honor's speech which would have been a lot longer had Sam Moskowitz made a decent attempt to keep down the ridiculous length of his vapid speech. Now, I am not one of those whom SaM ordinarily irritates with his fantastic longwindedness; generally I regard his speeches as plangent with more delightful and hilarious ineptitudes, not to mention infelicities, of language than any man who revels in such ludicrousness has any decent right to expect. But there comes a time to shut the mouth and proceed to other matters, and the fact that it was Lester who had to face up to this reality, rather than SaM, was a sad loss to those whose \$5.50 was paid out, not for food, and certainly not for SaM, but for the chance to hear Lester del Rey -- who had, for him, been holding silence a year now -- tell it like it really is.

In that context, a Moskowitz travelogue through -- once more -- the era of Capt S.P. Meek and such other luminaries was a gross insult to us all.

It might also be pointed out that Edmond Hamilton's best work has been in recent years. It was surely no compliment to him to be reminded once more that SaM has apparently read nobody's work since some point roughly situated in the Second World War era.

Enough of SaM. But any other convention committee that proposes to allow itself to have him droning his banalities for half an hour during the peak of the convention had better be prepared at least for a pretty severe dishing from me.

Footnote: Harlan removed the record-player from the podium and set it in front of me when SaM came up. The audience may have noticed that Harlan tried several times to speed SaM up, even threatening to play the record. But -- "No, I can't do that, even to him. It's just too rude."

I agreed at the time. Now I wish he'd gone ahead.

□□□ Might as well talk about Harlan a bit, as one of the stars of the NYCon. Personally I thought he was great, and had a hell of a lot to do with the successful flavor of the whole thing.

Harlan's been vindicating himself to fandom over the last couple of years, and they've given him a Hugo and a Hugo nomination to show they're well aware that he's finally making good. Maybe it's a cheap trick to say I knew he could do it all along, but I'm in print on the subject enough years back so that it doesn't embarrass me too much to say it.

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But while I do treasure a well-turned insult, either in jest or at a particularly fat target, I do feel that to insult Bob Silverberg, or Isaac Asimov, or Lester, is one thing. To insult a young neo is another. Now, I'm not saying that some of the stupid creeps that don't seem to have any idea of proportion or appropriateness shouldn't be put down a bit. But insults directed at a person's appearance when that person has not the opportunity or the equipment of a Silverberg to fight back, goes a bit far. I've noticed Harlan usually tries to pull the barbs back out when he's gone too far this way, these days, but that hurts too, especially when you're a kid with no defenses. I dunno. Harlan is a Force of Nature, I suppose, and Nature hurts too. But, dammit, Nature doesn't have intelligence; it hurts people because it is reality, and reality hurts people. Reality can't have compassion.

Damn if I know why I'm trying to lecture Harlan. But maybe I'm trying to act on something I learned in the last week -- those who see but do not speak are as bad as those who do not see, and no better than those who cannot see.

I'm the guy who smiles. I'm the guy who soothes people. I've been told I did a lot to calm people down at crucial times before and during the con. I'm the nice guy who laughs at every line that strikes him as funny, even when the rest of the room remains stony-faced.

But I've also been a guy who sees but does not speak. I've soaked quietly in life and experience till lo and behold, I'm 32, married, about to have a son or daughter, a professional writer, an ex-convention chairman. How much more apprenticeship do I need, sitting around and listening to everyone else's views on writing and on life?

Harlan's becoming the damn fine writer he was always capable of being. But he hasn't struck the full chord yet. Perhaps there's one more insensitivity barrier to break through. Or only a couple of bad habits left. I hope he does; I want to help vote him a Hugo for Best Novel some day. During this con, he was mostly merely Great, but...

Well, hell. On to something else.

☐☐ As long as lumps are coming, here's one for me: I was conned, quite thoroly and professionally, and it helped Los Angeles lose the '68 worldcon.

I suppose I'll be challenged on some of this stuff, but my memory scans it thus: George Scithers repeatedly told me in confidence that the Baycon bid was pro-forma, intended simply to serve as a spur lest the L.A. people "fall down on the job" as, according to him, they had done on unspecified occasions in the past.

This is not to say George was lying to me. But at the least, someone was lying to him, making two of us who were conned. (Not to mention the L.A. people, who seemed to have the same feeling -- that the Baycon bid was pro-forma -- and whose awakening on the platform Saturday afternoon was rude indeed.)

The fact that I was conned, however, had one particular effect: it lulled me into inaction, even on the platform where Stark had assembled four seconders, including the Fan and Pro Guests of Honor at the NYCon itself, plus Roger Zelazny and -- the real giveaway, had I not been too exhausted at the time to realize it -- Harlan.

Pass the question of whether it's ethical to use the Guests of Honor for such purposes. Pass the question of whether Lester had any right to imply that the BArea fans were the truly fannish ones, the L.A. fans some other kind.

But I had told Bjo over the phone some months earlier that it was my clear understanding, based on such discussion of the matter as the Nycon committee had had at the time, that there would be two seconders for each of the then-three bidders.

Los Angeles had proceeded on this assumption. (It is not relevant at this point to consider whether Los Angeles proceeded from this point with the best of skill; it is true their presentation was an unmitigated disaster area in spite of the thunderous ovation Gene Roddenberry got, but had the Baycon bid been left up to J. Ben Stark and, say, Roger Zelazny, I do not think the differences would have been sufficiently great to produce the fantastic swamping that L.A. received.)

