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"A Con-Running Metaphor"

The
Art
of the
Con

Argentus Presents the Art of the Con

Steven H Silver

Welcome to the second special edition of *Argentus*. While the first, published in 2005, included articles by fans who have appeared on a variety of game shows, this one presents a series of essays on the philosophy behind various aspects of con-running. Needless to say, each article is the opinion of the individual authors and is open to debate, argument, and even agreement. Some of the topics covered include registration, programming, filk, the dealer's room, badges, the Green Room, and films. There are even more topics that aren't included at the moment, but I would love for this to be a living document and if any readers feel they have something to add, either on a topic not covered or one already included, I would be happy to have the article for inclusion.

In general, these articles are less "How To" articles and more a look at the philosophy behind running any of these particular portions of a convention. Partly, this is because when it comes down to the "How to," each person has their own way of doing things that work for them. Ann Totusek could tell you where she buys her Green Room supplies, but if you aren't in Iowa, there is a reasonable chance that the shopping in your area is different from where she lives. Granted, their specific suggestions might not always match your own technique, but each of the articles should give you some pointers and ideas about what things you should be considering when running a convention. To that end, I've asked different people to write on the same subject, so both Patty Wells and Baron David Romm have contributed a look at Opening Ceremonies.

So please sit back, read, and enjoy, perhaps learn something. And feel free to send in additional articles discussing con-running for future inclusion in *Argentus Presents the Art of the Con*.

Argentus is published once a year by Steven H Silver, occasionally with an extra, special edition (which this is). All submissions, letters, or other correspondence should be directed to him at 707 Sapling Lane, Deerfield, IL 60015 or e-mailed to shsilver@sfsite.com. Issues of *Argentus* are available for \$5.00 or "the usual." The *Argentus* website can be found at www.sfsite.com/~silvervag/argentus.html

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Hotel Relations—A Philosophical Discussion

Ben Yalow

Fandom has been using hotels for conventions since just about the beginning of SF conventions. And a bunch of knowledge has been gained over the last seventy years about how to make the relationship work, some of it even true.

There are a few general principles that, if used, can be useful in making for a successful con, over the long term. I'd like to try to talk a bit about what they are, and how to turn those into useful practices.

The first thing to keep in mind is that, for the last twenty years or so, hotels have been in business to make money (until then, they weren't, but that's a different article). That means that if they don't make money, their people all lose their jobs—so they've got an incentive to have the hotel make money. And while the person who you negotiate with for a contract is typically called something like "sales manager", and you aren't, that doesn't mean that you aren't just as much of a sales manager as your counterpart. The sales manager's job is to sell the hotel to meetings, at a set of pricing that lets the hotel reach its profit targets. Your job is to show the hotel how to make money by booking your con.

In some ways, we start out with a real disadvantage in that task—we don't have a lot of money for the hotel to make, compared with corporate groups, or even professional associations. So, to make up for lack of money, we have a few things we can try to use to make booking us worthwhile.

Our major weapon is the cost structure of a hotel. They make a *lot* of money on a rack rate room. In general, their variable cost for that room is typically about a quarter to a third of that rack rate—all the rest is contribution towards profit. So if they can sell that room, even at a steep discount, it's better than leaving it vacant. That *doesn't* mean they can get away with selling all their rooms at such a huge discount. Hotel costs are

dominated by the fixed cost of paying off the mortgage on the land and construction costs, so if everybody got their rooms at the variable rate, the hotel wouldn't be able to make the mortgage payments, and it would go out of business. But it does mean they've got a fair amount of wiggle room to negotiate with.

However, the key to making this work in our favor is to fill rooms that other people (who are presumably willing to pay higher rates) won't fill. They'd much rather sell a room to us for \$100 rather than let it sit empty—but, if they think they can sell two rooms to other people for \$150, or sell three to us for \$100, they'd rather sell two, and let the third sit empty. So we need to look at dates/places that people who pay more than us don't want.

Which means that we go to Boston (twice!) for major cons in the middle of winter. And we spend Easter at a con, and Thanksgiving dinner is at Loscon. It's not that those dates are ideal—but they give us the rates we need.

Our other major weapon is knowledge. Our group profiles are different from many other groups, and hotels might well not understand us. So we have the chance to explain ourselves in ways that help them understand us, and make us a better fit for them. This *doesn't* mean we lie to them—**NEVER** lie to them—but it does mean we get to write the script. But, to do that, it means we do better the more we know, both about what we, as a con, are really like, and what they, as a hotel really want. So, ideally, when they're constructing the profit/loss statement for the hotel about how much they'll make by booking us, we're in a position to do the same thing. They're a lot more standard than we are; we can learn their business much more easily than they can learn ours, so it means that we can try to do so.

But, in order to take advantage of that, we need to know ourselves, and them. Know your con—how many rooms do you

pick up, do you eat in the coffee shop or the good restaurant, how full will the bar be, etc? And how busy are they on the various weekends we're thinking about, and what regular business do they have, and is there a citywide coming in which may change that pattern, and do they have too much function space for their number of bedrooms, etc?



Capricious, the mascot of Capricon, points the way to the new hotel before Capricon 29

And, of course, general economic trends help, or hurt, too. Right now is a good time to be booking meetings—lots of other people aren't, and there are still all the new bedrooms

going into service from the last expansion. So now, it's a buyer's market. A few years ago was a terrible time—it was very much a seller's market. But don't take advantage *too* much—this is still a business where reputation means something. And if you squeeze too hard now, it'll only rebound when trends change—which they will.

And this is a small industry, even though it seems huge, and has revenues in the many billions. But spend any amount of time in this, and you'll run into people you've met before, under different circumstances. And they'll remember you, and your group—and you want that to be a good impression they remember. For example, when I had to have a serious discussion about an issue at a recent Worldcon™ with the hotel's senior onsite manager, it really helped him to believe I was serious because he knew that a dozen years earlier, when he worked at a different job, at a different hotel, and I was hotel liaison for Lunacon, I never complained unless I had good reason to. And any other hotel liaison can tell the same story—you keep running into people you met elsewhere, and everybody remembers everyone else. And it can also go bad—when a con has problems with a hotel, then somebody who worked there may well turn up decades later at *your* hotel, and decide that he really doesn't like cons, or that you tried to pull a fast one and he doesn't trust *you*. And then you, and the con, are in real trouble.

I'm not going to go into too much detail about contract law, since that's another article (and I'm not an attorney, anyhow). But, in general, when drawing up the contract, there are a few general principles to keep in mind. The contract should be as complete a blueprint of your mutual expectations as is feasible. So, if something is important to you, then it should be specified in the contract. Of course, there's no need to

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include trivial things that you already know are standard (“rooms must include working bathrooms” is not really something needed in a contract)—but if you want the hotel to keep the coffee shop open 24 hours, then it *is* something you should specify. Obviously, things like rates, function space, etc. all need to be specified.

And the hotel will have the things they think important in the contract, as well—you should understand what those are. The main things that they’re likely to insist on are a cancellation clause, which specifies how much you owe them if you cancel the meeting, and an attrition clause that specifies how much you owe them if the meeting falls short on its room pickup. Attrition clauses need to specify two things, primarily—how much you can fall short of your total block before you start to owe money, and how to figure out how short you are. Typically, it’s been possible to get an 80% clause—you only need to fill 80% of the rooms you’ve got blocked before you need to start paying for unoccupied rooms. In the current market, it might even be possible to get a 70% clause, or better—but it’s often been closer to 90% when it’s been a seller’s market. And the other piece of that you need is something that ensures that all rooms occupied by your members are counted towards your block—that ensures that if the hotel runs special rates, and your members grab those rooms, they count towards your block.

Note that the contract is a set of mutually agreed plans on how the meeting will happen. It’s *not* something that you (or they) should be using as a weapon against the other, since that’ll just poison the relationship. And contracts aren’t really enforceable by compelling the other party to do anything specific—they are a list of things that if the other party doesn’t do them, then you are owed money. And they don’t want to pay money—so they have an incentive to follow the contract terms. And you don’t want money—you want a successful con.

Once all the negotiations are finished, and the contract signed, then comes the hard part—making the con a success for both you and the hotel. Which means you need to describe

for them all of the stuff that you need that wasn’t specified in the contract—things like the setups in each of the rooms you expect them to set up. And you need to get that document to them in plenty of time for them to turn it into their internal format—typically a month or so in advance (the more time, the better).. And make sure they give you a copy of their internal description, and check it against what you’d asked for.

And the key to all of this is communication. That means you stay in contact with your facility all the time—that way, you’ll know about any changes that happen. And, the more you talk to them the more you’ll be able to hear their concerns, and address them, before the relationship gets messy. Talk to them, and listen to them. Because you both want this meeting to be a success. And it won’t be if you don’t communicate.

Overall, there’s nothing magic about hotel relations. The principles are pretty straightforward—honest communication of mutual desires. But the key to that is understanding the con’s needs, and communicating them to the hotel in ways that make the hotel want to fill those needs. And that means you need to understand the hotel’s needs, as well as your own, so you can see how the two of them match.



Convention Registration

Randy Kaempfen

My name is Randy Kaempfen. I was Director of the Member Services Division of Chicon 2000. My main reason for taking that position was to try to run the best registration of any Worldcon. I will leave it to others to determine if I succeeded, but it seems to me like it went well. I am going to try to express some of the theory behind what I did in the hope that it will help people running registration at future Worldcons.

1. Physical Badges
2. Online Registration
3. At the Door Registration

Physical Badges

The design of the badges themselves take several factors into account. With registration prices that could cost close to \$200, badges become very valuable. One of the things to prevent is some guy running over to a color copying machine and making a handful of fake badges. One of the ways to do this is with the badge material. Many conventions still use the standard 'card in holder' design. I chose a plastic material which had sparkles inside it and was somewhat holographic.

If this kind of badge was photocopied, it would be very obvious, as you can see.

In addition to validating a person's membership, the badge is also used to identify the type of person. This could include staff, guests of honor, dealers, and program participants. It can also indicate whether they are full convention, daily, and child memberships. The Chicon 2000 badge material was available in several colors, which was used for different kinds of badges. The different colors were used to differentiate between staff, regular, daily, and child memberships. For the daily badges, the days were printed on

the label and the ones that the person didn't pay for were physically punched out. It is important in this case to take something away, not add it on. A person with a marker can write in a day, but they can't fill in a punched-out hole. Having the days in a consistent place on a specific color badge also makes it easier for the security staff to quickly identify daily badges and whether the person has paid for the current day.

With the badges being hard plastic, obviously they wouldn't be printed on directly. The easiest solution would be to



print computer labels and apply them to the badges. To make room for this, I sized the badges large enough to leave a blank space for the labels underneath the holographic card. Many conventions, including Chicon 2000, now require the member's real name on the badge as well. This is easy to do with computer printed labels, since you can print the label with the real name and address at the same time as the one for the front.

Many conventions make the mistake of using the same size font for all badges. While this may be the easiest approach, many times it means that the font is too small to read, defeating one of the main purposes of the badges—identification. If you are using a database to create the badges, there should be the ability to change the font and to determine what size text will fit in a given area. If it doesn't, you can do some simple tests and build your own table of how many characters can fit in a specified size. This will allow you to print the badges using the largest font possible for each name.

The dual punches at the top allow for use of either clips or lanyards. You would be surprised how strongly some people feel about this choice. Some people don't want pins making holes in costumes. Others don't want things hanging around their necks. Having the most flexibility possible is best, especially if it doesn't cost you anything.

Online Registration

While online registration was new in 1997, it is an expected method these days. It is important to have your registration ready as soon as you start your bid. That is when you are starting to take registrations, even if they are only supporting your bid. If you are offering some sort of premium or having a competition, a registration database is the perfect way to keep track of it. You may think it's easier to carry around a receipt book, but these days, someone in your committee has to have a laptop. It's better to start getting your information entered as soon as possible. The people most likely to buy supporting or attending memberships are those who pre-

supported, so having them on file makes conversion easier. This is one of the most important concepts in registration. Spread out the work. This is a volunteer effort. No one wants to spend weeks entering data all at once. However, everyone would be willing to do a few entries a day. Chicon 2000 had over 6000 attendees and all the of pre-con registrations either came from online or was entered by me. Alone. The reason this wasn't a problem was because it was spread out over 6 years. It gets even better with online registrations. Then, the work is being done by someone else. With a proper registration system, you should be able to quickly download registrations and incorporate them into your main database. This allows you to take registrations online and at one or more cons at the same time.

To do online registration, you will need the ability to accept credit cards. These days, most people won't want to enter that kind of information into a non-secure screen, so you will need to be set up with a payment gateway service. These are companies that will handle the credit card authorization and purchasing on a secure site, collect the payments, deposit them in your bank account, and provide you with the results of the transactions. The details vary by company, but many of them will let you customize the pages to match with the rest of your website and registration. PayPal is an option for some people, but you can't count on everyone having an account. You also need to be clear with the payment gateway and your bank about exactly what you are doing. Some of them are picky about what is being sold and some even have restrictions about selling non-tangible items, such as memberships.

If you set up your own web server and database, the membership database can be built in. If not, plan on exporting the data from the transactions provided by your payment gateway. Most of them will let you customize the information they collect and what they pass on to you. By doing this, you can download a text file of the transactions and import it into your off-line membership database.

The online database should make registration as easy as possible for the user. You want to keep online problems and question emails to a minimum. The various date cutoffs and their corresponding rates should be built in, so that they are automatically applied. A lot of people will also be buying for families. If you allow them the option to 'add a family member', you can duplicate everything from the last name to the address. This lets the user enter an entire family in just a few minutes. You also need to have a lot of flexibility. There are some people who insist on going by only a fan name. However, for security reasons, many conventions insist on having the member's real name as well. Either way, it's important to have fields for both a real name and a fan name. You also need to allow a lot of room for the names. There are foreign names and combined family names. With families, you will need to allow for children to have different last names from parents. When you do, you will need to decide how to have these available for pickup. You may want to keep all the people in the family alphabetized under the name of the first person. Nothing disrupts lines more than a family zigzagging between lines to get the badges for all their family members.

The membership number is also important. The main function is a unique number to identify each participant. However, many people try to register early and view as lower number as a status symbol. A system should be set up to allocate the numbers. For something like a Worldcon, you might want to reserve the first 200 number for guests of honor and their families and for staff. By starting regular memberships with 201, you can leave the earlier block free for special uses. It is not a good idea to have certain numbers have specific meanings or to combine part of the person's name with the badge number. This will cause problems if the person gets married and changes their name or if the membership is transferred to someone else. It is best to just let it be a unique ID.

