

SFAV FROM 1981 TO 1983

by Garth Spencer

In March of 1981, SFAV held a rather successful one-day con, Fair-Isle, at the University of Victoria, in cooperation with the University of Victoria SF Association. The subsequent reports indicate that guests and hosts enjoyed themselves. SFAV made a profit sufficient to pay for a second-hand ditto machine.

From March onwards SFAV's newsletter indicates plans being laid for the usual round of events: parties, summer activities, an Easter benefit dinner, a mall display, etc. In June came an editorial complaint of the lack of submissions, of apparent club apathy. The club may have been getting into a rut; the October From the Ashes pointed out the need for recruiting "new blood," for stimulation, ideas and enthusiasm.

By January 1982, plans were laid for the next minicon, "Imagine," a joint UFCST-UVicSFA venture in which several SFAV members participated. Dixie Sackett, and later Julian Reid, read about (and from) the work of Jack Williamson (the prospective Pro guest of honor) at SFAV meetings. Activities planned or engaged in at meetings included the Timmy's Telethon benefit dinner, discussions of SF and why we read it, talks on other subjects of interest to members, and progress reports on Imagine.

There were two minor problems at Imagine. Jack Williamson had to cancel,² as the U.S. Mail refused to get his ticket to him on time; and the timing of Imagine

conflicted with Rain, BCSFA's relaxicon on the same February weekend. The Imagine concom agreed with Vancouver not to schedule local minicons within a month of theirs.

The first sign of Constellation was a briefing Bernie Klassen gave SFAV at the meeting of Feb. 28th. We heard about some fans, unknown to most of us, who proposed to put on quite a big con in Victoria. At the same meeting, several members mentioned the proposal to form VISFCSC, the Vancouver Island SF Con Steering Committee. Its purpose at this time was to keep records of local minicons for future con committees, in the hope that "if information is kept from year² to year, we may make fewer of the same silly mistakes." (FTA/Phoenix, Vol. 3 no. 2/April '82).

SFAV's publications, From the Ashes and Phoenix, were combined in 1982 into one bimonthly zine, FTA/Phoenix. The April number carried an ad from the Constellation committee. On May 2nd a Constellation committee member made a presentation to SFAV, describing their planned program and soliciting gofers.

The Constellation affair dominated 1982 and 1983 in Victoria fandom. In a nutshell, the committee (led by some mediafens who had shown up at some UVicSFA meetings) wished to put on a three-day media-oriented ("professional") con, with upwards of 1500--2500 people and five CoHs -- despite their lack of funding, experience, or knowledge of local fandom. The SF clubs in town did not find the concept of the con credible, and they were

a little riled that it was advertised as Victoria Con 1, and so on, and so on. The concom began to perceive the lack of support as an attack. A feud developed. Paula Johanson's Atrazine describes as much of the affair as bears on the mistakes in running a con.

At the May 30th SFAV meeting, a letter from UVicSFA was read and discussed, which disclaimed any connection between Constellation and the university club. In the June FTA/Phoenix, D. "Mac" MacInnes (the president in 1982 and 1983) discussed Constellation, and the feud, and what he saw as people on both sides descending² to personalities and unfounded rumour-mongering. (A year later, I observed editorially that he and I disagreed about how much basis there was for the mounting paranoia.)²

Meanwhile, SFAV set its summer schedule, discussed a joint dinner with the UFCST, and scheduled elections and a SFAV Open House. I pleaded for more submissions to FTA/Phoenix. The Central Ganglion #1 appeared on May 11 -- an inter-club newsletter conceived by Bernie, Paula Johanson and myself (the Ganglion of Four), with the aim in view of facilitating communication between the clubs. Later, the Ganglion served as a means of common publicity.

The Central Ganglion #2 reported on the joint mall display. Paul Delaney (now in Manitoba) locced that issue, pointing out that SFAV and Victoria fandom might be suffering from lack of growth and complacency -- as Bernie had written in #1 -- but we tended also to suffer from lack of communication, so the Ganglion was a good idea. Paula pointed out in Ganglion #3 that no communication about fandom reaches 90% of science fiction readers.

At the Sept. 5 SFAV meeting, members proposed asking for an interview on CFMS to promote the club and the Open House. Karl Johanson asked whether SFAV might be listed as supporting Concept, the minicon planned for 1983. This came to confusion as SFAVians could not decide whether enough members were present for a vote, or what quorum was. Mac declared provisionally that we did support Concept.

