

## I'M NOT BORING YOU, AM I? #7

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## SPECIAL CUFF TRIP REPORT ISSUE Introduction To CUFF

CUFF is the Canadian Unity Fan Fund, and flies a fan from Western Canada to Conventions (Canada's national SF convention) held in the east, or vice versa. In 1981 I was chosen by the fund's founder, Bob Webber, to be the first recipient. Unfortunately, I had to decline the honour. The \$50 he had convinced the Toronto club to donate was insufficient to pay for my return airfare to Toronto, and I had no money of my own. Mike Hall went in my place, but the \$50 cheque with which they presented him bounced.

Things have improved somewhat since then. Fran Skene (Vancouver) organized The Turkey Readings—brilliant fund raisers at which panelists would read out passages from Robert Lionel Fanthorpe<sup>1</sup> and his ilk while conscripted audience members act out the scenes described. Money flows in as those desperately wanting to stop the torture attempt to outbid the sadists who want it to continue. (Large sums are often extorted from the "actors" themselves as they anticipate upcoming developments in, for example, badly written romantic scenes.) Even these fund raisers were outdone by the Turkey Auctions at PineKone (Ottawa), where such items as doodles on paper plates by the artist guest of honour brought big bucks.

Last year the fund took Taral from Toronto to Winnipeg, and paid for his flight, lodgings and meals. This year the fund was able to fly me from Edmonton to Ottawa, pay

<sup>1</sup>Fanthorpe was one of the most prolific SF authors of the late 1950s, and arguably the worst ever. He wrote a book a week while holding another full time job. Writer's groups often read passages aloud from Fanthorpe's work to encourage each other, on the grounds that if he could get published, anyone can.

for my accommodation, and still have money left over for next year.

This was also the first year that balloting extended beyond a few SMOFs to include the general fannish masses; though I must confess that since the other person on the ballot (Steve Forty of Vancouver) spent the entire race campaigning for *me*, it was still a bit of a fix. As the administrator of the fund for 1990, however, I have already been approached by three prominent Easterners about running for next year, so I think it's safe to assume that CUFF has finally established itself as a legitimate fan fund.

So, while we're establishing traditions here, I'd thought I'd borrow one from TAFF and DUFF, and produce the first CUFF trip report.

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## BANFFCON INTERNATIONAL (October 6-8, 1989)

My vacation really started in Banff the weekend before Convention.<sup>2</sup> I took the Greyhound bus down after work on Thursday, October 5th, a six hour journey relieved somewhat by the onboard movie. I thought at first that people were kidding when they said buses showed films, but the new buses do indeed have tiny TV monitors, a VCR, and a limited selection of movies suitable for family viewing that they rotate between buses.

After the movie, I dug out my walkman and listened to tapes of the CBC's half hour radio show, *Vanishing Point*. Both tapes were embarrassingly bad, their mundane authors reinventing the predictable punchlines of ancient SF clichés. Large \*sigh\*.

<sup>2</sup>The Canadian Thanksgiving weekend is traditionally NonCon's (Alberta's regional SF convention) timeslot. But this year the convention committee was drawn from all over the pacific northwest circuit, and Banffcon International was officially a NonCon-MosCon co-production. This meant that coordination among committee members ahead of time left something to be desired, with our respective postal services doing their best to make things even worse, but the con itself came off reasonably well.

observe trends over time, compare styles between regions and ethnic groups, and identify some really outstanding individual artists.

I was particularly relieved to discover contemporary pieces by native artists who were not content to rediscover and preserve traditional themes and styles, but had allowed these to evolve into new forms. While I am a strong proponent of multiculturalism, I am disappointed by those cultural leaders who seem to confuse the maintenance of a separate identity with the rigid observation of traditions a hundred years out of step. In my view, "cultural preservation" is more accurately rendered as "cultural embalming". Minority cultures should seek to evolve as does the dominant society. Who wants to preserve, to take just one obvious example, the sexism of traditional cultures?

Of course Canada's native peoples are somewhat at a disadvantage in that there is no independent nation of Cree or Inuit people who have had the opportunity to develop a modern version of native cultures. Whereas Alberta's German and Icelandic minorities can reference modern Germany or Iceland, the Cree pretty much have to make up modern Cree culture as they go.<sup>13</sup> Nevertheless, keeping the best from native traditions while developing new ideas, literature, and art, seems the only realistic way of (re)creating a viable cultural identity.

