

FANAC 102

westerncon smash hit!

The Westercon began with a breathtaking, suspenseful tour up and down the steep hills of the San Francisco Peninsula, going from one hotel (and city) to another, following the helpful signs the Convention Committee had set up. Depending on which Progress Reports one had (or hadn't) received, one was directed to various hotels, as the Committee had changed its plans. At last, at the St. Francis, one saw no more "PLEASE FORWARD" signs, and, yes, this was the final resting place of the Convention.

Once inside, one found an efficient assembly-line registration had been established by Adrienne and Larry Barnes. One held out money, and the Registration package (two-page mimeoed program, three pages of hektographed changes in the program, ten-page letterpressed list of what the hotel would not allow, and two-page Program Book, all neatly stapled together in one corner) was handed to him. He held out money (no checks or credit cards) to the Hotel, and received a room key. He then held out money to Bruce Pelz, and received three LASFS cupcakes and two LASFS cookies. The convention was off to a good start.

The Program began fashionably late, and Chairman Jerry Jacks made the opening speech, his voice occasionally dimming during the Brownout that prevailed throughout the convention because of the fuel shortage. He explained that the Committee had purposely planned a smaller, more intimate con, "just like the ones before 'Star Trek,' the SCA, and various stupid fueds ruined the cons." He finished to a round of applause and a few thrown battleaxes.

The Huxter Room opened late, as dealers studied through the Manual of Regulations for Dealers, which included an Oath of Allegiance and a half-hour Aptitude Test, before being allowed to set up tables. There was another Brownout -- Charlie was selling LOCUS subs as usual, out of his own room, but wasn't covering the Convention itself because Sampo had been unable to meet his fees.

Several smaller rooms had been set aside for special exhibits, but the one for "Panelology as a Force for Social Relevance" was never completed, as the exhibitors were unable to settle their argument whether to feature Little Lulu or Herbie. The other exhibit, however, on "Parascience in Science Fiction," was evidently a huge success. Run by Isaac Bonewits, it had a stream of people entering each day. (Apparently a second exit from the room was unmarked on the Hotel diagram, as only the "Enter" door was immediately visible, but no one was seen to exit from it.)

The Art Show difficulty started five minutes after it opened, when Norman Spinrad, as Vice-President of SFWA, attempted to enter without showing his membership badge. He had been practicing karate secretly for months, and expected only the usual unarmed guard. It turned out, however, that Sampo, in an effort to economize, had hired Longshoremen, and Spinrad was removed to the hospital with a gaff hook lodged in his pancreas. Some of Norman's fellow pros appealed to Godfather Enterprises, which runs a prozine, for assistance, and an hour later the original security squad followed Spinrad.

Radio reporters broadcast this news "story," and soon afterwards several Teamster busses showed up in the parking lot, while an unusual number of instrument-case-carrying String Quartets began arriving in black limousines. Very soon, even the Creative Anachronists gave up trying to enter the Art Show, as their armor wasn't strong enough.

Hilda's speech, later that afternoon, was heartwarming. She resolved to reopen the Art Show in a gallery down the street, and charge admission. The audience cheered her resourcefulness. Jerry Jacks explained that, ordinarily, the city police would have come to our aid, but they were unwilling to cross the Hotel Call Girls Union picket line, set up to protest unfair competition from the Westercon. Sunday morning, Hilda had an agreement with the gallery, and went to transfer the Art Show. The Music Arranger for the Quartets was reluctant to let her enter, and even went so far as to point his guitar case at her, but Hilda continued her logical reasoning, and presently Mr. Genovese motioned (with an elbow) that she could go inside. (It is uncertain why Genovese was rehearsing a Gary Owens imitation with both arms.) The shattering scene when Hilda emerged and explained that, because of the ricochets and smoke damage inside, there wasn't anything left of the Art Show, will surely rate a sentence or two in one of Warner's books.

However, every cloud has a silver lining. Jerry Pournelle has started a new Analog trilogy based on the tactics of the two opposing groups, and the LASFS Building Fund netted \$763.18 from Bruce Pelz's expert administration of pools on the outcome.

The outstanding Program, of which at least three out of every five items scheduled actually appeared, had many notable features. Sampo, in an effort to provide a popular agenda, had hired Harcourt Fenton Crayne to find out what convention attendees really wanted on the program. He advised sending questionnaires through SFWA, APA H, The Hotelman's Monthly, and the newsletter of the Madison (Wisconsin) Science Fiction Club.

The panel on "The History of Homosexuality in Fandom, As Seen Through LASFS Publications" was an instant success, and the after-panel discussion and demonstration lasted into the early morning. Bruce Pelz reported that the Building Fund netted \$72.45 from sales of lubricants and rubber sundries to the audience. The panel on "Extraterrestrial Biology" was absorbing, especially when David Gerrold, holding aloft a cage full of tribbles, was bitten by one, and the bite proved rabid.

The Masquerade was fabulous. The slight problem when the platform gave way under the weight of two Anachronists who wore full regalia was eventually corrected. Scott Shaw, finding that Sampo had purchased and hidden every jar of peanut butter within ten miles of the hotel, improvised and repeated his now famous costume, but entered it in the Most Authentic category this time. The unfortunate selection of Ed Buchman as a judge was entirely coincidental, and apologies have been accepted on all sides. The intermission was enlivened when twenty of San Francisco's Finest ("The Cockettes") appeared and did their act while staring pointedly at "Jugs" Anderson and making witty remarks. Their challenging Gretchen Schwenn to a Drag Race was a high point of the show. (The LASFS Building Fund netted \$27.32 from suntan lotion sales while contestants were photoed.)

The Banquet was delayed an hour in order to air out the room after the fumigators had finished, but otherwise it went reasonably well. In answer to numerous requests, the Catering Manager explained that the rising cost of meat had compelled a slight alteration in the main course. The Hotel was required to provide the Salisbury Supreme with price and portion-size as originally contracted, and he assured the membership that the unexpected 67-percent soybean content was extremely nutritious. The menu, overall, was delightfully New Wave. Several fans performed an unorthodox experiment with the mashed potatoes, and all agreed that, after the spuds had dried on the wall, they were indistinguishable in color and texture from the original stucco. Elayne reported a net profit of \$82.12 to the Building Fund from sale of Di-Gel, pain-killers, barf-bags, and maps to the location of the LASFS baked-goods sale.

The banquet talks by Dan Goodman and Larry Nielson were excellent, as was George Clayton Johnson's speech when he refused the Invisible Little Man Award to protest the mistreatment of polo ponies in Argentina. That he hadn't won the Award in the first place was not considered relevant, either.

Conventions are always full of surprises, and nothing could have been more traditional than a last-minute surprise. At check-out time on Wednesday it was found that the number of rooms rented had not met Sampp's guarantees to the hotel, and that Jerry Jacks had therefore had to agree to an extra \$5 per day charge on the room rates. And with that we bade farewell to another fun-filled Sampo Westercon, and returned home.