The purpose of a database is to provide information. This goes beyond just keeping track of the members. Ideally,

you want keep transactions for everything that happens. If you just have a membership number and a name and then the membership gets sold, you won't have any record of the original person. If they then come to the con with their credit card receipt, it will look like you owe them a membership. You need to have transactions each time a membership is purchased, transferred, upgraded, or refunded. Having a date on each transaction lets you establish a timeline. By seeing how many transactions happen on each day and how many days in advance of the con that is, everyone involved in the convention can get a better idea of what the actual attendance will be and what the revenue from the memberships will amount to. Searches on the data should be flexible, to allow for the greatest ease in finding the data you want. This data should also be fed back to both current and possible future attendees of the con. Many times rumors will spread about conventions being sold out or hotels being full, leading to bad feelings. Nothing defuses this kind of rumor faster than a dose of cold hard facts. Publishing these on your website regularly will ensure that everyone knows what's going on.

This same concept of spreading out the work applies to creation of badges. Many cons wait until a week or two before the con, get a dozen people together, and go crazy trying to make thousands of badges. Again, at Chicon 2000 we did this by creating a dozen or so badges each day. We alphabetized them and stored them in trays. When it came time for the con, we just packed up the trays. By not having to have the badge creation party, you can keep the online registration open later. Many people buy their registrations at the last minute, and the more of them you can allow to register online, the less your work will be.

At the Door Registration

This is the first experience everyone has at a con. It's crucial that this gets them off to a good start. The load at the door will be affected by how many registrations you can get done pre-con. There will be a big rush when you first open.

You want to have as many badges ready to go as possible. When you determine how many people you have for pre-registration, you should divide the boxes of badges into that many equal groups. This does not mean an equal number of letters of the alphabet, since there will be an unequal distribution. Ideally, your database should be able to print out a breakdown of members by first letter of the last name. If it's really good, it will let you give it a number of positions and it will print a list of letters for each position which gives the most equal distribution.

While no one wants to have a line, you need to plan for it. Hopefully, your hotel will be able to provide you with rope and stanchion, if you ask for it. You should clearly delineate the lines for each position. You don't want to have a crowd jamming in, trying to figure out which position they're in line for. You should have signs, either electronic or physical, above each station indicating what the station does. If your lines are long, you should also have corresponding signs at the beginning of the line so that people can see what they're getting in line for.

There needs to be a policy for badge pickup. A parent should be able to pick up badges for their children, but it gets stickier for spouses. Should one spouse be able to pick up for the other? Do both need to be there? What if one person paid for multiple badges? Should they be able to pick them all up, regardless of name? Some of these will be legal decisions and some will be dictated by security. Whatever you decide, the policy needs to be clearly specified in advance. It is best if it is spelled out at the time of online registration. This may also dictate how the badges are arranged for pickup.

One of the big holdups with registration is new registrations. A single family can slow an entire line. The family options mentioned for online registration are equally important for at-the-door registration. Having a form for people to fill out give the data entry person something to work for and gives you an audit trail. You also need to be able to quickly switch between daily and full convention prices and tell the person

what the prices for each will be. The program should be able to handle both new registrations, upgrades from supporting or different types of attending membership, and transfers from one person to another.

Another aspect that will require advance planning is the membership packets. At smaller conventions, this may be no more than a program book. At a Worldcon, this may consist of the souvenir program book, the pocket program, pages of other information, a number of freebies, and possibly a bag to carry it all. You need to make sure all these items have been produced or acquired in sufficient quantities for the projected attendance. You will want to add a fudge factor to that. No one wants to be one of the last people to arrive and not get the goodies that everyone else got. These items need to be staged both before the con and on site. Although many large hotels have dedicated registration areas, storage space is usually limited. You will want to check with your hotel liaison and find if there is a nearby storage area where you can keep these supplies. Each day when you set up for registration, retrieve the amount of these items you think you will need. If all the packets are the same, you can assemble them in advance. If there are choices for the members to pick from, try to set up distinct stacks so it is easy to select the right items.

Summary

In general, plan ahead, keep as much data as possible, and spread your work out. This will give you the ability to be flexible with your plans and provide the best experience to the attendees of the convention while not ruining your life in the months and years leading up to it.

If you have any questions, I would be happy to discuss them with you. I can be reached at randy@kaempen.org.

Feeling Badgered? Membership Badge Issues and Fannish Community Spirit

Kevin Standlee

Most SF conventions issue each member a badge when they register for the convention. Those badges often end up annoying at least some of the members. Sometimes, something about the badges becomes a major issue affecting the members' enjoyment of the event. Westercon became so excited about badges that it wrote badge specifications into its bylaws.

Worldcon came within a few votes of doing the same thing, and to this day has a standing committee of the Worldcon Business Meeting whose tasks include reminding Worldcons how to design their membership badges. How can something so superficially simple cause so much trouble?

An issue related to badges is the practice of using a pseudonym, known as a "badge name," on one's membership badge. Some conventions routinely allow this, while others prohibit it and others have variations that print the "badge name" in large type while printing the "real name" in small type or on the back of the badge.

While the original subject of this article was just going to be about badge names, the more I thought about it, the more I realized that there are a bunch of unstated assumptions almost anytime the subject comes up, and that it would be better to address those assumptions about badges first. Therefore, I am going to consider what the purposes of a membership badge are, and then later come back to badge names.

Note that by "SF convention," you should assume, unless I make it clear explicitly or in context, that this includes science fiction and all of the "fellow traveler" related conventions, including fantasy, horror, comics, gaming, and anime. In my opinion, all of these conventions share a common heritage, even when the people organizing them are unaware of it. I am

by inclination an inclusive sort of person, which is why I'm fond of Worldcons and other "big tent" affairs, but a discussion of the distinctions between the different types of event is a subject best left to a different article.

Purposes of Membership Badges

I said at the start that most SF conventions issue badges or some other sort of token that confirms that the person is a member of the convention. I think that most conventions do not give enough thought to the purposes this token (I'll call it a badge hereafter, but it can take other forms) serves, and that most bad membership experiences or dissatisfaction with their badges stems from this lack of thought.

What are the purposes of a membership badge?

Broadly speaking, the purposes of a membership badge include:

- A. **Identity:** Identifying the person to the other members of the convention.
- B. **Ticket:** Serving as an admission token proving that the person has the right to be present at the event.
- C. **Memorabilia:** Acting as a collectable item or memento of the event.
- D. **Utility:** Assisting the member in some way not directly related to the other purposes.

I think that the order in which a convention committee prioritizes these four factors will determine a lot about the convention and how it is perceived by its members. I'll declare my own biases up front by telling you that I've arranged these factors in the order I think they should be prioritized. Let's examine them in order.

Identity



Conventions are usually gatherings of people with a common interest who have gathered to socialize with each other. In many cases, this includes socializing with people whom you know by correspondence (through letters, email, fanzines, web sites, etc.) but whom you may never have met. It is generally much easier to do this socializing if you can see the person's name. Ideally, you should be able to read this name without having to invade the person's

“personal space.”

Badges should include the member's name in large, legible, clear type, visible from a reasonable distance so that two people standing talking to each other can read each others' names without having to stick their noses into each others' chests. The very fact that this phrase is often a standing joke about people using “I couldn't read your badge” as a (bad) excuse to invade someone's personal space—for example, a man poking his nose into a woman's cleavage—is a sign that failing to meet this design criteria is an all too common failure of membership badge designers.

Badges that do not include members' names damage our sense of community. Instead of making conventions a place where we can easily meet and talk to people whom we may not know already, they act as a barrier to communication, and send the wrong message about what kind of event we're holding.

Incidentally, I prefer that membership badges also have members' city/state/country on them, although generally not in quite as large a typeface as the name.

When I designed the badges for SMOFCon 17 (SMOFCon being the annual gathering of SF convention

organizers; the 17th such convention was held in New Orleans in 1999), I printed the members' names in 36-point bold type, and their city/state/country in 14-point non-bold condensed type.

Ticket



Generally speaking, our events are not open to just anyone. You have to have a membership to attend. We therefore need some sort of way of determining who has a membership (right to attend) and who does not. A membership badge is one way, but not necessarily the only way to do this. Some conventions, especially “gate shows” use hand-stamps or actual tickets. The 1976 Worldcon, MidAmeriCon, issued hospital-style plastic wristbands as right-to-attend tokens, a move that was widely criticized at the time and that I think would be similarly criticized today if anyone tried it, at least at a Worldcon.

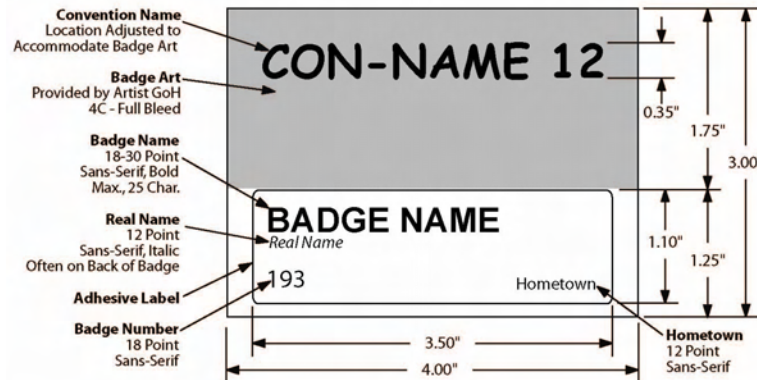
Because the membership badge is a ticket-to-attend, many conventions spend a lot of effort making it difficult to counterfeit them. This is not necessarily a bad idea; after all, with a Worldcon membership costing \$200, making a badge that you can duplicate with a simple photocopier and a plastic holder you can buy at any office supply store is just asking for someone to go into the badge-making business for him/herself. However, it is important to remember that it is impossible to make a badge completely fool-proof. You can raise badge security to any arbitrary level of copy-proofing, but you can never make it perfect. Conventions should strive to achieve the level of copy-proofing that makes it difficult to copy the badge

without spending more resources on the copy-proofing than they would lose on “pirate” memberships. It is, unfortunately, a fannish (in its negative sense) trait to pour vast amounts of resource into anti-counterfeiting measures—far more than the convention might lose if a handful of badges are copied by some relatively determined badge pirates.

Most badges include the membership number, but that tends to assume that the convention has assigned the member a unique identifier. This is such an obvious assumption that it can be very jarring when a convention does not do so. Westercon 44 (Vancouver BC, 1991) did not issue membership numbers until just before the convention, which led to a minor constitutional crisis because it technically invalidated mailed-in site selection ballots. The convention side-stepped the constitutional issue (I was the administrator; frankly, I ignored the technical reading of the rule because it led to a nonsensical conclusion) and passed a bylaw amendment mandating that conventions issue membership numbers in a timely manner and inform members of their membership numbers.

Memorabilia

Many people collect their membership badges. I had a display of most of my Worldcon membership badges in my Fan Guest of Honor exhibit at CascadiaCon, the 2005 NASFiC in Seattle. I have seen some fans with sashes containing past convention badges. Keith Lynch has strung his Worldcon badges together to make a superbadge that by now stretches to the floor. The badge should be something that members treasure as a memento of the event. If possible, it should contain artwork that is attractive, but such artwork should not detract from the more-important purposes of the badge.



Utility

Membership badges may serve other purposes than simply identifying the member and proving that they have the right to attend. It is common to hand out stickers at convention parties and to put those on people’s badges. Some conventions have issued fairly elaborate badges that included accessory space to hold additional items. While some members appreciate these utilities, others dislike having the extra bulk that this entails.

Getting Your Priorities Straight

I think one of the worst failings of membership badge design is that they put function 2 (Ticket) ahead of function 1 (Identity). That is, whoever designed the badge considered the admission-token purpose the most important purpose of the badge. All too often, conventions assume the only purpose of the badge is to serve as an admission token, and you consequently end up with a badge that fails all three of the other criteria. Such a badge, if it doesn’t actively annoy the members,

will at the very least degrade a sense of community. Most SF conventions I attend are run by fans for fans. These are gatherings for our friends, including friends we haven’t met yet. I think that it’s much easier to meet someone when you can easily see their name.

While it seems obvious to me that you should be able to read your fellow-members’ names on

their badges, conventions continue to issue badges with names in unreadable small type. I cannot believe that convention committees consciously sit down and say, “What can we do to cause our members grief? I know! Let’s print their names in eight point type and run them vertically instead of horizontally!” What I think must happen most of the time is that badge design

tends by default to be left to whoever is doing convention registration, and that person's priorities are likely not going to be focused on what is best for the members or for the convention, but what is most convenient for Registration to provide. This can lead to badges being printed, for example, with names in tiny type because there happens to be one member with a huge long name, and in order to fit that 50-character name onto his badge, everyone else gets 8-point type. Or it may be even more thoughtless, with the database person simply taking the default generated by the database program without realizing how bad it is from most members' point of view.

I recently attended a convention whose badges, as far as I can tell, failed every one of the criteria. The 2006 World Fantasy Convention had large portrait-orientation clip-held laminated plastic badges with members' names printed in fairly small type near the bottom and most of the badge taken up with a fairly uninteresting piece of artwork and convention logo. It was difficult to read other members' names at any reasonable distance (failed Identity). It would have been trivially easy to duplicate with material available at any well-stocked copy shop (failed Ticket, which is ironic considering that the convention was more strict than most about checking for badges everywhere you went). It has little collectible value except as an example of poor design (failed Memorabilia). It had no use other than as a large hunk of plastic catching the breeze when you went outside (failed Utility). It would have been difficult, although not impossible, to design a worse badge for a convention.

Other conventions deliberately design their badges to put



item 3 (Memorabilia) ahead of all of the others. FanimeCon, for instance, appears to want all of its badges to be considered collectable items, and goes to considerable effort to produce memorable artwork for those badges. On these badges, the members' names are an afterthought, squeezed into the margins in tiny type. I used to attend FanimeCon before it moved to the same weekend at BayCon, and I'll never forget the answer I got from another member—as I recall, it was not a committee member, just some random attendee to whom I was discussing this while I sat behind a sales table trying fruitlessly to promote ConJosé. This person, who had never attended anything other than FanimeCon, said to me, "Why would you want to know other members' names?" To him, the Collectable and Ticket aspects of the badge were the only things for which he thought you'd use a badge. His badge got him into the event and was a neat piece of artwork, and he would never socialize with anyone at the convention whom he didn't already know by sight, so who cares if you can't read the badge. It made me want to cry, since such an attitude is anathema to the social aspects of science fiction conventions with which I am most familiar.