The downside of all this is that native postmodern art is as dreadful as the mainstream variety. \*Sigh\* There were a few outstanding exceptions here, however, the best of which was a mural-size painting by Lawrence Paul, "The Universe Is So Big But The White Man Keeps Me On My Reservation". This was vaguely Dali-like, with some surreal native motifs, and would make a great SF cover. I thought this was terrific, full of color and life, but friends told me later that they found it moody, dark and oppressive.

A conceptual sculpture I thought moderately effective was Ron Noganosh's "Canoe 92" a figure in army fatigues and gas

mask, paddling down a river choked with garbage. I also liked most of the Inuit art, and particularly the way a single carving will have a half dozen different faces, such that each slight change in perspective reveals a different story/aspect/feature.

There was also a nice exhibit of crafts on tour at the Museum, worldclass examples of pottery, bookbinding and the like, including some rather fine fabric art by Jonna Staniszkis.

On the whole, however, I think I'll wait until they have the rest of the museum uncraated before I go again.

After returning to the National Art Gallery for the afternoon, I ate supper and spent a quiet evening reading *The Silent City* by Elisabeth Vonarburg. This was the last of the Casper nominees I had yet to read, and I wanted to finish it before the convention.<sup>14</sup>

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## PINEKONE II, CANVENTION 9

(October 13-15, 1989)

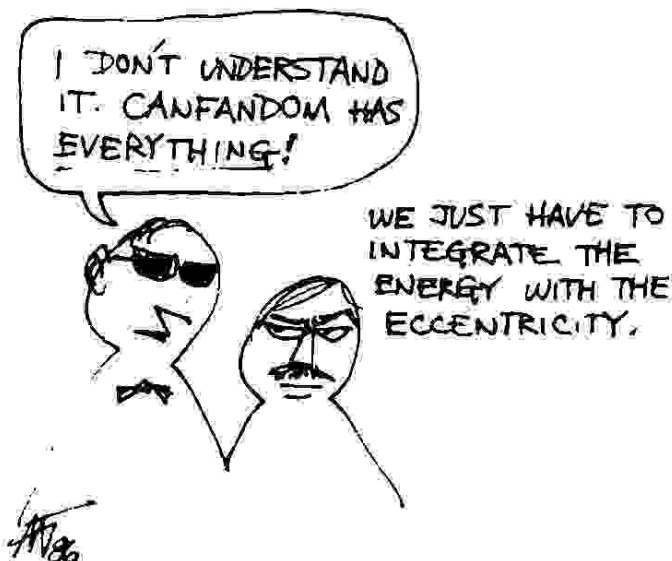
Friday I checked out of my cheap hotel and into the Skyline where the con was to be held. The con was slow getting started, and I understand there were some difficulties with registration and the set up of the dealers' room, but none of this particularly affected me. After chatting with fellow Westerners, Steve Ferty and Randy Reichardt, I eventually found myself at the opening ceremonies.

Somewhat to my surprise, Easterners actually attend the opening ceremonies at their conventions. There were easily 60 people listening to speeches by the Guests of Honour explaining how glad they were to be there. This all seemed rather redundant, since I would be seriously taken aback if any of them were to announce otherwise. When eventually called upon to speak myself, however, I provided a brief explanation of the function of CUFF. To wit: that I was the one fan

<sup>13</sup>Alberta's Ukrainian community feels similarly isolated on the grounds that the Ukraine itself has been subject to Russification.

<sup>14</sup>I had been scheduled to attend a pre-con party Thursday night, but it was 11:30 PM before my hotel remembered to tell me there was a message for me, so by the time I found out where the party was, it was too late.

Westerners were most anxious to ship east, presumably because they had not understood that it was intended as a round trip. This seemed to be well received, and I sat down again. I suppose the whole ceremony was effective in allowing the audience to match faces to descriptions in the program book.



The first major item of programming was the closed meeting of the Speculative Writers Association of Canada (SWAC).<sup>15</sup> This scheduling was a bit unfortunate, as many of the authors who would have attended had not yet arrived, but it was nevertheless a productive meeting. Besides the normal conduct of SWAC business, there were three items worth noting here.