The point is this. Had I cleared my brain and remembered (or had Bjo, for that matter, reminded me) that the seconders-limit was two, I would have told George Scithers right there on the platform that two of Stark's and one of Al Lewis's seconders would have to leave.

If this had not been done (or some mutually-acceptable compromise been reached), I would have walked off the platform. For what good that might have done.

I am damn sick of wheelers and dealers in fandom. Syracuse did it for two years running, and I thought that was going to be it for a while. But here it is again, the same shabby dealing, the same evasive attitude toward what I would think most people would regard as honorable dealing -- the same sort of thing that everyone's been accusing us of for the last year, relative to the Hugo flap.

And there's no end in near sight. The Columbus people are pulling the same crap in their 1969 bid, tho they have the excuse of being almost completely new to fandom except for their Shaded Eminence. But Jack Chalker put them down pretty well in his last SAPS zine.

What the hell is this? Fandom, or the Cold War? What vast contending ideologies are these that periodically sweep over our microcosm leaving shattered friendships and mountains of unhappiness? Are we simply unable, for some reason, to protect ourselves from being swindled from time to time, when some Big Man behind the scenes decides he wants something? Listen, gang, the Pong flap was nothing compared to: the Berkeley Boondoggle; Kyle's disgraceful two-in-a-row bid; the Baycon affair, which does not look to be over; the Columbus maneuverings -- gotten any interesting mail lately? What Ted White and the rest of us thought we were doing when we added two awards onto the current structure was something that would specifically benefit fandom. Sit down and make me a long, long list of the benefits available to us in the list two sentences back.

I hope the Art Show doesn't fold; I intend to push for passing on as much money from the NYCon to the Art Show as possible. I also want to see a goodly stack of money passed on to the Baycon, to give them the best chance to put on a con now that they've managed to get themselves a second one in four years. I hope Bjo will keep going with the Art Show, and I hope the Baycon is a great convention. Let's try to make the best of things. But let's not fool ourselves. Ho ho.

□□ What is this? Did I hate the NYCon or something? Hell no. So:

GOOD THINGS: The wave of thundering applause when Jack Gaughan got up to accept the Fan Artist Hugo. (I quivered inside, knowing he was immediately thereafter going to get the Pro Artist Hugo). The greater wave of thundering appliause when Jack Gaughan got the Pro Artist Hugo. □□ The way the STAR TREK audience fell silent instantaneously, every time the picture came back on after the "Commercial Pause" signs. The way the STAR TREK audience, mostly, seemed to groove with the show, in spite of its *sigh* predictable flaws and logical fallacies. □□ Meeting Ray Fisher for the first time. Meeting Burnett Toskey for the first time. Meeting Bob Lowndes for the first time. □□ Seeing the incredible number of West Coast fans show up for the convention, after hearing for many many months that almost none were going to make it. □□ Ted & I, realizing that for damn's sake it was our convention, reserving half a dozen seats on the front row at the Fashion Show, and snagging people like Chip Delaney to sit there... □□ At the STARTREK/TOFF auction Sunday night, watching a half a room full of fans surge forward as one, to donate a quarter each to pay for giving the STAR TREK original treatment to the Smithsonian, "In the name of the convention." Sorry about that, Ted -- for ever after in the archives of our nation, STAR TREK will be linked with the name of the NYCon III!... □□ Sitting at hasty lunch with Ruth Berman, Ted Johnstone, Dave McDaniel, and Len Bailes, working out Len's interview of Ted and Dave (which I'd sold Ted White as the best way of filling up the incredible 45 minutes by which we were ahead of schedule on the first day. □□□ Fred Pohl hating the topic of his dialogue with Norman Spinrad but going on anyway -- and remaining on the griddle while we had to stretch it out, waiting for Judy Merrill and Ben Bova. And pointing out, in accepting his Hugo for IF, that it's a bit harsh on a man whose life, after all, has been devoted to science fiction, to tell him he shouldn't edit three prozines and try to do the best for the field he can. □□□□ Sitting at the banquet table and digging Harlan at first hand as he Destroyed the Statler-Hilton. □□□□ Twice engaging assistant managers face-to-face and telling them at length of the shabby treatment they were giving everybody. I have never been able before to make an assistant manager (of anything) fall silent with at least a good imitation of shame. If you were dissatisfied, write the Statler -- and write Hilton himself. (And call him Conrad...?) (But bear in mind that the con facilities were as they should, and that the staff that set up the Fashion Show, the Costume Ball, the Banquet, and the regular programming, in the Grand Ballroom, did everything they were supposed to, and did it very well.) □□□□ The girls, all the beautiful girls! A flood -- a plethora -- what has happened to the forlorn fandom that was? And why didn't it happen sooner? □□□□ Ellison as auctioneer. (Whispered colloquy overheard only because I was taking advantage of my co-chairman ribbon and was up on the platform digging the performance: "Didn't you bid against yourself that last time?" "I dunno. I think so. Harlan does that to me from time to time...") □□□□ Looking thru the Program & Memory Book and realizing that the damn thing was giving me Sense of Wonder... □□□□ Beautiful people: Andy & Barbara Main, Les & Sandi Gerber, Jock Root, Gail Ewert, rich & Colleen Brown, Mike McInerney, Lee Hoffman, and many others, each of whom at some point or other during the con did wonderful things to buck me up during gloomy moments. □□□□ Cindy. □□□□ And the magnificent wave of applause that Ted White got and deserved at the banquet.

I liked the NYCon III a Whole Lot. I hope you did. □□ And hoping you are the sane...