



# gambit 44

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This is free, a ride with AXE. Most issues take the form of a VOID column/editorial.

CON DATES: In 1958 Ron Bennett, Bob Pavlat, my future wife Sylvia Dees, and I returned from the Los Angeles convention together in Pavlat's car, visiting fans along the way. One very pleasant night was spent with the fans in Cincinnati, dining with the Fords, and bedding down with both the Fords and the Skirvins. During the after-dinner chatter on many subjects fanciful and stuffy, Don Ford raised the thought that we (being then DC fans bidding for a Con) might consider moving the world convention away from Labor Day weekend to a spot somewhat earlier in the summer. We chatted about this for a moment, and for that moment Don's reasons (kids to be sent to school, etc.) seemed very reasonable.

But later, when we considered the idea at Washington SF Ass'n meetings, we found little weight behind the largely unappealing idea, so we shelved it and did not consider it in our bid.

That dates the idea, however, as having been in existence at least since 1958. It may well have been a bee in the midwestern bonnet for a much longer time, but it is not, at any rate, a very new idea.

But more recently, the idea of transferring the time (and, duration, apparently) of the World Con has again been raised, again largely from the Cincinnati-area fans. The motion was proposed at the Pittcon and tabled. It was brought up and torn to pieces at the recent Midwestcon. I understand it was propounded by Doc Barrett in SHANGRI-L' AFFAIRES, but I never saw the issue.

In a week or two it will be proposed again, this time at the Seacon. And because this time the proponents of the idea are after action, I want to give you some background here and now.

Not having seen the SHAGGY article in question, I will have to rely upon my own experience and the discussion at the Midwestcon. It should be obvious that I am, as things presently stand, opposed to the idea of moving the con date away from Labor Day weekend. When Don Ford first mentioned the idea, he proposed no alternative date, and merely said he hated having to rush right back from a Con to get his kids off to school, usually on the day following Labor Day. Lou Tabakow was considerably more explicit at the Midwestcon.

He spoke first of the same school problem for a fan's kids. The answer, as he saw it, was a Con held one or two weeks earlier. In answer to complaints that this would mean only a two-day weekend, and a shorter con, he said he felt it would be easier to arrange for a vacation from one's job in the middle of summer, even during the week before Labor Day weekend, than to get a vacation to extend past Labor Day. One of his objections to Labor Day weekend was that it was impossible for fan's mundane wives to shop during the weekend, since stores would be closed, and another was late August heat. He pooh-poohed any difficulty in obtaining a Con hotel for another date, stating that he knew of no other major, competing, conventions scheduled for the summer months.

He was immediately answered from the floor. Earl Kemp stated that neither he personally, nor the Chicon Committee had any intention of changing the

the con dates. As far as he could see, it made little difference if one's kids missed the first couple of days of school (days usually wasted anyway), and his children had been doing this for years and would probably continue to do so without ill-effects.

Dave Kyle pointed out (and was supported by others who'd worked on cons previously, including the Detention, the Clevention, and the Pittcon) that the summer months are far from empty of major conventions, and that indeed few hotels can be booked for a convention on one-year notice (or less) for any date except Labor Day weekend. Most conventions, it was pointed out, are booked at least three years in advance.

Many others objected to the idea of a two-day convention, and it was pointed out that most of the months of July and August are likely to be as hot as Labor Day weekend. Fans were still rising with objections when Tabakow rose to suggest that this wasn't a debate, and that the discussion be continued at the Seacon, where he seemed to feel the motion would be put right through.

That's a reasonably accurate report of the discussion. It's a shame it was cut off there, because several other points deserved to be raised. I'll do so now.

The immediate objection is that the entire proposal has been viewed by its adherents as though they (the Cincinnati-area fan) were typical of most fans, and thus their plaint would be the average fan's complaint. Their view would seem to be that fans are male, thirty years or so old, married to mundane wives, have one to four children, and work in a factory or heavy industry. It just ain't so. The average fan is more likely to be single, in high school or college, and aged 16 to 25. He too may have objections to Labor Day, but I haven't heard them voiced.

A stronger, much more practical objection to the Cincinnati proposal is the hotel situation. The AMA, American Legion, and Shiners all hold big conventions during the summer months, often swamping an entire city and its hotels with thousands of Big Spenders. Our convention averages 500 attendees, who often operate on skimpy budgets, doubling up in rooms and etc. Few fans are aware of the fact, but the hotels have their own national association and they keep accurate records of conventions. The Washington DC hotels investigated in 1958 and 59 had an accurate record of every convention since the 1948 Torcon. They knew how many were in attendance, took rooms, went to the banquet, and whether the con made or lost money. They were able to estimate how many attendees and how much money they could expect. They keep accurate tabs on bidding cities, and as soon as they knew we were bidding for the 1960 convention, they came to us. So did the hotels of the other bidding cities.

Why? Because we hold our cons on Labor Day weekend, and hotels are traditionally empty on that date. Business, even ours, is enthusiastically welcomed. On any other date none of this luck would be ours; the enthusiastic cooperation we have received from hotels in recent years would be totally absent, and on one-year notice a hotel might even be impossible to find. Few hotels in the average sized city are suitable for a Con, you know.

"But!" cries the fringe-fan in the back row, foggily, "I thought you fans were forward-looking and not so sentimentally tradition-bound. Why be so reactionary?" Why indeed? And why be pointlessly revolutionary? Fans, if they are the thinking-reasoning, superior types they consider themselves, will not be stampeded into a move without due consideration.