Lest you blow off this example as simply "not our kind of con," and assume that this kind of bone-headed mistake wouldn't be made at a "real SF" convention, I point to Westercon 50, held 1997 in Seattle. Now I have many friends in Seattle fandom, including the chair of that Westercon, and I'm sorry if I'm offending them, but that convention's badges, which apparently were modeled after Boeing employee badges, hung from a lanyard going through a hole in one corner of the badge so that no matter what you did, the name was going to be at an angle, even if it had been in sufficiently large type, which it was not, you were going to have difficulty reading it. Westercon's Business Meeting got so fed up with badges containing tiny type that they passed the (now infamous) "24-point rule," which orders Westercons to print names on membership badges in no less than 24 point bold type. Fannish nitpickers and typography geeks have repeatedly jumped on this provision because of

course you could pick an unreadable typeface. Such hairsplitting aside, at least half of the Westercons held since this rule passed have simply ignored it, and some committees, when they have been reminded that they were supposed to do this, have shrugged and said, more or less, “Who cares?” or “It was too difficult,” or otherwise blown off the reply. This is, in my opinion, at least as bad an attitude as the person who assumed the only point of the badge was as a ticket and collectable.

One of the best membership badges I have ever seen was the membership badge for Noreascon 3, the 1989 Worldcon in Boston. N3’s badges were larger than what had been traditional up until that time, and they used a significant portion of the badge space to print members’ names in a very large, clear, sans serif bold condensed type. (I’ve been told that the font was actually custom-designed by a member of the committee who was into such things.) There is only one other Worldcon that, in my opinion, did a better job, and that may well be due to my own personal bias, but I’ll come back to this later.

Worldcons (and other conventions) that followed N3 kept the oversized badges, but they seemed to forget that the reason for the large badge was to print names in large type, and they mostly took members’ names back down to small type and filled up the badge with a bunch of artwork or anti-counterfeiting

measures. The nadir of this trend of “big badge, small type” trend may have been The Millennium Philcon, the 2001 Worldcon in Philadelphia, where the WSFS Business Meeting considered a variation of Westercon’s 24-point rule. I drafted the original proposal, at the request of Bruce Pelz and Mike Glycer, who were grouching about the hard-to-read badges with me at the



convention’s Opening Ceremonies. Despite ample evidence with Westercon’s attempts to micromanage committee design decisions by legislation, the WSFS Business Meeting came very close to passing this bylaw amendment, but pulled back at the last minute. Instead, they issued standing orders to the Nitpicking and Flyspecking Committee (a small committee of people who try to stay on top of the complexities of WSFS rules, and to whom WSFS tends to refer rules questions) “to remind each future Worldcon, early and often, that the WSFS Business Meeting believes that membership badges be readable, with members’ names printed in no less than 24 point type.” Since then, at least twice a year, the MPC sends e-mail reminders to Worldcon committees nagging them about this standing request. Has it helped? I’m not sure, but I know I thought the 2002 Worldcon’s badge was the best balancing of the four factors, and I did not even design it.

Even if you did not attend ConJosé, if you’ve gone to many conventions, particularly Worldcons, since 2002, you have seen the badge, or at least the badge holder. ConJosé issued badges in a small pouch that went around the wearer’s neck on an adjustable lanyard. This pouch was 5 inches high by 4 ½ inches wide, and had a clear plastic pouch on the front and two zipper pockets in the back. The convention name was printed on the back, and a printed card with the member’s name, city/state/country/member number, and convention logo and artwork fit into the plastic front pouch. To this day, I continue to see people wearing that badge pouch, often putting the badge of the convention they are currently attending into the clear plastic front pouch. They were not perfect—it is practically impossible to design a badge that doesn’t annoy someone, particularly at a Worldcon—and some members complained that it was too large, too bulky, and that they disliked lanyard-type holders (as opposed to clip or pin type holders). Nevertheless, I think the ConJosé membership badge was a superb balance of prioritizing the factors: It was easy to read (unless you ignored the instructions on how to wear it, in which case it tended to flop wrong-side round), it was difficult to duplicate (getting such

pouches on short notice and imprinting them would not have been impossible, just difficult), and it was both collectable and useful, as evidenced by the people still using them today.

More Than Just Registration's Responsibility

It appears to be common to leave all of badge design to a convention's Registration department. Indeed, Registration may become testy when other parts of the convention, including the top management, try to get involved in badge design. They raise the cry of "micromanagement!" and object to being told anything about how the badge should be designed. This assumes that the only priority for the badge is how easy is it for Registration to produce it (not one of the four priorities I mentioned above, but a consideration nonetheless). What the Registration department needs to realize is that a membership badge is something every member will carry with him/her throughout the convention. More than any other single object, including the convention's publications, the membership badge says who we are. I think that every committee should look at the four functions cited in this article (Identity, Ticket, Memorabilia, and Utility), and think about how they want to prioritize them, and why. Only once you have done this should you actually design your badge.

Badge Names

I've completely destroyed the projected word count for this article and only now have reached the subject on which I originally intended to write, which is the practice of printing pseudonyms ("badge names") on membership badges. Practice here varies considerably. Some conventions refuse to do so; others do so without including the members "real name," while others print both, with lots of variations.

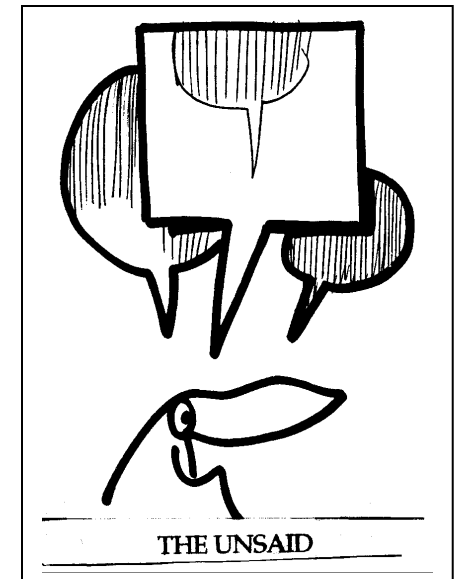
The increasing popularity of LiveJournal and other on-line communities where people are known by their "handles" may be leading to an increase in the use of badge names, but there are plenty of other reasons for people using them, some of which are good and reasonable and others of which are far less defensible.

What's a "Real Name?"

Typically, when a convention starts discussing whether they will allow alternative names, a lot of words get tossed around about trying to define what a "badge name" or "real name" is. Much is made about nicknames and common abbreviations, and usually much hairsplitting happens, when in my opinion, a little common sense should apply.

If your legal name on your birth certificate and identity papers reads "Robert Quincy Smith IV," is it okay to print "Bob Smith" on your badge even if the con has a policy of "real names only?" To give an example of someone who is probably known to many of the readers, what about Spike? Can we print "Spike" on her membership badge? My answer to both the hypothetical and actual cases is "yes, the 'nickname'" goes on the badge, because that is the name by which the person is most commonly known to his/her fellow members and to which s/he will answer.

What does annoy me are people who hide behind a badge name and won't answer to it. If you want your badge to call you "Xyopwzt the Bold," then unless you're including a pronunciation guide with your badge, I think you would be showing a bit of respect to your fellow members by including a name by which we can reasonably address you and to which you will answer. Remember, a convention is a gathering of mutual friends, not all of whom know each other. We are all here, or should be here, because of a shared interest, and socializing with each other is a good thing.



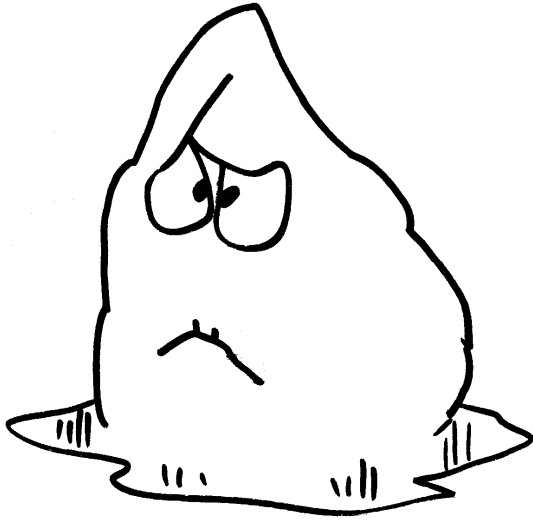
It's actually quite difficult to draw a hard-and-fast line about when to allow badge names and when to require something else. There are people who have real concerns about their "mundane world" identity being known. I understand that, especially in the UK, some fans are afraid that if their employers knew they attended SF conventions, they would be fired or at least downgraded or disgraced. That's an incredibly stupid attitude for the employer to take, but it is apparently quite real. There are also people who are concerned about "stalkers" or other unfortunate real-world issues. These are not easy cases, and Registration people need to have some discretion in dealing with them.

Some conventions compromise on the "fan name" issue by printing the badge name in large type but the real name in small type. In most cases, this is not much of a problem, especially if SPACE TWINKIE doesn't mind you printing her real name in smaller type underneath. This, in fact, may be a good way to deal with electronic "handles" for people who want their (say) LiveJournal user names to be more prominent than their given names, but still want people to be able to read their given

names. The "print both" case has its own difficult situations.

Suppose the person attending the convention really is a different persona than the person's "real world" identity.

To give a plausible scenario, imagine some Joseph Phanboy who attends conventions



dressed as a female named Jane Fangirl. It could be that Joe is in the process of becoming Jane, but maybe Joe just likes dressing up as Jane for convention-attending purposes. This person wants a badge that reads Jane, will answer to that name, and is not requesting this for any fraudulent purposes; however, Jane does not want Joe's name displayed on the membership badge at all. Would I grant this request?

Almost certainly I would. Would other people do so? I think some would not. And if they would grant this gender-crossing request, would they grant one that we see in Furry Fandom, where the person wants to present him/herself as their furry persona for the weekend and does not want their given "real world" name displayed for all to see? I recognize that these cases are difficult, and I present them to make people think about what they are trying to achieve.

Conclusions

"What problem are you trying to solve?" was the theme of the Chicago SMOFCon of 2003, and that seems as good a place as any to end this article. Before charging off into designing your convention's membership badge and registration materials, put some thought into what your design goals are with your membership badges and how you plan to handle complicated cases. If you do that first, then it will be much easier to answer specific design and individual questions when they arise.

Design your membership badges well and they may go unnoticed, but will serve as a minor social lubricant that improves your convention. Set your priorities wrong, and your badges will act as sand in the social gears. Save yourself grief in the long run by spending some time at the beginning thinking about what you expect to accomplish with that piece of paper or plastic that every single member has in common with each other.

Publications

Deb Kosiba

I've been doing Pubs for conventions, off and on, for a little over 10 years. Not long in fannish historical terms, but long enough to have learned from my mistakes and the mistakes of others. It has also been long enough to have seen technology change the way Pubs is handled. Given that this is supposed to be a "Philosophy of" and not a "How to" I'll try to minimize the technical specifics and talk more about the overall process involved in putting together a program book along with some commentary on how the process has changed over the years and how those changes impact the whole convention.

I never really set out to do Pubs. In fact, back in the early 90's, I wanted nothing to do with computers. And while there weren't the powerful layout programs we know today, the content was still typed out on computers and sometimes the layout was kludged together on a computer as well. The first program books I helped with were done, late the night before the con, at our local Kinko's. Lots of typing, cutting with real scissors, and pasting with glue sticks, and generally hand building a "Master" hard copy to hand over to the Kinko's employee for printing.

In the mid 90's, I went back to school full time to pursue a degree in Industrial Design. This meant that I needed to own my own computer to run the CAD software that I needed for my classes. Determined to figure out this new machine on my own,



I soon grew to enjoy using a computer and quickly became proficient with the hot graphic design software of the time, CorelDraw! By this point, local fannish circles had already figured out that I could draw, and had been regularly hitting me up for artwork to use in the advertising and program books. Once they learned that I could do layout as well, it wasn't long before I was doing fliers, program books, and even the occasional web site.

Today, I assemble program books in Adobe InDesign, a high end layout program with more bells and whistles than I will ever learn how to use. I still do most of the work late at night, although in the comfort of my own home. Because the software can do so much more than it used to, so much more is expected in terms of quality and variety. 20 years ago, a black and white, hand typed program book, with the hotel map made in ASCII art, was completely acceptable. These days fandom expects a program book with a four-color cover, tight layout, and professional graphics.

Back when I started, I think the Apple had 12 fonts, now I have thousands to choose from. I can adjust the size, spacing between letters and lines, and even tweak the width of the letters themselves. Instead of choosing between a few layout templates, I have an infinite variety of options, limited only by my imagination.

All of these options take time to think about, although most are not really worth considering. For a while, the explosion of options resulted in a lot of unreadable documents, both in fandom and outside fandom. How many letters went out where the sender felt the need to use every single font, just because they could? How many pocket programs were printed in an eye-watering 5pt. type?

Over time, some rules of thumb were settled on. Some of the basics are;

- You don't really want to go below 10pt in a program book, any smaller and you get complaints about readability.
- A serif font is usually easier to read in a large block of text than a sans-serif font, but that's not an absolute.
- Script fonts or decorative fonts are never to be used in body text but can make a fun statement for titles.
- A single-column page is hard to read, the eyes don't like to scan that far across a page. 2-3 columns work best, depending on your format.

You learn what works and what doesn't. At this point I have templates for several standard program book sizes and all I really ever change are the fonts and the positions of the titles and page numbers. Some of my personal guidelines are

- Hotel map, con rules, and department hours and locations should be within the first couple pages
- The left hand pages have the departmental information and all of the ads. I try to break it up so there are never more than 2 ads in a row.
- The right hand pages start out with the GoH bios in a 2 column format and then finish out the program book with the programming descriptions in a 3 column format.

These days takes me about 40 actual hours in front of the computer to assemble and finalize the program book. That translates to about 2 full weekends of work, with a couple evenings thrown in in-between.

The first weekend tends to be lighter. I start out with a rough layout, pulling in repeat content from the previous year's program book, and from the convention web site, to give me a feel for the space. I then spend an evening sending out

reminder emails to all of the departments who have missed the deadline. If I have content from them from last year, or from the web site, I include it in the email. I ask them if they want to use it again as-is, or if they want to make changes. I also send out reminder emails to all of the conventions that we have ad swaps with. At this point, the program book is a lot of mostly empty pages with placeholders in large red type.

Over the rest of the first weekend, I will field reply emails, some with content, some begging for more time. Any content gets formatted and placed in the program book. I use the remaining time to work on the cover and the badge layout, as I usually have the art from the artist GoH by this point. I will also lay out the pocket program, except for the grid, since that is the very last thing I handle.