The October FTA/Phoenix, a large issue produced for the Open House, con-

tained three items of interest here. I editorialized on an emerging issue: the² UFCST was much given to constitutional² rules and regulations, and to Robert's Rules of Order, while SFAV (as far as I could make out) was averse to formal organization. I pointed out that to get anything done required a minimal level of organization, a core of rules; but more than a minimum was undesirable.

That issue also published the VISFCSC constitution and an article by Bernie Klassen, "A Status Report on Victoria Fandom." In the constitution, the objects of VISFCSC included not only keeping records, but fostering a convention philosophy for Victoria, and "a continuity of standards, sequencing and knowledge." (Sequencing, because the Constellation organizers had picked a date within a week of Rain.)

Bernie's article addressed the issue of fan recruitment. As he saw it, all three SF clubs in Victoria were smaller than they needed to be, they were not recruiting enough members, and complacency was setting in. Given the amount of fanac in town, the static fan population was liable to "begin birthing growing numbers of 'old fen and tired'," and "the end result of this is a slow but steady decline." He urged that the clubs plan "coordinated, but individual" publicity events, and continual, ongoing recruitment.

Paul Delaney locced from Manitoba in the following FTA/Phoenix: "Your last 'Raking the Coals,' plus Bernie's article, are comments on an ongoing problem. Further, all problems arise from some personal conflicts, or perhaps lack of strong, sound leadership ..."

I wondered at the time if he understood the situation. The problem Bernie was pointing at was the complacency, or lack of energy, in the majority of club members. Perhaps there was a lack of leadership, but personality conflicts didn't enter into it.

Bernie and Paula left for Edmonton in 1982, removing (for a while) one of the centres of fanac in town.

At the first SFAV meeting in 1983, Dan Cawsey announced that Concept had folded. This was a shock; the SUB had been booked, and the concom had been

meeting, but there is no record of any decisions being made on guests of honor or on programming. Dan reported that the feuding with Constellation had so sapped the energy of the concom that not much² was left for Concept. Further, as he later remarked, it came to seem as if this concom were holding Concept simply in spite of Constellation. A two-man PR delegation from Constellation, at the next SFAV meeting, was shocked to hear of some of the harrassment Dan and Paula had received. Not three days later -- at the end of January -- J.D. Waryk phoned me to say Constellation had folded.

The February FIA/Phoenix carried another loc from Paul Delaney:

Well, 1983 is off to an ignominious start for Victorian SF fandom. Firstly, the collapse of Constellation Con, perhaps not an unexpected event, but nonetheless a sad situation. Then the decision to call off Concept, a disheartening turn of events but again, not totally surprising given the recent divisivity [sic] of Victoria fandom ... Finally the departure of Paula Johanson and Bernie Klassen from Victoria ...

I hate to nitpick but Paul still missed the point slightly. He missed the fact that, in the Constellation affair, all the clubs were on one side. On the other were those of the Constellation committee who would hear no reasoned arguments for scaling down their plans. Since the divisiveness was not between the clubs, it was a surprise that Concept should be called off.

At about this time, I was wondering when the SFAVians would lend more active support to the kind of activities that were on the club agenda. So in the February 1983 editorial I listed my various functions and let people know I expected to lay them down near the end of the year.

In the April FIA/Phoenix I swore up and down that I was not a Secret Master of Fandom. Where it calmed down, I pointed out that I was filling at least four offices for SFAV, and how soon I expected to vacate them, and what I expected SFAVians to do.

Observation

From time to time it is in order to find out what your club is into. I now feel that, at a time when I was editor, information officer, VISFCSC representative and acting secretary, I was out of touch with the real interests of my club.

For seeing movies, playing FRP games, or having parties, members would put forth quite enough effort. For putting out a fanzine, or putting on a con, or carrying on constant recruitment, there was quite a bit less effort forthcoming.

I got quite frustrated because I thought cons and zines and so on were what an SF club was all about, what it was for, but if anyone was participating, it was the sprinkling of new members we gained in this period.

A few new faces did join, including two who had been on the Constellation committee. 1982 and 1983 were not great years of growth for anyone. But Victoria fans were forced to find some unity of goals and actions. If we have any intelligence, we'll pursue a common direction now.