First, the President of the Science Fiction Writers of America, Greg Bear, brought greetings and congratulations from his association. This was followed immediately by similar congratulations and offers of cooperation by David Cherryh, President of the Association of Science Fiction Artists. Of course, both men were at PineKone in their roles as writer and artist guests of honour, but it still looks great in the minutes!<sup>16</sup>

<sup>15</sup>SWAC was founded in July at ConText'89 in Edmonton. This was its second official meeting, and the first in the east.

<sup>16</sup>I must confess that when Randy Reichardt initially informed me that these fellows had expressed interest in attending

Second, Laural Bernard made the very welcomed announcement that Penguin Canada would be launching a line of Canadian speculative fiction under the New American Library's *Roc* imprint. This not only doubles the number of Canadian SF publishers, but suggests the entrance of some real money into the field. Following on the founding of SWAC and the unbelievable high of ConText'89, the announcement reinforced the sense that Canadian SF is finally coming into its own.<sup>17</sup>

Third, Candas Jane Dorsey related the following true story:

Two American tourists staying in the hotel where ConVersion VI was being held observed a group of *Star Trek* fans troop by in full regalia.

"Who are they?" whispered the woman.

"Don't you know anything?" her husband asked. "Look at those red uniforms, for heaven's sake! They're Mounties."

After the SWAC meeting I went to supper with former Edmonton fans, Christine Kulyk and David Vereschagin, now resident in Toronto. My best friends for many years, we had a lot of catching up to do and we talked until about 1 AM. I then went to the party hosted by Fan Guest, Michael Skeet and his wife Lorna Toolis (head of the Spaced Out Library). I got to bed about 3 AM.

Saturday morning I dragged myself out of bed in time to catch the tail end of the Convention 9 business meeting. (A slightly

<sup>16</sup>(cont'd) our meeting, images of Jimmy Hoffa "explaining" things to a breakaway Canadian union had briefly flashed through my mind. In the event, they both proved extremely gracious and supportive.

<sup>17</sup>Laural Bernard also provided Candas Jane Dorsey with the perfect straight line by asking what "SFWA" was. After months of the providing various people with the most succinct and obvious explanation of SWAC's function, Candas was at last able to say to someone, "SFWA is the American equivalent of SWAC".

abridged version of the minutes from that meeting are presented in Appendix B.) Then I sat on the fanzine panel with Steve Forty (former editor, *BCSFazine*), Michael Skeet (*MLR*), and Lionel Wagner (*Ottawa Statement*). While I'm not convinced that the panel made any particular sense to our 15 audience members, I did reflect later that there were two distinct approaches to editing represented.

On the one hand, Wagner and Forty adhere to the "print-everything-you-get" school, which emphasizes club participation and a pragmatic approach to logistics. Wagner argued, for example, that by having his contributors submit their own typed copy, he not only eliminated the tedious task of typing up each issue, but assured his contributors complete editorial freedom. Similarly, while Forty did retype submissions, his goal was to get as many club members involved as possible.

Skeet, on the other hand, writes much of the issue himself, based on information submitted. For him, editing implies more than the mere collation of other people's material, requiring not only the editor's active intervention, but the imposition of high standards in the selection of what gets published.

I would argue that the appropriate approach depends entirely on the nature of the zine in question. I agree with Wagner and Forty that a club newsletter belongs to all the members and should therefore act as their forum, even if this occasionally means including material which is not entirely up to standard. On the other hand, genzines, personal zines, and the like should be a reflection of the editor's taste and abilities, and therefore requires a rather stronger editorial presence.

Following the fanzine panel I went to Elisabeth Vonarburg's signing. Since no one had apparently thought to organize with the dealers to have copies of her book available for sale, there weren't a lot of people lined up for autographs. \*Sigh\* Well, I shouldn't complain too loudly since it gave me the opportunity to meet and speak with her at some length.

I was fascinated to realize, for example, that coverart can suffer in translation too. I asked Elisabeth what she thought of the cover to *The Silent City*, and she admitted that she

didn't like it. I was surprised, since I had thought it rather good, especially given the terrible track record of other Canadian publishers. She then pointed out that the female figure on the cover can be interpreted as making an obscene gesture in French. Of course I recognized this once she had pointed it out, but I must have looked at that cover a hundred times without it ever occurring to me before. It's not a gesture anglophones ever use. Now, unfortunately, I can't look at the cover without it bothering me!