Mid week I send out another round of emails, warning the remaining departments that if I don't have their content by midnight Friday, their content will not be in the program book.

The second weekend is crunch time. In theory I have all of the content from the departments. In reality I'm still missing some. I've been very fortunate that the department heads for the "critical" departments are usually incredibly on top of things and have their content in by now. Sadly, I do occasionally have to make up generic department descriptions. I'll send what I wrote to the department head for approval and they'll usually ok it with some modifications. I have generally found that it's not lack of caring, or laziness, that keeps people from turning in their content on time. It's usually because they just don't know what to write.

All program books are in multiples of 4 pages. That is, 4, 8, 12, 16, 20, 24, 28, 32, etc. The reason for this is that each piece of paper in a program book has a left side, right side, front and back. Folded in half it makes 4 pages, and multiple pages are stapled together down the center. In the early stages of layout, it's easy to add pages, and then arrange the rest of the content to fill out the space. Later on it's much harder. If it's near the end of the process, and I have everything snugged down, I

can't just add in that half-page description someone finally sends me. I've been asked "can't you just add another page?" And the answer is no, I would have to add another 4 pages, leaving 3-1/2 of them blank. It looks unprofessional and it costs the convention extra money. What I usually end up doing is finagling half a page's worth of space by tweaking line spacing, character spacing, margins, etc., all the while cursing the delinquent department head.

On the Monday after the second weekend, a PDF of the program book is emailed to a few people and posted on my LiveJournal for proofreading. By Tuesday night the corrections have been made. The final file is FTP'd to the printer Wednesday morning.

Sometime in the next couple days I will get at least one email profusely apologizing for the lack of content and asking when my "real" deadline is.



Earlier in this essay, I talked about assembling the program book at Kinko's the night before the convention. Based on stories I've been told, this is how it's been done since the dawn of time. If the

final assembly takes place 24-48 hours before the con, the content deadline can be as close as a few days before the con. Or even that night if you were willing to meet the pubs person at Kinko's at 3:00 am. But it no longer works that way. Technology has not only changed how I put together the program book, it has changed the timeline of a large part of the convention.

So far, I've explained that it takes me about 11 calendar days to assemble the program book. Once the file is sent to the printer it takes them 1-2 days to print a proof. That proof is Fed-Ex'd overnight to me for approval. I look it over and give them verbal approval over the phone the next business day. I still have to return the proof to them with written approval before they will start printing. If I can get it to Fed-Ex that day, they can start printing about one business week after they received the file. It takes them about 2 weeks to do the actual printing and they deliver the boxes of finished program books the day before the con.

For clarity, here is the Program Book timeline in list form, the number is days out from the con.

- 35 First deadline and first Round of reminder emails
- 30 Second Round of reminder emails
- 28 "Real" and final deadline
- 26 Finish Layout
- 25 Send out PDF for proofreading
- 24 Make corrections
- 23 FTP PDF of Program Book to Printer
- 22 Printer sends Printing Proof overnight Fed-Ex
- 21 receive proof from printer and review
- 18 Give verbal ok and Ship back Proof and written ok via overnight FedEx
- 17 Printer receives returned proof with written ok
- 16 Printing Begins
- 2 Printing Finished
- 1 Delivery to con

This roughly translates to the first deadline being 6 weeks out from the convention. A far cry from the days when you could

meet the Pubs person at Kinko's the night before the con. This has caused some...re-training of the...more experienced con runners who are used to doing it the old way. They've had to push their planning schedules back a few weeks in order to meet these new deadlines and this has caused a ripple effect throughout the whole planning process. The departments that feel this the most are Programming, Special Events, Filk, Films, Anime, and Parties. Basically, any department that requires individuals to make a solid commitment for man-hours or equipment.

Using Programming as an example: If all of the program descriptions need to be submitted 6 weeks out, Programming needs commitments from the program participants a couple weeks before, let's call it 2 weeks. And emails asking for participants need to go out several weeks before that. But a potential program participant is not even thinking about WhateverCon almost three months out. They have other, more urgent, deadlines and the email is pushed aside until later. Now



Printing presses have come a long way

programming is put in a position where they have to re-train the entire program participant pool to think in terms of the new timeline. And so the ripple spreads.

On the plus side, it does mean that many of the screaming emergencies also happen 6 weeks earlier than they used to, resulting in less hair pulling insanity in the days leading up to the con.

It has been interesting watching the changes happen over the years. Looking back, I wonder how I ever had the energy to pull the all-nighters at Kinko's. All-nighters at home are so much more relaxed. In some ways, the addition of new technology has made my job easier, or at least easier to put out a far more professional product. But in other ways, it has made the job more involved and time consuming. Gone are the days of slapping together a program book last minute. Now it is a carefully co-ordinated dance with department heads, myself and the printer. I still love doing it, and if you ask, I will tell you I have the best job on the con-com.



From Dryer Lint to the Strange Love of a Star Woman

Patty Wells

The woman next to me in the audience was trying hard not to stare. I'll give her credit for her self-control, given that I was formally attired in a long velvet dress, decorated with large handfuls of lint, string, gunk, and an old athletic sock fetchingly draped over my left breast. Keeping the lint in my hair had been the most challenging, but in the end it looked no more tangled than my hair usually does. But it was that sock that mesmerized her.

Finally, while we waited for something to happen, she leaned over and said, "I've never been to a science fiction convention before. Is it okay to ask what you are dressed up as?" I guess I didn't look quite as much like a dangerous lunatic as I'd hoped since she was willing to speak to me.

"It's fine," I said. "I am the stalwart heroine, Dryer Lint Woman."

"Is that in some comic book?" she asked.

"No," I said, having a heart, "I'm part of Orycon Opening Ceremonies." Just then, not yet a Hugo winner, David Levine took to the stage. Later he asked for obscure super heroes from the audience, and it turned out that I was the most obscure of all.

Is there a point to this story, you ask? Yes. I ran into this nice woman, whose first con it was, several times during the weekend. Each time she said hi, and by the end of the weekend she was introducing me to her new friends. She was a great lesson to me. By bonding over my sock draped breast, I was not just a concom person, whooshing along and likely looking officious; I was a superheroine she had talked to and seen closeup. It was something to make a bond between her and the folks who hang out at cons routinely.

To me it is one of the things we get out of an opening ceremonies; it makes some of the con com familiar to the attendees. (Here I am not representing the whole of the Orycon group. Several of the regulars wouldn't appear if paid, and feel we look STUPID, STUPID, STUPID in front of the audience.) But I figure that if the guy with the Hugo (David Levin) is willing to still don Spock ears and emote, why let the sane people bother us when we're having fun.

There are several ideas as to why an opening ceremony is important. But first, it might make sense to explain how the insane skit Orycon ones started. You see, the first time we did one, none of us had actually attended an open ceremony before. Having the hazy idea that they were boring, we spoofed Saturday Night Live's News Update and appeared in our underwear. (Not just any underwear, three of us ladies had Edwardian underwear because Sue had a pattern for it.) I started my fannish acting career by sitting on Bill Rotzler's lap in Edwardian underwear trimmed with purple ribbons.

Because, you see, the next and actually the most important part of opening ceremonies is to introduce the GOHs to the attendees, so that they can recognize these folks as the weekend progresses. A corollary to this, to us, is that we want our Orycon GOHs to have a memorable con with us. After all, many of the guests we've had attend many other cons. At the end of the day, we want Orycon to be one they remember. Bill Rotzler remembered me. Even as a young thing I had rather an Edwardian figure, and I sat on his bad knee. Whoops. The lesson learned from this is that we have, ever since, told our GOHs what we expect them to do. Hardly any of them have ever fled screaming, and those we caught and brought back. Or made it part of the script. Ginjer Buchan flees screaming with great panache. I'm sure it's a useful skill for an editor.

Seriously, many of our GOHs have loved a chance to be part of our gang of crazies. We have had them edit the scripts, ad lib great new lines, and sometimes come up with things wilder than we could. This year, Harry Turtledove explained that his cousin, also Harry Turtledove, was in Portland. We brought him in and an unfortunate transporter error ended up with us having to sort out the right Harry Turtledove to keep as our author GOH. We bet both Harrys will remember Orycon and we think we only mixed up a little genetic material.

Personally, I have viewed these opening ceremonies as a lovely way of experimenting with people's minds. One year we had lots of signs and even more than usual audience participation. I added three signs. The first said, Bark like a Seal. Many people clapped their hands and did excellent seal imitations. The second sign said, Bark like a dog. We had the whole dog pound out there.

The third sign said, Bark like a tree. Few things have ever made me happier than the looks on people's faces as they tried to figure it out.

Do you have to do terrible skits? No. Should you do something that reflects your group and the talents within it? Yes. Should you have fun? Absolutely. Will your group let you indulge your own sick fancy to manipulate an audience? Alas, probably not everyone is as lucky as I am. However, I do believe that you can have an opportunity to delight your audience at the beginning of a con, to introduce your great guests, and to get many attendees seeing you positively. Whatever your style is, don't miss the chance.

One little thing more, just because it's fun. Our Sue Renhard discovered for Orycon 30 that the original Star Trek theme had lyrics (never used, and the story is worth googling). We had the audience sing them at the end of the ceremony. I got to hold the cards in my Lt. Uhula outfit and fling them into the audience as we finished the lines. To get you into the mood to think about how to highlight your own opening ceremonies, I suggest you do the following. Hum the original Trek theme to

remember how it scans, find a mirror, and try singing these lyrics. It's sure to get you in the mood.

Star Trek Theme Lyrics
by Gene Roddenberry

Beyond
The rim of the star-light
My love
Is wand'ring in star-flight
I know
He'll find in start-clustered reaches
Love,
Strange love a star woman teaches.
I know
His journey ends never
His star trek
Will go on forever.
But tell him
While he wanders his starry sea
Remember, remember me.



Opening and Closing Ceremonies: View from the Front and Back

By Baron Dave Romm aka DavE

Qualifications and disclaimer

I've been in charge of or participated in scores of Opening and Closing Ceremonies since 1979, hundreds if you count Opening and Closing as separate entities. I've been on stage in front of 5000 people in the LA Coliseum for LACon III and standing up in the middle of a small hotel suite at Minneapolis Fallcons. Mostly, I'm associated with Minicon, where this year will mark 28 (I think) Opening/Closing Ceremonies, often including the Shockwave Radio Theater Live Stage Show as part or adjunct. And, of course, I've been to many others. I will try to generalize to a larger set of principles, but I can only speak from my own experience. Please insert "I think", "in my view", "having screwed up, I've come to the realization that" and other qualifications as necessary.

Thanks. Okay now, where was I. Oh yes.

A word about the pictures accompanying this article

I took a fair amount of pictures when I wasn't active on stage, though none of me (not surprisingly). All the shots in this article (except the first one) are me abusing the Vast Powers that attach to the position plus the photographer's gambit of having a good vantage point.

Opening Ceremonies: To commence, let us start by beginning

A. Overview

Opening Ceremonies sets the tone of the convention. It doesn't have to be the first programming event; sf cons aren't the Olympics. Indeed, Opening Ceremonies is often the most well attended item, second only to the Masquerade or other Big Event if the con warrants, and is where you can find the largest and most diverse cross-section of convention members.

Opening Ceremonies should be planned well in advance. Much of what will actually happen might not be determined until a few minutes before the event, but you should have the structure in place.

B. Months before: When and where.

Work with Programming and/or Facilities to determine a start time and an end time. These are Opening Ceremonies, not a

starter's pistol. Therefore, you might want to have your convention intro a bit later in the evening when people get off from work. This is a balancing act and should be worked out with the arrival times of your Guests of Honor as well as the



Dave Romm rehearsing at Minicon 25: DavE at tech rehearsal
Minicon 25, April 13, 1990CE,
Photo by Terry A. Garey, poorly Photoshopped by Dave Romm.

Note stage set-up: row of mics, seats back far enough so we can move around in front of the mics, band set-up for event after Opening Ceremonies/ Shockwave.

Programming schedule.

Any sort of major equipment needs should be planned well in advance, possibly in line with the Hotel Contract or Resume. Will you need a dais and microphones? A head table and a few mics? A sound system, projector and screen? The larger the tech needs, the longer in advance you should be working on it. If your needs are simple, that's fine, but make sure that the Hotel knows what you need. Sometimes you have to wheedle a spare mic, and that takes more effort than you might think.

For the most part, where is easy: The main stage or largest programming room. For smaller cons, especially those without programming, you can be rather informal and hold it in the Consuite.

You should know the time and place at least by the last Progress Report (and maybe have a paragraph or two), and certainly by the time the Program Book/Pocket Program is published.

C. Weeks before: Who and what.

Grand Entertainment is a lot of fun for all involved, but requires more lead time. When we put on a Shockwave Live Stage Show, we had to write an original play, make sure the cast was going to be at the con, record any music/effects, and so on.

What do the Guests of Honor want to do? I tend to be very GoH driven, and like them to participate more than just a "hello". If that's all they want to do, fine. But you should always ask and leave open the possibility of a longer slot for a short speech or Q & A.

Just like Publications, you should be planning on having some Department Reports and last minute changes. More on this later, since you won't get these until minutes before the event, but you should lay the groundwork early and often. "What do you want to say? Do you want to make an announcement or do you want me to read something? Let me know!"

Does the Con Chair want to say anything? At smaller cons, the Con Chair may want to be the emcee. If so, what do you want to say? Check around and have the times for Registration, After Hours Registration, Dealers Room, Art Show etc etc at hand. Much of this information should be in the Program Book and you may not have to do more than urge people to read the Program Book (which they won't, but what the heck). If anything has changed (esp. After Hours Registration, which tends to have last minute adjustments), Opening Ceremonies needs to announce it.

Will the area be badge checked? If so, make arrangements with Ops/Volunteers. If not, you're the one who has to keep an eye on the crowd.

D. 24 hours before event

"In order to perform miracles, one must take notes."—
Robert Sheckley

Time to get all your ducks in a row.

Yes, you may have to check out the room the night before, especially if you need to rehearse (or have the players rehearse). The convention may not have the room yet, but larger cons probably do. Don't worry about tech at this point, but you should at least be worried about the people who should be worried about set-up. Including the hotel.

For larger cons that require lots of tech, you should be in the room most of the day, overseeing. Before people come in, do a tech rehearsal. Tech people are generally pretty good, but they're all volunteers too, and they're geeks. Tech cares more about minutia. You care about putting on a good show. Notably, you care about starting on time.

