



RACHE

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THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF CONVENTION.....

Convention time has rolled around again, and the smaller regionals are already in full swing, with the big cons coming up fast. For the benefit of those in the audience who have never been to a con -- or at least not to a big one -- I thought a few notes might be of interest. If they aren't, well, at least they are available for reference.

First of all, to quote Len Moffatt in an old genzine article, "Get a Bolt-Hole." Make sure you have a room at the hotel -- maybe not your own room, and probably not a room all to yourself unless you've got more money than most first-con fans, but a room. Even when the convention is being held in your own city, there is a certain amount of gear you will be bringing with you to the con, and you won't want to carry it with you through the whole con. You can't set it down in one of the public meeting rooms with any degree of safety, either -- if it's left in the main auditorium, it's likely to get auctioned off! (Fans at a convention will bid on anything.) So get together with someone else -- or several others, if you're really broke -- and get a room. A single room is cheapest, of course, and the problem of how many of you can actually cleep there can be worked out later, bearing in mind that even if the hotel catches you putting more people into a room than are signed up, the extra charge isn't that much more. You can usually get a second key, and maybe even a third, by telling the desk clerk you locked yours inside the room -- the doors have spring locks -- or lost it. The usual ethic of space rights, by the way, is that the guy who signs for the room has first rights on sleeping space. After that, it can be decided by who is paying more, or who gets back to the room earliest. You'll probably be up all night at the parties anyway, won't you?? Suuuuurrrree you will..... . Anyway, it is definitely the best idea to have a room you can dump junk in, or dump yourself in when you get completely flaked out -- and you will, too.

Okay, so you're there the evening before the con opens -- you might as well be, as everyone else will be -- and you've dumped the pile of trash -- fanzines for sale, costume stuff, comics to trade, and maybe even a change of clothing -- in the room. Your roommate won't be showing up until much later, so you return to the convention floor -- usually the mezzanine or someplace similar. You look around expectantly, and can't see anyone you know at all. You now have two choices: go up to some likely looking stranger -- the large gentleman, for instance, with the small mustache and glasses, carrying several monster magazines under his arm -- and ask him if he's with the science fiction convention. When he says yes, ask him how to get to where something is going on. He probably won't know, but will be able to make reasonably good guesses. Second choice: sit down and read a science fiction book. Even-

tually, someone will come up and ask you if you're with the science fiction convention. From there, you estimate how much more he knows about things than you do, and play it by ear.

If no one is around at all, they must be out eating. Try the bar. If they won't let you in to try that, try the coffee shop. Eventually you'll find a pack of idiots with every mark of ~~Hom~~ Hetero Fannus except perhaps the spinnerbeanie, which is rather out of date these days. Even with name badges to identify themselves. You don't have one yet, which puts you in an advantageous position. "Hi!" you greet the one who seems to be the center of the mob. "I see you've got your badge already. Looks pretty good." At this point you lean over to admire the artistry of the badge, even if it is probably a standard badge provided by the Chamber of Commerce convention bureau to every convention that comes to town. While doing this, you will be able to read his name; hopefully, it will mean something to you. Otherwise, fake it. You know his name, and he doesn't know yours. If you continue talking to him, referring to him by name every once in a while, he will eventually have to admit being One Down by asking what your name is: "What did you say your name was?" You proceed to cement him into the One Down position: "I didn't say. But it's _____. Hey, where's the party tonight?" At this point, he can't afford going Two Down, so he tells you (if he knows) or finds out from one of his mob. That should take care of the problem for the first night, and from the first night party you should be able to set up the ones for the other nights. (If you can't, try going to the NFFF Hospitality Room; you deserve no better.)

Okay, so you've managed to get to the party. Have fun -- but keep it fairly cool if you want to get invited to any other parties. It is quite passee, these days, to get roaring drunk at a con party so that you will get mentioned in convention reports. It was discovered that, if you did get mentioned on such occasions, the writer generally didn't know your name, and in any case the negoboo wasn't worth the opprobrium you got. The same goes for the public make-out artist. Necking quietly in a corner somewhere is one thing -- making a Big Thing out of the scene in the middle of the party is quite something else.