I also asked her why she chose to write the novel in the present tense. She shrugged and said that's just how it came to her, but added that she had thought of a rather clever rationalization for it after the fact: From the city's point of view, everything is happening in the "now". Brilliant, eh?<sup>18</sup>

Elisabeth also gave me the very good news that Jane Brierley has undertaken to translate some more of Vonarburg's stories.

I talked briefly with Yves Meynard, one of Quebec's nicest fans, and had a quick lunch. I returned to catch part of Elisabeth Vonarburg's reading.<sup>19</sup> This was a rather nifty short story with a philosophical bent about a little girl who turns off her electrically enhanced senses one by one. This was followed by readings by Shirley Meier. Neither of the stories she read were SF, but they were quite pleasant. (What I can't understand is how a woman who writes charming stories about chocolate bars and small boys growing sunflowers can turn around and collaborate with a guy who makes Jerry Pournell look like a squeamish pacifist.)

I have no recollection of the next couple of hours, but it probably involved tours of the artshow and dealers' rooms. The artshow was quite good, and while there were a number of familiar prints and the usual assortment of dragons and spaceships, at least most of the artists were new to me. I think a number of eastern artists could do quite well at

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<sup>18</sup>This won't make any sense to you if you haven't read the book, but take my word for it, it is brilliant.

<sup>19</sup>Unfortunately, my watch was running 20 minutes slow, and it took me three or four panels to realize it, so I kept arriving late for things. Brain the size of a planet, and I still can't tell time.



conventions in the West and vice versa, simply because they would be reaching new audiences. David Cherryh's work also helped to raise the tone of the artshow (he's much better than I expected somehow), but I couldn't help comparing his work with that of the Dillons. Looking at the \$7,200 price tag on one of his originals (which was probably worth it), I kept thinking of the Dillon originals going for \$1200 at ConText, and me flat broke! Talk about frustration.

The dealers' rooms, while small, had some interesting displays. There was one of the best tables of Lovecraft, *Weird Tales* and so on that I've ever seen, though I'm not into such things myself. The second dealers' room was for fan stuff, where I picked up a subscription to the *Ottawa Statement* and various back issues.

Somewhat to my surprise, I was invited to the banquet and seated next to Michael Skeet at the head table. I thought the food rather better than typical for such functions, and enjoyed the usual upbeat, congratulatory banquet speeches. (Greg Bear: It's great to be in Canada. David Cherryh: It's great to do art. Fiest: It's great to be honoured with a GoHship.) Realizing somewhat belatedly that I would probably be called upon to speak, I wrote a few notes on the general theme of "Fandom Is A Family" and awaited my turn. I was somewhat dismayed to hear Michael give his speech on the theme "Famdnon Is A Family" a couple of minutes ahead of me, and so switched to a few brief comments on "The Purpose of CUFF". I was therefore definitely dismayed to hear the MC explaining "The Purpose of CUFF" as he introduced me. I ended up extemporizing something on the "Ecology of Fandom" theme:

#### CUFF Speech<sup>20</sup>

First of all, I would like to thank you all for making me so welcome at your convention. I'd also like to thank everyone who voted for me. I'd especially like to thank my campaign manager, Steve Forty. I'm sure I couldn't have won without Steve's tireless efforts on my behalf. What makes this so unique, of course, is that Steve was the other candidate this year. ((Laughter)) That's the

sort of generosity of spirit that makes fandom what it is.

I've been corresponding with fans in the east for 17 years, but this has been my first opportunity to meet any of them in person. It's also been an opportunity for me to get together with a few friends who've moved here from Edmonton, and of course, to meet many new people. So I'd like to second everything that Michael said about the importance of conventions, about fandom as family, and about why we're in fandom.

The thing that I've noticed here, though, is that I keep seeing people I know out of the corner of my eye. I'll see someone go by and I'll think, "There's Ken", and then I'll stop myself because I realize that Ken is 3000 kilometers away and that can't possibly be him. I keep seeing the people I always see at conventions or at club meetings, only it isn't really them at all.