Medium to small cons: Check to see the microphones are working and the room is arranged the way it's supposed to be. For really small cons that might not be expecting an Opening Ceremonies at all, let people know where and when. You might have to yell.

For cons of any size, you should spend a goodly chunk of time checking with people. Are the Guests of Honor here, or will they be on time? Do they still want to do _____, or can you talk them into something at the last minute? Most of the concom will be busy and will want you to make announcements: Have them put it in writing and keep all notes with you.

Write (or prepare) introductions. This can be as simple as an off the cuff remark or reading from the Program Book...but remember to do it. Make a list of announcements and speakers.

E. Immediately before the event

When to open the doors and let people in? This is surprisingly controversial. I never had a problem with people slipping in and catching a bit of tech rehearsal or watching us do last minute set-up, but others like to do the prep work in private. Sometimes there are other events in the space before Opening Ceremonies. If the previous event is open and can function as a lead in, great. If not, and the doors need to be closed, make sure it's ended on time and your set-up is in place. At larger cons, the room might not be ready and a line will form. Open the doors as soon as possible; that might not be solely your call. Allow at least 15 minutes before the start time for people to trickle in.

This is a greater issue for larger cons, obviously. The bigger the expected audience, the earlier you should open the doors. Interestingly (at least for me), the smaller the expected audience, also the earlier you should open the doors. You can sit and chat while discreetly preparing the next step.

Track people as they come into the room. You will need to reference people in the audience and/or call them up. You don't always have the luxury of knowing where everyone will be, but it will move things along faster if you do.

For very small cons, the seating doesn't matter. At small cons, just warn people not to sit there as they come in. For medium-sized cons, Reserve the front row (or rows) for GoHs or anyone else who will be coming up to talk. For larger cons, you

may have to reserve several rows. Generally, masking tape and a few signs saying "Reserved" will do the trick.

F. Opening Ceremonies

Start on time and end on time.

Clock management is especially important for larger conventions where Main Stage time is at a premium. If the first big event ends late, the rest of the evening's schedule will be pushed back accordingly.

"Opening Ceremonies have never started on time," opined one Minicon co-chair after I'd been away for a few years. "They do when I'm in charge," I replied rather sharply.

Some opening gambits:

Smaller cons: "Hi. Could everyone be seated, we're about to start now."

Medium sized cons: "Hello, hello, is this thing on?"

Larger cons: Turn on spotlights and cue music.

Being Up Front

Many are uncomfortable speaking in front of people. I understand that; I do a radio show where I'm behind a mic. Real people are...interactive.

But know one thing: They're on your side. The crowd at Opening Ceremonies (and the entire convention) is the friendliest audience you will ever be in front of. A goodly chunk of them will know you already; some are good friends and more will be friends by the time the con is over.

So don't be afraid to browbeat people into sitting down so you can start. They know what to expect. You're in charge.

You, as Emcee, need to tell people about the con and tell them what to expect. You'll have a wide range of fannish experience in front of you it's a bit of a balancing act. Neos at their first con sit next to Old Fen who have been to far more cons than you,. I like to get everyone involved, and at larger

cons I generally ask (by a show of hands), how many are at their first...and how many have been to 20, and so on. Get everyone on the same page.

Digression 1: Illustrative and possibly humorous anecdote

Minicon 20 in 1985 was our first at the Radisson South. We had never been in that Great Hall before. The con had grown to 1500. Shockwave and Opening Ceremonies were presented as one unit with the same tech. I was the Producer of Shockwave, and oversaw the set up of the Great Hall. Our engineer, Chris, using equipment from Shockwave's listener-sponsored radio station, had rigged a number of microphones back to his station. He told me that the mics all were plugged in to this one box just in front of the stage, and he wasn't sure just how well-built it was. The box needed watching so that it didn't get kicked around.

I sat down right in front of the iffy box, next to Artist Guest of Honor Stu Shiffman, about as close to the stage as I could be without treading the boards, shooing people away.

The Fan Guest of Honor that year was a Fan Group, the Permanent Floating Riot Club out of Michigan Tech in the Upper Peninsula. As the Guests of Honor were being introduced, PFRC came in from the back, dozens of them, and marched right up to the front of the stage. A gentle kick, then a harder one, then a few more. Nothing terribly violent, but few pieces of equipment are designed to withstand PFRC.

And then it was Shockwave's Live Stage Show. The Toastmasters, Kara Dalkey and Jerry Stearns, turned the proceedings over to me. I popped on stage. "We here on Shockwave have a tradition of naming our microphones. Tom," I said into the first one, "Dick," I said into the second, "Curly," into the third, and so on through all five. The Shockwave Riders were scratching their collective heads, since we have no such tradition. I was doing a mic check.

I listened to the monitors and glanced up at our Engineer. All the mics worked. *whew*

Having reestablished tech, I went on to introduce *When The Chips Are Down*, which then happened. It wasn't our best show (alas), and I eventually rewrote the play into a shorter and tighter sketch, but we did well to pull it off at all, without anyone the wiser.

Mental Preparation/Emcee Mantras

Be flexible. Keep it running smoothly. Really, this is the hard part. If things don't work out exactly as you planned—and they won't—you have to ride the wave. Don't get bogged down in minutia or in waiting for a response.

Some emcee gambits when things stall:

"...anyway..."

"Well, moving on..."

"The next thing on the agenda is..."

"I'm sorry to cut you off, but in the interests of time we have to keep it moving.

"Well, that was fun. Now we move on to..."

"I did not know that. Meanwhile..."

"Okay, who's next?"

Have a back-up plan. A GoH might not show up in time, or a mic might not be working. Have a few extra tidbits. Don't be afraid to ad lib or bounce off a comment made by a GoH or other speaker.

Keep the audience in the loop. "We expect our Artist Guest to be here by her panel this evening."

Have an exit strategy: How are you going to end it? Perhaps have several possibilities in mind, depending on just how the flow goes. A simple "Well, that it. Go! Have a good convention!" is fine.

Opening Ceremonies should include but are not limited to:

Introduce yourself. Medium sized cons may have the room set up like a standard function room with a head table, and various people may be at that head table. You have some control over that, but not total. Introduce them, too, even if that means deviating from your carefully planned sequence.

Introduction to the con. Why are you here, why is this con different (or like) other conventions.

Welcome and thank everyone for coming.

What to do in an emergency. Where's Ops? Where's Late Registration?

Where to go to ask questions. If you have a problem with the Hotel, see Hotel/Con-Chair/Registration and/or the hotel. Etc.

Emphasize any Hotel quirks. My generic admonition: "Please don't break our hotel." Other non-standard (for fans) hotel requests should be passed on. "The Sheraton doesn't allow any tape on the wall except masking tape. We will have rolls of masking tape in Ops for signage..."

Guests of Honor. Some cons don't have GoHs, but most do. Since this may be the largest event they'll be part of, and probably the only one (besides Closing Ceremonies) that they'll all be here for, introduce them. For larger cons, you can introduce the Introducer. For medium cons, you may all simply be at a head table. Get them talking, if possible. If they just want to say hello and thanks, fine. But you can kid around or ask a pertinent question, especially if you know them. I like to get the GoH's to interact, though that can be hard.

Notable programming events.

Deviations from PB and/or pocket program.

Introduce anyone else who has asked to say something or or make the announcement for them. These are what you spent all day gathering.

You may want to point out an author or comcom member or some other notable. They should be at Opening Ceremonies. If they're 'in the bar', move along. In the early 80s when Minicon topped a thousand and grew rapidly, one of the major headaches was mentioning all the notable at the con, many of whom weren't there. Fine. We thank them for being here, but if they don't have the courtesy of showing up at Opening Ceremonies we don't have to show them the courtesy of introducing them. As Minicon grew larger, we tried various things to streamline introductions, and eventually just dropped the whole idea.

You don't have to fill up the whole time allotted, though you shouldn't leave people hanging. Remember to introduce the next event(s).

Digression 2: Illustrative and possibly humorous anecdote

The late Doug Friauf was a friend and Shockwave Rider,. He was into movies and parodies. I didn't know John Picacio at all, though his art is excellent. To get Harlan Ellison, we also scheduled a separate talk the day before the convention.

On Thursday, Harlan was having a grand ol' time. At the autographing session after his talk, he was bragging about all the science fiction conventions he had been to and all the panels he had been on, and that there wasn't a question he hadn't been asked. Hmm...

I had written a Shockwave play, *Wallace and Gromit: The Curse of the Were-Ellison*, and hoped Harlan to do the Were-Ellison parts so I gave him a copy of the script Thursday evening. Before Opening Ceremonies, he declined, saying the script was "too self-referential". Well, yes, that's how it was written; if he didn't want to read the part, I would. I arranged for a fairly low-tech performance at Opening Ceremonies.



Guests of Honor Harlan Ellison and John Picacio
at the Head Table for Opening Ceremonies.
Minicon 41, April 14, 2006CE

The even proceeded as planned. The Guests of Honor were at the head table already, and everyone else came up and talked until I cut them off. The GoHs didn't have large speeches, but they each said something nice. Harlan was ebulliently Harlan. So much fun to play with. I rose up to his challenge. "I have some questions I doubt you've ever been asked before."

"Okay, I'm game." (or words to that effect)

"If you crash landed in the Andes, which of your friends would you rather have eat you?"

He never did answer the question. He didn't actually answer any of the questions I threw at him, but we had a grand ol' time going at it. Indeed, we (and others who chimed in) filled up the entire time. The next scheduled event was a Harlan Ellison signing and he needed to be there.. I simply ended. I announced the signing, thanked everyone and boom it was over.

Harlan was stricken. He knew we had a Shockwave play in the works, and was aghast that he had used up the whole time slot. He stammered an apology and wondered if he could make up for it.

I must admit, in a previous life I would have taken advantage of this. But no, he was a Guest of Honor, and it was my job to make our guests feel honored. I told him the truth: That everyone, including the Shockwave Riders, was marvelously entertained and he shouldn't feel at all unhappy. Besides, it wasn't his call, it was mine: I was keeping track of the time and could have stopped the repartee. Harlan was being Harlan and we were better off for it.

I'll save Curse of the Were-Ellison for another time.

The convention.

Go to it. Have fun. Keep your eyes and ears open for anything that might be fun and/or useful to say at Closing Ceremonies. But mostly, enjoy yourself.

Closing Ceremonies: To conclude, let us finish by ending

A. Hours before

Gather the information you will announce. What was Registration/warm body count (if known; an estimate if not). Who won the Masquerade/Art Show Grand Prize etc. Do the Guests of Honor want to say anything at the end? If so, gently remind them of when and where. Anyone else have anything to

say? Anyone else have anything they want you to say? Ask around.

If there's a rumor to squelch or incident that needs explaining, get your facts straight before trying to tell the story to a room full of tired fen. Ops may want to tell exactly what happened when the ceiling leaked or Hotel might want to tell the story of the ferret. Whatever. Find the most direct source and either get it straight from them or have them relate a first hand account.

B. Closing Ceremonies

Your job is to find people who toil in thankless jobs and thank them for it. You have to end the convention by fulfilling the promise of the beginning of the con. Con members want to know how it went, how many of us were there, who won the various prizes, did everyone have a good time, and so on.

Thank you and recognition to the people without whom the con would not have been possible. GoH's, concom (Registration is a notably thankless task), Con-Chair(s) (if the Chair isn't emcee), volunteers (show off volunteer t-shirts or other perks), anyone else. Especially the volunteers.

Attendance from this year (if known; if not try to get an estimate from Reg. even if it's a general "more than last year"). How to register for next year.

Winners of Art Show, Masquerade, Medallion Hunt, etc. If there are too many to rattle off, announce the biggest winners and point to the rest of the information in the newsletter/online/wherever.

Amusing anecdotes or personal tidbits

Announce any dead dog parties tear-down needs, post-mortems and organizational meetings.

Announce next year's Chairs and Guests of Honor (if known). Some cons turn over Closing Ceremonies to next year's concom.

End and say goodbye. Have some sort of exit strategy. This doesn't have to be complicated, but should let everyone know that the con is over...but lives on in teardown, memories, photographs and Dead Dog Parties.



Looking out at Minicon members at Closing Ceremonies
Minicon 23, April 3, 1988, originally printed in *Rune* 78

Digression 3: Illustrative and possibly humorous anecdote

The Theme for Minicon 14 in 1982 was "Forward, Into the Past". The Theme for the Minicon 19 in 1983 (no, don't ask) was "Backward, Into The Future". That didn't affect a great deal of the convention, but we hung some Programming off concept. In structural terms, only Opening and Closing Ceremonies were affected because we wanted to run (backwards) with the idea.

As Head of Opening Ceremonies/Shockwave, I had planned out the 1982 convention this way:

Thursday, we held the Dead Dog Party.

Friday, we held Closing Ceremonies. I opened the Shockwave Live Stage Play with, "As the end of Minicon draws near..."

By Sunday, it was time for Opening Ceremonies and the Pre-Con Party.

And the very first Microprogramming event of the 1983 Minicon was the organizational meeting for the previous convention. We decided to do it, eliminating most time paradoxes.

We Conceptual Artists work hard.

To repeat some general principles:

Opening Ceremonies sets the tone of the convention. A push, however gentle, for neos and old fen alike.

Closing Ceremonies is a time to share information and feelings before people head back to the Real World™.

You're among friends. The convention is on your side. If you have fun, so will everyone else.

Make a list of all the stuff that has to happen and consult it frequently.

Keep it running smoothly. Don't get bogged down in minutia or in waiting for a response. Do practice lines like, and "Well, moving on..." and "The next thing on the agenda is..."

Have a back-up plan. A GoH might not show up in time, or a mic might not be working. Have a few extra tidbits.

Have an exit strategy.



The Greening of Fandom

Isabel Schechter

No, not Graying, Greening! Although I do have stories to tell from “the good old days...”

Back in the day, before fandom and conventions, science fiction meant going to the library every week and searching the spindle racks for new paperbacks with gaudy cover art and staying up late every Sunday night to watch Doctor Who with its spectacularly awful special effects. Science fiction was new and exciting, boldly going where few could dream, exploring brave new worlds full of strange aliens and evil overlords. It was a wonderful escape from the boredom of an everyday existence, from being hemmed in by far too many rules made by adults who clearly didn't understand that they were dealing with a child who was not like the other children.

It wasn't until many years later that the move from spindle racks to bookshelves led to my discovery of dystopian literature with its post-apocalyptic themes of a post-war, post-economic collapse, post-nuclear winter world where the survivors try to live in the ruins of a devastated society and a dying planet. Not to malign dystopian literature—it is interesting and challenging and engaging—it's just that there is only so much darkness and hopelessness that I can take before requiring a nice fluffy fantasy novel with dragons or a sprawling space opera as an antidote.