If you must be noticed, try edging into a discussion. Edging -- not butting. Stand on the sidelines long enough to find out what they're talking about, then, when you actually have something to add, add it. Don't try yukking it up too much until you're definitely a part of the group; facts are much easier to have accepted by a group that doesn't know you than are humorous remarks.

If you had a personal invitation to a private party, you can do things a semi-crasher can't. (A semi-crasher is the guy without an invitation, who shows up at the door, says Jophan X sent him, and is admitted on the strength of that.) The invitee, if he is a non-drinker, has a right to drink the party's mixers straight; the semi-crasher does not, and should bring his own. If the semi-crasher is a drinker, he should bring his own booze, even -- but he seldom does, adding one more reason for the host to pass the word about him to other party-throwers.

Should a specialized group in which you are interested -- a filksing, for instance, or a card game -- form at the party, go ahead and see about joining them. The filksong session is usually open, and you can sit on the periphery and join in when/if you know what they're ~~butcher~~ singing. Don't try to call songs unless you're sure are

calling them from the right type of repertoire. A real fan filksinger doesn't know the ethnic folksongs (or many non-ethnic ones, either.) All he knows are the parodies. A beginning filksinger only knows a few of the parodies, and probably a few regular folksongs. Listen a while and see what the situation is. (It takes a lot of nerve to commandeer a filksong session when you're not the guitarist. It can be done, but not usually by neos.)

The card game is different. If you get an affirmative answer to the standard "Seat open?" line, you're in. Your first job is to find out the house rules of whatever is being played, and then to determine the degree of weirdness that the other players will put up with -- or, on the other hand, the degree they insist on. A non-LASFSian who blunders into a game of Blackguard Poker -- in which the varieties and rules change radically from deal to deal -- will find the other players get very bored by standard games such as five-draw and seven-stud. On the other hand, a LASFSian who gets into a serious poker game will find that they won't play anything but the standard games. Remember, it isn't your game when you sit in.

Anything can happen at a convention party, so just take it easy and let it happen. When you finally sack out after the party, leave a call with the desk for noon. (And remember to leave it in the name of the legit occupant of the room.) You could get up earlier, but there wouldn't be anyone else around but other neos.

It is now the first day of the convention, and opening session is about to begin -- 1:00 or so in the afternoon. You have already registered, put on your nametag, bought your banquet ticket, and leafed through the Program Booklet. Should you attend the opening session? Depends.... . If there will be a Keynote Speech, you should probab;y attend. Keynoters are usually important, and the speech may be second only to the Banquet speech. Most Worldcons do not have a Keynote, but it has been done. (FUNcon, the substitute West Coast Regional over Fourth of July weekend in Los Angeles, will have a Keynoter: the Guest of Honor, Harry Harrison.) If there is no Keynoter, you can probably skip the opening session and not miss anything. The only people who attend non-speech opening sessions are (1) people who are impressed by all the Big Names introduced there; (2) people who hope to be introduced as a Big Name; and (3) people who don't know what else to do but go to all program items. And, of course, the Convention Committee. If you fit into one of these categories, go to the opening meeting whether or not there is a Keynoter. If you don't, spend the time fangabbing or something equally enjoyable.

Once the convention has begun, you have to decide for yourself which items on the program you want to attend. Somtehing which would bore hell out of one fan will be completely fascinating to another. Read your program booklet carefully; take into account not only the title of the item, or the subject matter suggested thereby, but also the participants in the thing. Something called "The Future of Fantasy and the Mass Media" sounds terrible, but if it turns out to be Harlan Ellison and Gene Roddenberry arguing, that's something else entirely. It will, of course, take you a convention or two to figure out which names indicate, by themselves, an interesting item. And by them your ideas of interesting program items may have changed, but... .