So I've come to the conclusion that there is an ecology to fandom: that every local club or convention has the same set of ecological niches fills them with the same sort of people. Every club has its compulsive photographer, its hippy musician, its natural MC, its femme fatal, its space cadet, its currrly-beared physicist, its long haired scholar, and so on. Every club is the same. That means that everyone of you has his or her twin in Edmonton fandom. Every one of you has been cloned!



<sup>20</sup>Reconstructed as best as I remember it.

The corollary of all this is that wherever you go in Canada, or the world for that matter—wherever your job or education or wanderlust takes you—there is a niche waiting for you in the local fandom there. You have friends waiting for you wherever you go.

Thank you, and thank CUFF for showing me my friends here.

Well, not much of a speech really, but I was one of the last of a long list of speakers, so I didn't want to push my luck. Madona Skaff then announced the winners in the PineKone II short story contest, and set some kind of record in that not one of the seven people called upon was actually present. After a short break, the Casper Awards ceremony got underway.

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## CASPER AWARDS

(October 14, 1989)

The 1989 Canadian Science Fiction and Fantasy Association Award Ceremony was the best ever. The Awards committee was very professional, and made a glamorous production out of it. (The glitzy setting in the Skyline Ballroom helped a lot.) The committee members alternated between English and French; and working in pairs, would alternate reading out the definition of the category, then the nominees, and finally the winner. What made the event really exciting was that most of the winners were in attendance, and as this or that name was called out, the table at which they were sitting would explode with the enthusiastic screams of friends and supporters. The whole thing was very impressive.<sup>21</sup>

This stands in sharp contrast to when I ran the awards ceremony six years ago at NonCon 5. Then there was just the single

<sup>21</sup>The only thing I would have done differently is to have reversed the order and started with the fan awards first, then alternated French and English categories. That way the novel categories would have been announced last, thus building the tension even more.

award, not very many voters, and the winner was 2000 kilometers away. No one got very excited to hear that she had—predictably—won. Where my announcement drew polite applause, this year's audience reacted with real emotion. Tension remained high as nine different awards were distributed to a field where the competition is now sufficiently tough that the winning entry is no longer a forgone conclusion.

This sustained excitement also reflects the greater voter participation than ever before. Voting on the Caspers now exceeds, on a per capita basis, every other national SF award, including the Hugos. Paul Valcour and Jean-Louis Trudel deserve credit for compiling and publicizing extensive lists of eligible nominees, thereby increasing voter participation to the point where the Caspers may now be considered a credible award. (Michael Skeet's reviews in *MLR* of all the English language works eligible for nomination was also a significant factor in raising reader interest in the awards and Canadian SF.) The Casper Awards Committee, chaired by Maureen McKenna, deserves its own round of applause.

## THE WINNERS

### Best Long-Form Work In English:

William Gibson, *Mona Lisa Overdrive*

### Best Short-Form Work In English:

Candas Jane Dorsey, "Sleeping In A Box", from *Machine Sex and Other Stories*

### Best Work In English (Other):

Gerry Truscott, editor *Porcepic/Tesseract Books*

### Meilleur Livre en Français:

Esther Rochon, *Le Traversier, Le Préambule*

### Meilleure Nouvelle En Français:

Joël Champetier, "Survie sur Mars", *L'Année de la SF et du F Québécois 1987*, *Le Passeur*

### Meilleure Ouvrage (Autre):

Luc Pomerleau, *Solaris*, #77-81.

### Fan Achievement/Activité Fanique (Organizational):

Paul Valcour, PineKone I Treasurer and Chair, Steering Committee

Fan Achievement/Activité Fanique  
(Fanzine):

Micheal Skeet, *MLR* editor.

Fan Achievement/Activité Fanique  
(Other/Autre):

Robert Runté, *NCF Guide to Canadian  
Science Fiction and Fandom*, 3rd edition.

HM. MAYBE IF I GIVE HIS  
HAT A SPIN IT WILL GET HIM  
TO PUB HIS ISH.



I was inordinately pleased to win, of course. This year's trophy was a handsome plaque designed by Larry Stewart. It was presented to us blank, the names to be engraved shortly thereafter, as the balloting had remained open until noon at the convention itself. Unfortunately, the Awards Committee insisted on arranging for the engraving themselves—I was secretly hoping I could put "Best Novel" on mine when they weren't looking.