The innocence and wonder of youth, when the future only held good things like progress, and of course, spaceships, is



preferable to the cold, cruel world of modern dystopias. The world back then seemed a simpler, happier place, as was the science fiction in books and television. The world today seems much more complicated, and a lot less hopeful.

Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* (1962), widely credited with starting the modern environmental movement, had some classic elements of good science fiction: a widely accepted household product causing serious physical harm, species loss, a corporate cover-up, and government regulation. Too bad it was real (the book ultimately led to a national ban on the pesticide DDT) and not science fiction. It gets stranger, though. What if someone told you that the strawberries you find in the grocery store today may contain pig genes; wouldn't you think they've been reading too much sf? Sadly, genetically modified foods are not science fiction, but are in fact available in most grocery stores today. And that's not genetically modified as in your grandmother saving seeds from only the best tomato plants kind of agricultural Darwinism.

So what does all this have to do with fandom you ask? Well, fandom has lots of conventions, and conventions are part of the event industry, and the event industry is the #2 most wasteful industry, right behind construction. Therefore, science fiction conventions are part of the #2 most wasteful industry. Who would have thought? Here we are, coming together to discuss all this fantastic science fiction, contemplate the future, imagine the possibilities, look forward to progress, design some spaceships, and it turns out we're contributing to the destruction

of the planet. Yes, it sounds like science fiction, but again, unfortunately, it's not. Conventions are actually a major contributor to bringing about those modern dystopias.

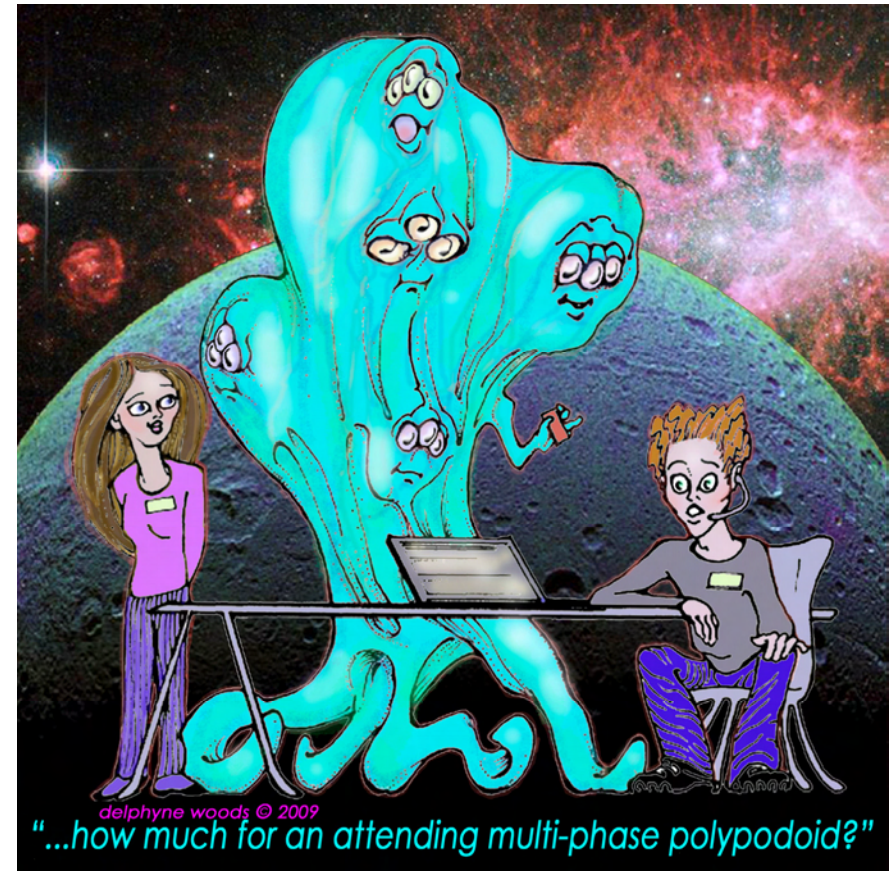
Conventions, contrary to popular belief, aren't all innocent fun and games. Conventions are full of disposable products that get thrown into landfills—thousands of pages of program books, freebie table flyers, paper/plastic/Styrofoam cups, plates, and flatware from the consuite, mini shampoo bottles, badges, stickers, and on, and on, and on. Thousands of gallons of water are spent on washing hotel sheets and towels that are only used once. Tons (literally) of CO2 emissions are added to our atmosphere by fans driving or flying to conventions.

We can avoid the impending cataclysm, however. It doesn't have to end that way. This is not to say that fandom should consider giving up holding conventions, however. Instead, conventions can reduce their carbon footprints. The goal is not to hide in our underground bunkers until the atmosphere is breathable again; the goal is to live our lives in such a way that we never have to go into the bunker in the first place.

For those who think the actions of one person or even one convention don't have much impact, just think of how many conventions you go to in one year and imagine if every one of those conventions printed fewer program books, copied fewer flyers, switched to compostable consuite products, and set up ride-share pages on their websites. Think about the impact on our environment if all conventions reduced their footprints. Imagine the impact that would have on our environment, on our natural resources, and on our pocketbooks. Think of the money that could be invested in creating spaceships instead of on fighting wars over arable land after we've turned the planet into a giant landfill.

Reducing your carbon footprint isn't rocket science. Just like lots of things that were once considered science fiction and are now commonplace—test tube babies; email; microwave

ovens; solar panels (I have several on my roof keeping me warm as I type this); cars that run on vegetable oil (I have one) or electricity (your editor has one)—hopefully carbon reduction will soon become a way of life. And if there happen to be spaceships as part of that way of life, that would be ok, too.



Dealer's Room

Bill Roper

The primary reason for having a dealers' room at an SF convention is to service the members. The secondary reason is to service the dealers, since if they are not, on average, having a pleasant and profitable time, they won't come back, which means that they won't be there to service the members. That said, you will not be able to make all of the members or all of the dealers happy all of the time. The members would be perfectly happy with a room of infinite size containing anything they might want to buy; the dealers will object to having a finite number of dollars spread over an infinite number of dealers, since none of them will make any money that way.

So while there's probably some theoretical optimum solution for the size of your dealers' room based on the number of members (and their level of affluence), in the real world we find that we're most often constrained by the function space available. A convention tends to try to set the price for tables at the market clearing level—that is to say, having selected an optimum number of tables given the size of your convention and the size of the function space, the concom would like to exactly fill the room, with perhaps an extremely short waiting list to be used in case of cancellations. But this tendency is countered by the desire to have a diverse dealers' room. The higher your table prices are, the more different kinds of merchandise that you'll price out of the room. This is why we no longer tend to see, for example, Joe Fan buying a table to clear out used books from his library, which I've heard numerous folks complain about over the years. (The fact that most rooms are oversubscribed and he wants to get rid of the books now, not some time next year, also helps.)

Conventions generally want a diverse dealers' room—it makes the members happy. Another tactic that's used to

promote diversity is to limit (by jurying or otherwise) or make it more expensive for a dealer to have multiple tables. This is not a problem for the larger, more profitable dealers (in general), but tends to discourage dealers from bringing a third table of junk jewelry (just to pick an example, not that there's anything wrong with jewelry). In general, it's more desirable to have three dealers each with a single table than to have one dealer with three tables.

(However, you increase diversity in the room by giving better book dealers—for instance—three tables, because this allows them to bring more different titles, improving the chances that your members will find the book that they're looking for. You may make that table more expensive for them, but they'll decide whether it's paying for itself or not. And to some extent, taking the third table at a higher price is a way of advertising to the members and saying, "Look here! I've got all of these books, so surely I've got the one you want.")

As it turns out, dealers also want a diverse dealers' room. If you have too many new book dealers in a room, none of them tend to do well, because the book buying dollars get spread out among too many different dealers. In an ideal world, then, we'd have exactly one dealer carrying each different item of merchandise in a room and maximum diversity.

This doesn't work, of course, because we're not living in an ideal world. First, the members would like to receive some of the benefits of competition, such as discounting. Second, if Dealer A runs out of a book, Dealer B may still have some. (In fact, just this happened to a friend of mine at Windycon this year. He was bemoaning the fact that Dealer A was out of the new Karres novel and was unable to obtain more. I suggested asking Dealer B if he had any, despite the fact that my friend had been by his table and hadn't seen the book. It turned out

that the book was right there on the table—my friend just hadn't seen it.) Third, not all book dealers (or filk dealers, or t-shirt dealers, etc.) necessarily carry all of the same merchandise. And finally, there may be enough book-buying money at a given con to support more than one book dealer, so it's rational for a second or third dealer to attempt to enter that market.

(Contrariwise, Gretchen and I don't deal at Chambanacon or Inconjunction, because there's no sense splitting that market with Juanita. Juanita tends not to deal at a number of cons we deal at. We overlap at Marcon and OVFF, because there's enough filk-buying money there to support two

filk dealers.)

Ok, we're still feeling our way through the fog here. There's a lot of nice theoretical talk above, but what are the practical things a con can do that would produce a "good" dealers' room?

Start by realizing that you cannot make everyone happy. There will always be some fan who complains that he cannot find something that he desperately wants in your dealers' room; there has never (apparently) been a dealer who has had good sales at any convention. (Despite this, they keep coming back, so I believe that some of the tales of economic disaster are overblown. :))

You can make most of the fans happy, though. You usually have enough space in your dealers' room to accommodate a wide variety of the most common fannish merchandise. So you need to arrange to mix it up. There are a number of ways to do this, almost all of which involve at least some level of jurying at the marginal table level in order to balance the room.

(This assumes, of course, that you have applications from dealers for each of the desirable lines of merchandise. You may not. If this situation persists, it's time for you to start recruiting dealers, no? Take, for example, the frequent complaint about the absence of button dealers lately. Go to some cons in other cities, find a button dealer, and—excuse the expression—button hole them. Tell them what a swell idea it is to come to YourCon. If that doesn't work, see if you have some budding entrepreneurial talent in your home city who you can convince to start up a button making business. It's not like the barriers to entry are huge in this case. There are other dealer categories, like books, filk, or jewelry, where the



THE JOYS OF HUCKSTER ROOM SET UP!

inventory costs might keep someone new out, but most cons don't have a big problem filling that sort of niche anyway.

I've been recruited by some nice folks at other cons who would like to have a filk dealer, but I've usually had to say "No" just because my schedule is full up. I feel guilty about that, but then I'm not trying to make my living this way.)

I tend to give bonus points to dealers who provide items that aren't easy to find in stores. That would seem to be a minus for book dealers, but then you have to consider that the better dealers carry more titles than you would tend to find even in a store like Borders or Barnes & Noble. And I'm definitely going to give bonus points to SF/Fantasy book dealers as opposed to those who are selling remaindered titles of dubious value to the fannish community.

If my con has a strong programming bent in a particular direction (say filk or anime or costuming), I'm going to try to make sure that I have at least one dealer to service those members.

I'm going to give bonus points to dealers who make at least some of their own products for sale.

I will try to minimize duplication of items in the room. I'm unlikely to need, say, two dealers selling similar (even if not identical) crystals and incense, especially since that market's going to be relatively small as opposed to, say, books.

Minus points go to things which—even though they might be attractive to some folks—are not particularly fannish. See the remaindered books discussion above.

And then there are going to be the cases which I just can't solve. If Joe Trufan believes that it just isn't a real SF convention unless there's someone there selling rare old books, he may well be dissatisfied by anything smaller than a Worldcon (or a specialty con that attracts a lot of folks just like Joe Trufan), because I may not be able to find such a dealer who can make enough money at MyCon to make him want to come there. It's likely to be a thin market for that dealer at most

regionals, which isn't necessarily a good thing or a bad thing, it's just a thing that exists and we'll have to deal with it.

I want to support the dealers who come back and support the convention year after year. There's a certain value to the members in knowing that they can count on having Dealer X at the con.

And I want to have a certain amount of turnover in the room, because I want the members to find something new and delightful in the room that they've never seen before. (And I want to see that dealer make a lot of money and come back. :))

And let's give some more bonus points to the dealers who support the con by working on it, or appearing on panels, or even just saying good things about it.

Does this form a scoring system where I can add up all the points and determine definitively that Dealer X should be in the room and Dealer Y should not? Heck no! But it does give me some idea of how to rank the dealers if I need to do so.

When I do that, I'm going to find that there are some dealers who are no-brainers, because I either want them in the room or I don't. If I'm lucky, I find that I've got some tables left after putting all of the no-brainers in the room. (If I'm already oversold at that point, then I've either got to make some really tough decisions or try to find a bigger room.) Now I can start ranking the remaining desirable dealers so I can fill out the room and try to satisfy the maximum number of members, because I've got some decent criteria for trying to do it.

I'll still get down to the last table or two and wish that I had different choices that I could make and that I could squeeze someone else in.

But I'll feel pretty good about it when I'm done, because I've probably got a dealers' room that'll make my members and dealers happy.

And that's the best that I can hope for.

Expanding your Program Participant Base

Steven H Silver

When it comes time to figure out program participants, the first ones on the list for any given year are the con's guests of honor. Not only should the programming chair use these people on panels, but panels should be designed with their work (written, artist, film, or other) in mind. Even better is to find out their interests and program accordingly. Most people can be used in ways not obvious if you only look at what they are best known for.

Does your author guest of honor paint? Sing? Work as an active scientist, folklorist, photographer? Find out and use them in those areas. It will make the con more interesting for the guest and introduce their fans to a different, more human, aspect of them. Hal Clement, for instance, could speak about his novels, teaching science in the classroom, or his experience in World War II. If Programming needed it, Hal could present his "George Richard" persona as an artist and discuss his painting and illustrations. Most guests, no matter how they are billed, have the ability to be a sort of Renaissance guest, but in many cases, the title pasted on them...Author...Artist...Media...blinds and limits the Programming team from using them as effectively and as innovatively as possible.

Following the guests of honor, there are guests and special guests, local fans, authors, artists, etc. who can be relied upon, and other individuals who contact Programming (or through the office of guest liaison). As the Programming staff gets to know these individuals on a more personal basis following several years of attendance, the staff should have a better idea of each of their strengths and weaknesses, as well as their varied interests to use them to expand the program and fill in gaps as needed.

However, there are abundant sources for additional program participants out there: people who can be contacted

who might not otherwise come to the convention, but can add a great deal of value to the program, often for the simple price of a comped day membership.