There are still a few standard items almost everyone should attend:

the banquet and the masquerade. The banquet is usually overpriced for what you get in the way of food, running from about \$4.50 up to \$7.50, for cardboard roast beef or leather fried chicken. Occasionally you get a good dinner, but don't expect it; all you have a reasonable right to expect is an edible dinner -- if you don't get that, complaints are in order. In spite of this, go to the banquet anyway; consider it part of the expense of convention-going. It will give you a chance to sit quietly and talk with the 8 or 10 people at your table in a reasonably relaxed atmosphere -- not like the smoke- or booze-filled rooms the parties are held in -- and it will let you feel much more a part of things when the speeches come along. Sitting on the fringes of the banquet room, coming in after the banquet itself, is only a peripheral attendance at the speeches, which are usually the best of the convention, since the Guest of Honor gives his main speech then. If you can, get together a table group ahead of time, and post someone at the banquet room to grab up a table in front of the speakers' rostrum as soon as tables are available. (You may or may not be able to get away with putting a sign on a table: "Reserved for (name of group).") The Spectator Amateur Press Society has had a table at almost all US Worldcons since Detroit in 1959, with the Official Editor, if he is attending, having the responsibility for reserving it. (He frequently delegated the responsibility to one of the attending members with more time.) In addition to being right in front of the speakers' table so that you can hear and see what happens to the best advantage, you will also be placed so as to appear prominently in whatever photographs are taken of the aforementioned speakers' table. (Conventions from Detroit, 1959, through Washington, D.C., 1963, had Official Banquet Photos, which were taken professionally. They showed the entire room, and copies of them were then sold to members of the convention. Hopefully, Baycon will reinstate this practice, which was discontinued when Pacificon II forgot about it in 1964. The photos are well worth the \$3 or so.)

As for the masquerade, I have usually found it the most enjoyable part of the convention. It is more fun when you yourself are in costume, of course, but even if you aren't, just seeing the imaginative (usually) costumes the others can come up with is easily worth the effort of attending. If you brought a camera, the masquerade is the most colorful part of the convention, and you can easily shoot up 20 to 40 pictures of costumes. Recent conventions have arranged things so that photographers can have an area of the room to themselves at the masquerade, and sometimes there are separate areas for flash cameras and movie cameras with their light-bars. Find out what the set-up is, and watch out for the other photographers when you're setting off your flash or turning on your light-bar. Most costume-wearers are more than willing to pose for photographs when you ask, or you can try getting them as they come off the platform after passing the judges. Just remember that there are many costumes, and you can't tie up space needed for the judging. A few other rules for the non-contestant are: don't step on parts of costumes that may be trailing on the floor, don't pull at costumes, and don't assume that a contestant can see you and can get out of your way -- some of the costumes involve severe limitations of either vision, or movement, or both. Stu Hoffman generally wore costumes including huge head-masks, from which he couldn't see at all. He had to be led around the floor.

If you want to compete in the masquerade, you should first decide what kind of costume you want to wear. Masquerades generally have prizes for Most Beautiful, Most Authentic, Most Humorous costumes, plus two

or three Judges' Choice awards. The latter can be given for Best Group, Most BEMish, Best Presentation, etc. Once you decide which category you want to go after, you have to select a costume. You can pick a character from a science fiction story, or from a comic book, or make one up out of your own imagination. Other sources are TV, the movies -- any thing that is at all connected with science fiction or fantasy, or with fandom. Prize winners have ranged from direct copies of SF illustrations from books and magazines (Randall Garrett showed up at Detroit as the cover character from his own story "That Sweet Little Old Lady," but he wasn't in competition; Chuck Crayne won an award at the 1967 Westercon with an exact copy of the cover character from Vance's "The Miracle Worker"; and all of Stu Hoffman's fabulous head-mask costumes were direct copies.) to titles made up to fit costumes (Karen Anderson's "A C.L. Moore Character In Search of a Story," for instance.) In between have been comic characters (Spiderman; the Fat Fury), Sword-and-sorcery characters (Conan; Thuvia; a trio from The Broken Sword; Fafhrd-Mouser-Ningauble), undraped females (Joni Cornell/Stopa, several times), and even a pun -- Charlie Brown in Middle Eastern robes and Marsha Brown in an abbreviated bunny costume -- as the Genie with the Light Brown Hare.

The following costumes, unless given an extremely novel and impressive twist, are guaranteed to lose on the grounds of unoriginality: Dracula and other vampires; Frankenstein monsters; Spocks and other Vulcan-eared creatures; costumes with store-bought rubber masks; non-descript medieval costumes; and even undraped female forms, if they do not have enough of a costume-and-title to justify their entering the competition on the basis of something other than anatomy.