After the awards ceremony, I again went off with David and Christine. They packed it in about midnight, and I went to the consuite and partied until 3AM.

The next morning I again dragged myself out of bed for the second Convention business meeting, slightly abridged minutes for which are supplied in Appendix C.

## FRANCOPHONE SF

The next item of interest was the panel on "A Comparison of French Canadian and American SF" with Jean-Louis Trudel, Yves Meynard, Lorna Toolis, Guy Sirois, and Elisabeth Vonarburg.

Elisabeth Vonarburg started with a review of the four elements Colombo had identified ten years ago as "typically Canadian" in his *Other Canadas* anthology: the polar world, the national disaster scenario,<sup>22</sup> the alienated outsider, and the prevalence of fantasy over hard SF. In contrast, francophone authors have no interest in polar fiction or political projection whatsoever, and there isn't even a term for fantasy (of the dragon and unicorn type) in French. The "alienated outsider", however, is a characteristic theme of francophone fiction.

Elisabeth also cited as applicable to Quebec, Margaret Atwood's identification of the "survival" theme in Canadian literature, and a preoccupation with the environment.<sup>23</sup>

Yves spoke at length on the absence of credible science in francophone SF. There are few SF writers in Quebec with a scientific background, which contrasts sharply with the anglophone tradition. What little science is present in francophone SF is generally out of date, with nothing more current than the General Theory of Relativity. Yves noted that Luc Pomerleau had just published (in *Solaris*) the first of a two part essay criticising this scientific illiteracy in francophone SF.

<sup>22</sup>E.g., the over 40 anglophone SF works set in a future where Quebec has separated from the rest of Canada, or the stories where the Americans have overrun the country.

<sup>23</sup>I would argue that Colombo's "polar world" theme doesn't apply to anglophone authors either. Colombo defined anyone writing about the North as writing "Canadian" SF, so his analysis at this point was tautological. Instead, most critics now generally describe this feature of Canadian SF in the broader and more accurate phrase "an awareness of the impact of the environment on characterization".

Jean-Louis responded that this reflected Luc's prejudice in favor of the physical sciences, and that Quebec's SF was doing quite well in keeping up with developments in the biological and "soft" sciences.

Elisabeth suggested that Quebec was influenced by the technophobic attitudes found in France (which have deep historical and social roots). She quoted a French critic as saying that this technophobic attitude, and the fact that most of France's writers come out of the humanities, has meant that they are too narrow-minded or too lazy to research the scientific backgrounds of their stories. Similarly in Quebec, most writers are intimidated by the science required by their stories, and so leave it implicit.<sup>24</sup>

Yves felt that this is why Quebec's authors have trouble selling to *Analog*. Even when their science is correct, it remains in the background as just another element of setting. American readers are used to having the characters stop every few pages to discuss the science behind what is happening, and if francophone authors want to sell to the American market, they had better be prepared to include such expository lumps, or at least more scientific buzzwords.

Lorna Toolis commented that Americans like the nuts and bolts of the science to show.

Elisabeth identified another major difference between American and francophone SF: that the former is optimistic while the latter tends to be pessimistic. Everytime a francophone author submits work to an American editor, it always comes back with a letter that starts, "You are undoubtedly a good writer, but.... your story is too pessimistic." This is extremely frustrating, but everyone in Quebec has experienced the same thing. Canadian editors, on the other hand, have never rejected a story simply

because it was pessimistic.

Lorna pointed out that American stories tend to be very problem-oriented. The viewpoint character is presented with a clearly defined problem and he solves it. American readers have been brought up on television, which packages stories in a fifty-four minute format, complete with happy ending. She contrasted this with Canadian literature in which the problems are vaguely perceived, messily resolved, and one is left with the impression that the characters' lives keep going even after the curtain comes down on this particular scene.

Candas Jane Dorsey said that when she reads a story she judges it on its total impact, but is probably influenced the most by the writing at the emotional and social levels, and is less concerned with the science or whether the problem got solved. She therefore suggested that Canadians even *read* differently than Americans, based on a different cultural mindset.<sup>25</sup>

Elisabeth objected that she was not entirely convinced because Quebec fans were still reading American SF in translation. Even after 15 years of Quebecois SF, *Solaris*'s readership was still demanding that its contributors write more like the American mass market authors. Yves noted that that was true of every country. Elizabeth agreed that this was true of everybody except the Americans, because, after all, science fiction is essentially an American genre. (Fran Skene and I replied simultaneously that it may have been *up to now!* The new generation of Canadian writers is about to change all that.)