I've brought in specialist panelists from the local newspapers. After noticing one of the local paper's television reviewers give several good reviews of SF television shows, I dropped her an e-mail asking her to attend. She (and her husband) did and had a great time and hope to come back. Looking through the paper, there are other possibilities as well: the cultural critic, film critics, the book review editor (although our local book review editor detests SF and won't review it, which makes me want to bring her to a con even more).

Radio personalities are also a possibility. In Chicago, Peter Sagal, of "Wait, Wait, Don't Tell Me" is an avowed science fiction fan. We won't know if he'll come to a con until we ask him. Another NPR commentator, Aaron Freeman, did come to a Windycon several years ago. A couple months later, I got a call from him and he read one of his commentaries, about the con, to me about a week before it was broadcast on NPR.

Museums, especially, but not limited to, science museums, are also a good place to look. Scientists can come to talk about their specialties, curators about preservation techniques, if you have an art museum see if there is any reasonable tie (again, many pulp SF artists actually studied at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago). Contact their community outreach departments to see who is available.

Universities have a plethora of specialists, many of whom will be willing to come out and talk about their areas of specialty, whether it be science, history, philosophy, art...Check their credentials. A few years ago, I noticed a philosopher from a

university about three hours away had written an article about *Firefly*. We had him at the con.

Numerous fans work in the technology industry and know people at their offices or companies who are doing research that could possibly be shared. Reach out to them. Not only might they be willing to come and talk, but, given the type of work they do, they might easily be able to make the transition to fan.

Many cities have other, more miscellaneous organizations, that could offer good panelists. In most large cities, you'll be able to find someone (or sometimes, multiple someones) who offer tours of the haunted spots in the city. They can't really give a tour during the con, but they can tell stories and distribute literature about their offerings.

About three months before the convention, send an e-mail, call, or send a letter to the individuals you want to invite. Remember, they most likely aren't part of the con-attending community and will have preconceptions about what to expect. Explain a little about your con. Tell them why you think they would be a good addition, including specific program items you would like to put them on, or topics you would like them to speak about. Let them know what you are willing to offer...a one day membership for them, for them and a guest, the whole weekend?

If you don't get a response, follow up, but don't make a pest of yourself. If they don't respond after a second invitation, give it up and possibly try again the following year.

And if they do accept, treat them as a guest of honor from Programming's point of view. Let them know

expectations, where to pick up badges, materials, etc. Keep in touch with them and let them know what their schedule is. Don't schedule them for anything without their approval. And contact them about a week before the event with a reminder, their schedule, and to ask if there is anything else they need.

With luck, they'll not only add a new dimension to the convention, but will enjoy themselves so much that they'll come back on their own dime and can be inserted into the regular programming participant pool.



The Minicon Moderator's Guidelines

The Minicon 25 Programming Committee, Sharon Kahn, Co-Chair

Presumably^c, you are looking at this document because you are planning to originate a programming item, moderate it, or both. If you are entering this process sometime after Section 1, it is strongly suggested that you find out what the originator of the panel had in mind, and what, if anything, has been communicated to the panelists so far.

Section 1: DEFINING THE PANEL

TOPIC: Exactly what is the point? Be specific. Come up with a 1-3 sentence description that will leave no doubt in the mind of all the panel participants what they will be talking about. This description will also appear in the program book.

PURPOSE: Why are you doing this? To inform? Entertain? Showcase a GOH? Spark a group discussion? Stir up a controversy? It has been suggested that there are only two possible purposes for a panel: to inform or to entertain (with the best panels, of course, accomplishing both.)

TITLE: There seem to be 3 general approaches to titles:

(1) Explicit: "Collaborations: How It's Done, Why We Shouldn't Do It, and Why We Keep Doing it Anyway"

(2) Clever: "Worldcon Envy: Does Size Matter?"

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Disclaimer: These guidelines and suggestions are the distillation of a series of brainstorming sessions. In other words, this document was originated by committee. So if it waffles, backpedals and blatantly contradicts itself, that's just the way it goes. The project was started and organized by 1990 Minicon Programming Co-Chair Sharon Kahn, and involved many people's input. Dave Romm volunteered to take the mass of data, add his further input, organize and format it for the Mac, and give it to Sharon for final revision. What you see here is Dave's file, adapted to html, not Sharon's final, though changes were slight. E-mail me for the original 6pp file in MS Word 3.1 (Mac).

(3) Hybrid: "Lime Jello, Myth or Reality: The Origins of Fannish Legends"

The entire topic is surprisingly controversial, actually. But everybody agrees that titles should not be overly generic, for instance "Women in SF" or "Fantasy or Science Fiction?" The more specific the better.

SIZE: Experts suggest an ideal panel size of 5 including the moderator, rarely fewer than 4 or more than 6. Remember, 60 minutes divided by 5 panelists means 12 minutes for each person, assuming the audience doesn't participate (ha!).

FORMAT: Now you know what you are doing and why, let's talk about format.

Panel, Discussion Group, Debate, Free-for-all? This should be decided on far enough in advance to put in the program book.

Question Policy: Audience questions can be encouraged throughout or only taken during designated question period(s). Be sure to make the policy clear to all panelists (and then to the audience during the panel).

Facilities: Do you need a large room, a small room or an intimate space? Will you be seated behind a long table, around a round table or just chairs facing an audience? How many microphones will you need? Do you need special equipment like a slide projector or overhead?



CONSIDER MODERATOR STYLE: There is no single "best" way to moderate a panel. The style you use depends not only on your personality, but the topic and purpose of the panel, the personalities of the panelists, and what happens when the bullets start flying. In Section 3, you will find a list of moderator styles that have been observed in action at conventions that are now history. We had fun identifying these and we hope they provide food for thought.

Section 2: PRE-PANEL PREPARATION

MAKE YOURSELF A CRIB SHEET FOR USE DURING THE PANEL. Including but not limited to:

Panel title, 1-3 sentence description.

At least 3 questions that can be asked during the course of the panel. A starter question or two and then keep several emergency questions handy.

Panelist names and pertinent info about each (names of books, etc.).

READ SOMETHING BY EACH PANELIST, if possible. If not, at least know their latest book or a recent accomplishment.

TALK WITH THE PANELISTS BEFORE THE CON, if possible. Let them know if you will be gathering in the Green Room before the panel.

MEET WITH THE PANELISTS AT THE CON, either one by one or in a group. The Green Room is available for this purpose. If you can't meet in the Green Room, at least spend a few seconds before you convene to introduce yourselves.

IN THE GREEN ROOM:

Review panel description, purpose and format with the participants.

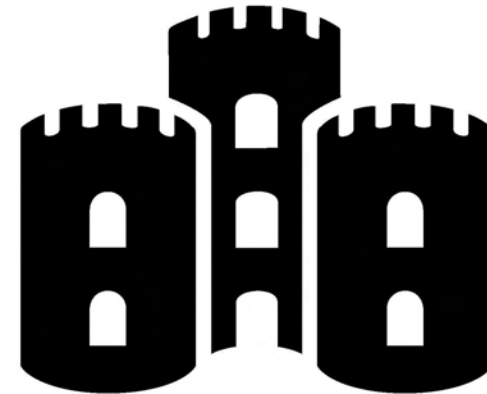
If you haven't already, introduce yourself and each other.

Check with the participants: Anything you've thought of since we last talked? Anything in particular I should ask? Anything to avoid? Get preferences and suggestions.

If panelists seem to need warming up, try out one of your Questions on them. If they're shy, feed them several questions so they can think about their answers for a while.

There are refreshments in the Green Room which participants can take to the panel.

Relax.



GETTING STARTED

Arrive on time. A few minutes early is ok. If you're arriving from the Green Room, arrive all at once; it really impresses the audience.

Sit down. If possible, arrange the tent cards yourself so the panelists are where you want them. Feel free to move people if they've beaten you to the seating arrangements. You may choose to sit at the end of the row of panelists instead of in the middle. It will make it easier to keep an eye on everybody.

Start the panel by establishing rapport with the audience. The traditional opening is "Hello? Hello? Is this mike on?" If it is,

smile and continue. If it isn't, turn it on (or otherwise make arrangements to be heard).

Identify yourself and briefly describe the panel.

Introduce panelists, referring to your notes as needed.

Give the ground rules ("If this goes according to plan..."). Be sure to address Question Protocol (questions taken any time, or only during specified question period)

Throw out the first question. Think carefully about who to address it to! The first questioner will set the tone for the panel. Some possibilities: The most senior GoH, the person with the most experience, the quietest person on the panel, the person who originally proposed the idea for the panel, the person most likely to set the tone you are striving for. Play out the question, giving everybody a chance at it.

FINISHING UP

Finish on time!

Give a 5 or 10 minute warning that time is running out. Issue a summing-up question.

If you have to interrupt the last person, do so. "I'm afraid we're out of time. Thank you all for coming."

Thank the panelists for participating.

If a discussion is still raging, suggest that the discussion can continue in Krushenko's [or any open site, including the consuite or the bar].

Announce the next panel.

Section 3: MODERATOR STYLES

We present these as examples for your consideration. Most moderators combine elements of more than one style. The style used for any panel depends on the personality of the moderator and the interaction of the participants. Some of the building blocks for a style can be found in the Section 4.

EVEN-HANDED: Keeps things moving, involves everyone, facilitates discussion without taking sides or expressing opinions. A good even-handed moderator can moderate a panel on a topic he knows nothing about and isn't even interested in.

NURTURING: Much like even-handed, but even more so. Especially attentive to quiet panelists who need to be drawn out and encouraged to enter the discussion.

PARTICIPATING: Joins in the discussion and expresses opinions, but without taking over or dominating the panel. At times, panel may appear to be a round-table discussion with no one moderating. However, the moderator is in fact leading the discussion, raising questions, encouraging participation by everyone and dealing with interruptions. This style is difficult to pull off. You must be able to split yourself into 2 people—the moderator and the participant. Do not call on yourself more often than any other participant.

TIGHTLY REINED: A moderator who naturally tends toward Participating Moderator trying very hard to function as an Even-Handed. Produces tremendous dramatic tension as audience waits for moderator to crack.

QUESTIONING: Intensely interested in the topic, but hasn't made up his mind how he feels about it yet and is hoping to gain insight into the subject (frequently a difficult or controversial one) by questioning the panelists.

PROVOCATIVE: This moderator believes that life is a bit dull without conflict. Specializes in questions like, "I sense that you may have some disagreement with the last speaker," and "You aren't going to let him get away with that, are you?"

Not to be too judgmental or anything, we do hope you avoid elements of the following styles:

IGNORANT: Not only knows nothing about the topic of this panel or the people on it, he didn't even know he was moderating it until about 5 minutes ago. (Best solution is to admit your ignorance ["But I find the topic fascinating!"] and get

the panelists to suggest appropriate questions, perhaps when you have them introduce themselves.)

FAILS TO FACE THE PANEL: Runs dull topics into the ground, interrupts discussions just as they're getting interesting, lets one panelist dominate the time, doesn't prompt reticent speakers, cuts off panelists in mid-sentence but lets audience loudmouths run on forever, etc.

OUT-OF-IT: Too sleepy (or otherwise underbrained) to pay attention. Calls the panelists by their wrong names, misremembers their books, gets the topic of the panel wrong and/or is still trying to get in the last word from the previous panel.

Section 4: THE ART OF MODERATING

Prepare in advance, but go with the flow. Don't be afraid to alter your original plan radically if it seems like a good idea. But do have a plan. Maybe more than one.

Keep the level of energy high. Be aware when a question or topic has run its course and be prepared to change direction.

Play devil's advocate if things get dull.

Refer to your prepared questions when you need a new topic.

Watch the audience. Start taking questions if too many hands are up; pick up the pace if people start to fidget (or leave).

Repeat questions from the audience, especially if the room is large.

Pay attention to the panelist's answers and ask follow-up questions if appropriate.

Pay attention to the people farthest from you: They may be participating less. Seat shy or quiet panelists close to you.

Pay attention to body language. Watch for signs of impatience, annoyance or general disagreement with the last

speaker (frowns, muscle tension, leaning forward, leaning backward, folding arms across chest). If a light bulb suddenly goes on over someone's head, call on them quick before they forget the idea!

Use body language. Lean forward slightly and make eye contact to encourage a shy panelist. To cut someone off politely: lean back, catch their eye. If that doesn't do it, slowly reach toward the mike.

Prompt the audience, if necessary. Lead the applause or laughter, but squelch any which goes on too long.

Remember: The audience didn't come to see you. Sometimes the moderator's main job is to stay out of the way. This happens more often than you might think.

Be firm. Don't lose control of the panel or audience.

Have fun. Encourage the panelists to have fun too. If the panelists enjoy themselves, so will the audience.



Moderator Emergency Kit

WHEN THE CONVERSATION GRINDS TO A HALT

- ❖ "Let's open the panel to questions from the audience."
- ❖ "What's the greatest challenge for you in your work right now?"
- ❖ "Is there anything we're leaving out here that needs to be addressed?"
- ❖ "What's the biggest controversy in this area?"
- ❖ "What's the greatest misconception people have about...?"
- ❖ "How did you handle this problem when you were working on...[insert book title or character name from author's work]?"
- ❖ "What made you decide to tackle this subject?"
- ❖ "Speaking as a [person not normally involved in this area] what's your perspective?"
- ❖ "What's the question you are most tired of hearing on this subject, and what would you like to say about it so you never have to answer it again?"
- ❖ Ask another person on the panel the question.
- ❖ Ask a follow-up question.
- ❖ Ask a different person to comment on another panelist's answer.

SQUELCHING THE PANEL

- ❖ "Excuse me, but we have wandered far afield..."
- ❖ "Getting back to the original topic..."
- ❖ "That would be a good subject for another panel."

- ❖ "Excuse me, but we haven't heard from [reticent panelist] in a while."
- ❖ "Let's take a question from the audience."

SQUELCHING THE AUDIENCE

- ❖ "No comments from the peanut gallery."
- ❖ "In order to make the best possible use of our panelists, we're only taking questions from the audience, not statements."
- ❖ "We're only taking statements from the audience, not questions."
- ❖ "Oh, let's not always see the same hands."
- ❖ "Thank you for your interesting suggestion. You may be right."
- ❖ "You're making some rather broad generalizations."
- ❖ "Ok, ok, I think I understand the question. Now, which of our panelists wants to handle it?"
- ❖ "Would someone in the back please call hotel security."