Judges in masquerades are getting a little more sophisticated as the years pass, and what might win one year won't the next because it isn't good enough -- either to suit fussier judges, or to beat better competition. Do your best; see what the others have done; and next year do better.

If you have selected a character from a story (or comic, or whatever), get the best description of his/her costume you can find. (A story is sometimes easier than a comic because it may tell you in the description what material to use.) Anyway, start with the description:

"By now was Gorice the King in full festival attire, with his doublet of black tiffany slashed with black velvet and broided o'er with diamonds, black velvet hose cross-gartered with silver-spangled bands of silk, and a great black bear-skin mantle and collar of ponderous gold. The Iron Crown was on his head. He took down from his chamber wall, as they went by, a sword hafted of blue steel with a pommel of bloodstone carved like a dead man's skull. This he bare naked in his hand, and they came into the banquet hall."

Then you see how close you can come to the description with what materials you can get hold of. Tiffany is a thin silk, so a silk-satin can be substituted, and dime-store rhinestones take the place of diamonds. You could use velveteen for the velvet, but you may be able to find real velvet cheap enough, and it does look better. Search the thrift shops for an old fur coat, and you can get the bear-skin mantle (or cloak). The sword may be a problem unless you can get a ceremonial one from Knights of Columbus or some such group, or have some other source of such things. It can be left out, but every added detail improves both your costume and your chances. If you get one, a fake skull from

some toy store can be epoxyed onto the pommel. (Paint it red; no one knows that bloodstone is green with red streaks.) For crowns and other strange metallic objects, an artists' supply store will supply a gallon of Sculp-metal for about \$5. The stuff can be painted onto any framework, and dries like metal -- hard and heavy, and can even be machine-polished. (The Iron Crown called for crab claws in the front, so we took real crab claws, after eating the rest of the crab, and dessicated them by stuffing them into a box of kitty-litter for a few weeks, then covered them with sculp-metal.)

Putting the costume together is another problem. One of Finagle's Laws is that the time you allow yourself to make the thing is never enough. If you can locate a captive seamstress who has some idea of how to adapt patterns into things they weren't supposed to be originally, you've got it made. Try flattering your mother, aunt, sister, wife, mistress, or some such into the job. When it's all done, check for details -- any jewelry needed? (We almost forgot the ring with "the likeness of that worm Ouroboros," for instance.) Try hockshops and the thrift shops for cheap jewelry. When you're sure you've got everything, pack it in a box and take it with you to the convention. Don't trust anyone else to get it there for you if you can possibly do the job yourself. Westercon 18 had a costume which was an excellent copy of a Norton pb cover character -- but the guy's friend got lost with the matching helmet and mask. He won anyway, but the effect was definitely spoiled.)

When time comes for the masquerade, allow plenty of time to get into your costume. Usually, an hour is enough, unless you have to use a lot of body makeup. If you get to the floor early, that's fine -- the early contestant catches the photographers. (Of course, if your costume is uncomfortable, and you can't sit down... .) Once you do hit the floor, stay in character, especially when cameras are on you, and when you finally Walk The Last Mile to the judges. If your costume does not call for eyeglasses, and you can't manage to conceal them under a mask, don't wear them! Even if you're half blind without them, carry them in a pocket, or somewhere else inside the costume. (Barbi Johnson and her husband ruined their interpretation of some Children's Fantasy characters at Discon masquerade by wearing glasses.) Check for watches, out-of-place rings, miscellaneous trash in pockets that shows up. Keep your movements in character: a Fafhrd does not move with the stealth of a Mouser; a Goriceparades, but does not swagger. If you have a presentation gimmick, save it for the judges.

When you go down the judging line, you will present an entry slip to an announcer, giving your name, the title of your costume, and the source of the costume (if any). Make sure he knows how to pronounce them; if he can mispronounce something, he probably will. Play to the audience until you're right in front of the judges, then play to them. When you leave the runway, stay around. Even if you are not called back for another run-through, you may have been selected as a winner without need for a second look, so don't disappear until after all winners have been announced.

And good luck -- I'll see you in the competition.

One last note: If you can afford to stay late the final night of the con, do so. There is usually a Last-Dog party thrown by the con committee, and it may be one of the better parties -- fewer people!