Candas talked about the problem of cultural imperialism, emphasizing that while there was no conscious intent on the part of Americans to dominate world culture, the reality was that the rest of the world was undergoing *coke-a-colonization*. When Marshall McLuhan had talked about the global village, he hadn't quite understood that it was going to be a suburb of Los Angeles. A healthy regionalism is necessary to fight off this overwhelming cultural presence.

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<sup>24</sup>As a sociologist, I should also point out that until the Quiet Revolution of the 1960s, Quebec's francophone schools and universities were devoted almost entirely to the liberal arts, law and religion. Quebec's elite became poets, lawyers, or politicians, and left technical and business education to the uncultured English. It is only recently that Quebec has revamped the education system to increase scientific literacy.

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<sup>25</sup>Note that Canadas, the current *Tesseract* editor, is taking the opposite position to that adopted by Algis Budrys in his talk.



There was some debate among the panelists as to whether Quebec was influenced by American SF. Guy argued that while the readers may be overwhelmed by the American presence, the writers tended to react against it. Even though 80 to 90 percent of what they were reading was American, they still wrote completely different kinds of books themselves. Elisabeth replied that some critics did see a strong American influence in Canadian and Quebecois SF.

Yves addressed the issue of the language barrier by pointing out that it is difficult to write American SF in French, because you can't say "warp drive engines" in less than fifteen words. French is not a language for engineers. Jean-Louis added that "warp drive engines" in French came out as a sort of metaphor, which gives an entirely different resonance to French SF.

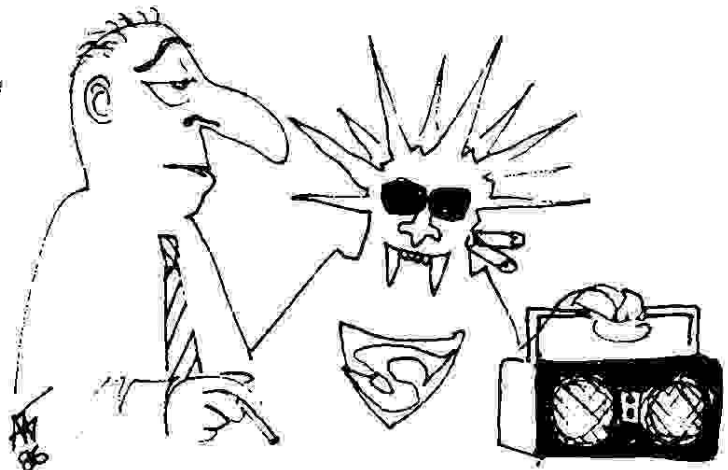
Elisabeth complained that many of Quebec's new writers automatically pick English names for their characters because that is what they are used to seeing in American SF. This isn't an issue for American or Canadian writers who simply assume that the future belongs to John Smith, but for a francophone, choosing John Smith means something quite different. Who can really believe that 100 years from now the space station will be manned by Yves and Jacques? To write such a story would require a lot of explanation. So even choosing the character's name becomes a conscious political act.

Jean-Louis agreed, arguing that science fiction is a genre produced by an expanding empire, confident that the future belongs to it. Now that the Americans are experiencing some self-doubts, there has been a sudden revival of interest in fantasy, which is essentially a harkening back to a lost golden age.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>26</sup>I would also argue that as their dominant position in the world starts to be eroded by Japan Inc.; as they begin to worry about global warming and other environmental issues; as Americans themselves start to have second thoughts about the benefits of technology, they will be much more open to the themes commonly found in Canadian SF. Current social and economic trends suggest that

After the panel, Candas commented to me that while all of the panelists and 90% of the audience had been francophone, they had conducted the entire panel in English without difficulty for the benefit of the five anglos present. We, on the other hand, could not have done the same for them. \*Guilt\*Guilt\*

LE CULTURAL IMPERIALISM,  
C'EST ANGLOPHONE.



Next, I sat on the "Canadian SF: A Literary History" panel, with John Bell, Michael Skeet, and Jean-Louis Trudel. Since I hadn't actually been informed ahead of time what panels I would be on, I had nothing prepared from a specifically historical perspective, and just rambled on incoherently. Jean-Louis Trudel, on the other hand, presented his thorough research on the history of SF in Quebec from the 1600s to the present day. It was quite good. John Bell reminisced about the Colombo and *Visions From The Edge* anthologies, and Michael moderated.

At 5:00 I went to the Closing Ceremonies which, like the Opening Ceremonies, were well attended. Here I was presented with yet another unexpected honour, a PineKone T-Shirt and mug. Whatever else can be said

<sup>26</sup>(cont'd) Canadian writers have a unique window of opportunity to form the next big artistic movement in SF.

about the convention, PineKone certainly went out of its way to ensure that the CUFF winner felt welcome and an important part of the convention.

SWAC reconvened briefly at 6:00 PM to hear the report of the membership committee. The meeting essentially adopted Michael Skeet's proposal that SWAC accept as members any Canadian with one professionally published SF story, and Michael's definitions of "Canadian", "professional", "published", and "SF". SWAC will also consider for membership individuals with a substantial professional interest in SF (e.g., specialized editors, publishers, critics, academics, etc.) on a case by case basis. This is not quite the final word, as the general membership will want to have a say when this proposal is published in *SWACCESS*, the SWAC newsletter, but I think it will probably stand.

I had supper with David and Christine again, reviewed David's *Tesseract* submission,<sup>27</sup> worked on an essay with Christine, and talked about the nature of art until midnight. Then I retired to the consuite.

Here, Steve Forty, Michael Skeet and I smuffed with Paul Valcour late into the morning. Paul is one of the neatest, most together guys I have ever met, and meeting him was definitely one of the highlights of my trip. Much of our discussion Sunday night concerned Paul's next major project (which I will leave for him to announce, when and if it comes about), but we also discussed fandom, con-running, dating, and the ultimate question of life, the universe, and everything.

Some of the behind-the-scene operations of eastern conventions strikes me as very bizarre, particularly in the way they are

financed. I'm still a little vague on some of the details, but I take it that wealthy conventions invest in smaller ones as a sort of corporate diversification strategy. And I was amazed at the size of the personal financial losses individuals (called "patrons") were prepared to accept as a routine element of running a con. I mean, sure, any con can miscalculate and lose money, and it's great when people chip in to bail them out (as happened with ConText'89), but it seemed to me that some of the patrons went in *knowing* they were going to lose *thousands* of dollars. This is nuts.

I was shocked, for example, to discover that some attendees still expected to receive a slick post-con publication, even though they knew the con was already in debt and that the \$2500+ required would have to come out of the personal finances of one or more committee members. While I certainly understand the disappointment of contributors when a publication which has accepted their submissions fails to materialize, the best laid plans of mice and men oft gang astray, and maturity is learning to cope with these little disappointments. For every zine that fails, there are another ten to which material can be resubmitted. Yet I watched several people give Paul a hard time over the cancellation of this project. I was not impressed.

Monday I had lunch with Paul Valcour and artist Larry Stewart, and had an uneven flight back to Edmonton.

All in all, the convention was almost more business trip than vacation. I took minutes at both SWAC meetings and one of the Convention meetings; I sat on two panels and gave three speeches; I did business deals with Candas and Christine; I workshopped a short story and an essay; I collected an award; I made dozens of eastern contacts and smuffed into the wee hours. It was great!<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup>Which was brilliant. I tried to drag him over to meet Candas, but he was afraid it would look too much like he was trying to glad-hand his way out of the slushpile. I got roughly the same reaction from Sean Stewart, another potentially brilliant newcomer, at ConText'89. I'm beginning to think this is a defining characteristic of genius. In my experience, the louder the self-promotion and the more strident a person's claim to "professional" status, the less likely they are to have any actual talent. \*Sigh\*

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<sup>28</sup>Candas Jane Dorsey similarly observed to me that she had spent the whole convention doing business. If that isn't a sign that Canadian SF and the national convention have come of age, I don't know what would be. I mean, my ghod, *there are now enough deals to be done to keep us busy for a whole weekend!*