Moderator Mantras

- ❖ It's only an hour.
- ❖ This has never killed anyone yet.
- ❖ I do not have to go home with this person.
- ❖ It's okay to do this—I'm the moderator.
- ❖ Hey, this is a nice looking tablecloth!

Minicon Moderator Preparation Sheet

Name of Panel: _____

Description _____

Day and Time: _____ Room: _____

Panelist Intros (including yourself)

Starter Questions

Emergency Questions and notes

The Boskone 43 Moderators Guide: (and other interested parties)

As the moderator, you can help make a panel focused and fun. You should try to:

Be prepared. (And, hopefully, you've already given some thought to this program item!) Pick up the panel's name cards at Program Ops. Briefly talk to your fellow panelists before the program item. Think up some questions or topics to keep the panel going if conversation lags. Make a crib sheet. And...start on time!

Briefly outline the topic of the panel for the audience.

Briefly introduce the panelists, or ask them to introduce themselves. (Do not allow others to join the panel unless the Program staff authorizes this addition.)

· Avoid the temptation to start the panel by announcing that you have no idea what it's about or why you're on it. Keep others from doing the same. (Yes—it is an easy way to start, and could well make the audience feel a sense of rapport with you. It may even be amusing. However, even if this is true, drawing attention to the convention's failings is rude and generally unnecessary.)

Make sure that all panelists start with an equal chance to participate, but once the panel is going, give more time to people who are making it a good panel and less to those who are inarticulate or prove to have little useful to contribute. Be fair, but firm.

Prevent the discussion from drifting away from the topic. Don't let panelists (including yourself!) pursue individual agendas unless they are directly on topic.

Allow time for questions, but don't let individual questioners monopolize the panel or drag it away from the topic. (If necessary, consider announcing that you will only take audience questions and comments after a specific time: don't move to questions too quickly!) If you are in a large room,

repeat questions from the audience so everyone in the room knows what was asked.

While you should try to keep the program on track, don't let any of these rules cause you to stop a discussion which is interesting to both the panel and audience! Keep the "big" picture in mind.

Keep an eye on the time (check a watch or clock, or keep an eye out for our adorable Program Ops workers who will may be around to flash "5 Minutes" and/or "STOP" signs for some panels). Consider asking a summing-up question near the end of your allotted time. Then, bring the panel gracefully to a close when your time is up. Thank everyone!

Please do not linger after the panel, and discourage other panelists from doing so, so that the next program item can start on time. If people want to talk with the panelists, please encourage them to do it outside the room.

To the best of our knowledge, moderating has never killed anyone. Yet.

Go with the flow. Relax. Enjoy.

Being a moderator is a JOB—but it can be a rewarding one.

Thank you for your willingness to take it on.



On Moderators and Moderating

Mary Kay Kare

Everything below is my opinion. I have a lot of experience behind those opinions, but I'm not infallible (you're shocked, I know). Circumstances and local mores must always be taken into consideration.

I wonder sometimes what people are thinking when they assign moderators. Also, what they are thinking when they don't. I suppose in that latter case maybe they may not have the people for it, but that's kind of difficult to believe. I've certainly seen some odd people assigned to moderate panels. Known mike hogs. People with an axe to grind/hobby horse to ride re the topic in question. Timid, quiet, shy people. Combative, tactless people. People with no social skills.

People, good moderating is hard work, but it can be invaluable in giving the panelists and attendees a good experience. So how do you choose these moderators so as to encourage success and a positive experience for all?

First of all, the moderator of a panel should be interested in the topic under discussion but not have a stake in it. I, personally, don't believe I can both moderate a panel well and participate in it. However, if it's something I'm interested in, I can, with luck and planning, keep things moving by asking questions the audience would ask did they have the chance. This assumes that the audience is interested but not expert themselves, but you kind of have to assume something about them.

When I've seen programming happening behind the lines, as it were, all too often, the moderators get assigned at the last minute without much thought. Often the programming folk merely ask someone already on the panel if they're willing to moderate. Really people, inscribe this on your brain:

STAKEHOLDERS DO NOT MAKE GOOD MODERATORS.

Now of course, almost all of us can cite some instance where, in fact the moderator was a stakeholder who did a fine job. I can tell you a lot more horror stories than success stories though. (Make it a Hendricks on the rocks with a twist of cucumber and I'll even try to make them entertaining.)

There's no way around it though: you're going to have to attend some panels and watch your panelists and moderators in action. No other way to judge their ability. Well, ok, the reports of someone/s you trust. But somebody's experience is about the only way to judge good moderating. You want people who

1. Keep the discussion moving and lively
2. Make sure that everyone (including the audience) gets a fair share of time
3. Have a wide-ranging and inquisitive mind
4. Can be both tactful and assertive – at the same time even
5. Won't be fazed by fractious panelists refusing direction (once again I can tell horror stories if oiled by good gin – or Lagavulin maybe)
6. Have social skills

Once you find these people, cultivate them, give them what they want/need, and USE them. Your panelists and attendees will thank you.

All righty then. You've been asked to moderate X panel and you've agreed. Now what? Well obviously, you want to perform whatever functions your particular program director

expects of moderators. Assuming they have any and that they share them with you. There are some general points though.

Be Prepared. One of your job functions is to keep the panel moving when/if the panelists run out of things to say. Or never even get started. This is where it helps to be interested in the topic yourself. Some knowledge of the field is useful in framing questions to ask the panelists to give them something to start with. However, you can successfully moderate panels on topics about which you know nothing whatsoever. Research is your friend. And it doesn't have to be fancy either. A good encyclopedia article or even Wikipedia can furnish you with enough knowledge to ask leading questions. (If you need to be taught how to do research, that'll cost you \$50/hr. Or I can do your research for you at \$65/hr plus expenses.)

If you don't know the panelists you'll be moderating, find out what you can about them. If the program head has time, he/she can be a gold mine of information about them. Otherwise ask your fannish friends. You need to attend a lot of programming (and listen to a lot of gossip) in order to know who needs what kind of special handling. And some of them do. Knowledge of your panelists is as important as some basics on the topic.

Once you know the topic and the panelists, invest some time thinking about strategies to make it the best panel it can be. If it's part of the program's ethos, take advantage of supplied information to contact your panelists before hand. Don't do a lot of discussion on the topic before hand – that can make you stale – but find out what the panelists expect and want in regards the panel. They'll love you for it.

Okay, you've got your questions and strategies and information. Now it's time for the panel. Your information from programming should include what they expect you to do. Pick up name tents from the Green Room? Meet the panelists in the Green Room X minutes before the panel? Pick up drinks for your panelists? If the info isn't there ASK. Even if it's a con

you're familiar with ASK. They may want to change things. There might be a new program head. This panel may need X special thing. Especially ask about timing considerations. When should the program item be ended? How long is it supposed to run? (Do not be afraid to end a panel early if you, the panelists, and the audience have run out of things to say. Staying there til the bitter end does no one any good.)

Okay, so you're heading off to your panel with whatever programming wanted you to have. In addition, take a watch and paper and writing implement. If you haven't all met in the Green Room (and you probably haven't) try to introduce yourself to the panelists you don't know yet before the panel starts. Try very hard to start the panel on time – even if all the panelists aren't there.

The first thing I do, even before I introduce myself is to ask all the people in the room to either turn off their cell phones or at least turn the ringer off. Cell phones ringing in the middle of a panel are RUDE and people who let it happen should be mocked unmercifully. (Ask me about the time a panelist's phone not only went off during the panel, HE ANSWERED IT AND HELD A CONVERSATION!!!)

Usually I ask panelists to introduce themselves, but use your judgment. If it's a con of 50 people all of whom know each other, duh.

Okay, things get less clear cut now. If you've had a chance to talk with the panelists before hand, you can start off with a gentle push in the agreed upon direction. Otherwise, you have to use your judgment and observational skills. If they don't need a nudge but are willing to jump right in, let'em go. Save your hard won questions for when discussion begins to flag.

Listen carefully to what your panelists are saying – you may want to make a note of questions their statements provoke in you. It really is best not to rely on memory here and that's what you brought the pen and paper for anyway. Watch the

audience for cues to confusion. Ask questions to clear that up if you can. Make sure that everyone on the panel gets a chance to contribute. Though I've had people refuse to do so. Why they agreed to be on the panel to start with Roscoe alone knows, but don't push them too hard if they're recalcitrant.

You may have to interrupt, repeatedly, if you've got a mike hog. If this thought makes you quiver in apprehension, moderating is not for you. Try to work out a way to do it smoothly, but do it. Some people won't actually read your non-verbal signals, or will read them but ignore them. Be prepared to be what most people would consider rude in that case.

Audience participation can be tricky. I've been in panels where the audience was so valuable as to be a panel member in aggregate. I've also seen panels derailed by idiots. Just about every fannish community has its Cross To Bear. Know this person and avoid calling on him/her in the audience participation segment. (Which can be throughout the panel or 10 minutes at the end. Know local expectations and practices.) (The audience can also help out when panelists run dry.)

All the while, keep a close eye on the clock. About 5-10 minutes before it's time to end, ask the panelists to sum up and make closing statements. If the panel doesn't want to end, suggest a venue for continuing the conversation. Make a closing statement that further questions and autograph requests should go out into the hall because there's another panel coming in. Thank the audience and your panelists and then get everyone the hell out. You can now go to the bar and have a well-earned drink.

This may just be personal prejudice on my part but I have one very strong DO NOT DO for moderators. Do not, for the love of Roscoe, come to the panel with a long list of questions and insist that each panelist answer them in turn and then go down the list that way. I will get up and walk out. Good panels are a conversation among the panelists, moderator, and audience. That's my opinion of course, but it's an opinion developed and confirmed by 30+ years of attending panels.

Above all, have fun. If you're having fun your audience is having fun. That's why we're here, right?



THE ART SHOW

Notes on Being a Better Panelist

Steven H Silver (with suggestions from Priscilla Olson and Michael D. Thomas)

Some do's

- I. Be prepared. If possible, find out the topics beforehand and make notes prior to the convention.
- II. Do have a general discussion with your co-panelists before the panel (meet in the Green Room before your panel if this is possible), but nothing too specific. At the very least, agree on what you're going to talk about!
- III. Especially if you are discussing something controversial, do back up your arguments and assertions with facts/
- IV. Do start and end on time (and take discussions/autographing that often pop up the end of the program item out of the room.)
- V. Turn off your phone (or, at least, put it on vibrate) before the panel starts.
- VI. If you speak softly, do remember to either speak as loud as you can or request a microphone. If only the first two rows can hear you, it doesn't matter how brilliant your observations are.
- VII. Do know how to use the technical equipment you asked for (well ahead of time...)
- VIII. Do use humor and/or try to be entertaining, where appropriate. (This is particularly important if it's supposed to be a funny program item!)
- IX. Do expect surprises. They happen.
- X. Be polite.
- XI. Have fun

Some things not to do:

- I. Do not announce that you don't know why you're on a panel. If you get put on a panel that you feel is not appropriate for you to be on, let programming know ahead of time so you can be removed from the panel.
- II. Do not sit on a panel and only promote/refer to your own work. You can mention what you've written, but your focus should be on the topic, not on selling your books/stories/whatever. If you are only at the convention to sell, that's what the dealer's room is for.
- III. If you have books with you, do not stand them up like a wall between you and the audience. It is distancing. Hold the titles up when you introduce yourself, but then either put them away or lay them flat on the table (see #2)
- IV. Do not monopolize the conversation. Chances are that if you do so, you will both bore and annoy your co-panelists and the audience. Unless you are Harlan Ellison, in which case they've probably given you a solo slot.
- V. Do not drone.
- VI. Do not be a wallflower. If you aren't adding to the conversation, there is little reason (if any) for you to be on the panel and someone else who can/will talk about the topic would have been a better choice.
- VII. Do not be afraid to disagree. Panels in which everyone agrees are boring. A little debate goes a long way to

make a better and memorable panel. That said, don't disagree just for the sake of disagreeing.

- VIII. Also, do not insult people—other panelists, the audience, the committee....
- IX. Do not drag the program item off-topic.
- X. Do not call on people in the audience for questions if you're not the moderator—corollary: in fact (unless you are the moderator OR the moderator isn't doing the job) don't moderate.
- XI. Do not add other people to the program item, or allow people to add themselves to it.



Programming—First Principles

Mary Kay Kare

Steven talked to me about doing an article on programming, but the topic is too huge and sprawling to take on. You could write a book about it, let alone a fanzine article. There are, however, a couple of things I would like to talk about – call them basic principles on which to build your programming.

1. What is your convention's mission statement? It may be explicit or implicit, but most conventions will have something they're aiming at. Keep that mission in mind as you build your programming and ask yourself, "How does this contribute to our mission?" Of course, since this is probably not a for-profit

venture we're talking about, not everything has to be directed to fulfilling this, but you'll have a better-organized, more coherent program if you keep it in mind.

2. Our guests of honor are here to be honored. Ask them what they've always wanted to do on programming and never got to do. Devote a substantial amount of your programming to them and their work. And note, they do not have to be on every panel about their work – it can be better if they aren't.

3. Your program should be chock-full of things you want to go see. If it isn't, why are you doing this?

4. Know your panelists. Who work well together? Who needs a firm moderator? Who is currently feuding with whom? Who is good to put on panels that need another person, i.e., can talk about many things well and entertainingly. (Buy that person a beer or a martini or whatever else they need at every opportunity. They're GOLD.) Know who has hobby-horses that need avoiding. If you have, for some reason, to program with panelists you don't know well, find someone who does and bribe them with whatever is necessary to get them to help you. The panelists are the actors who will execute your plan; do a good job of casting them and you'll all be happier.

5. Your panelists, moderators, and staff are your prime assets work hard to give them what they need and they'll work hard for you.

6. Comedy is always popular, but hard.

7. Try new things. Steal from other cons' programming. Ask people for ideas. Collect program books and pocket programs from other conventions. Even conventions very different from yours can provide a new idea for organizing or staging or something.

8. In this, as in so much of life, balance is key. Not everything needs to be Bright! Shiny! and New! But some of it had better be. Good luck.

Thinking About Program (with footnotes)

Priscilla Olson

O.K...I can make allusions to planting a garden (um, “compost” and all)—or giant jigsaw puzzles (which example, alas, tends to leave out the “artistic/organic” part of the process.) How about cellular protein synthesis: there are such great analogies implicit in replication and transcription, and what about those polypeptides (panel items?) produced at the ribosomes (program heads?) No....let me try to do this straight.

This essay is not really meant to discuss how to put together a program for a science fiction convention. It is a look at some of my thoughts on the subject of programming

(Note, however, that practice is informed by policy—what one does and how one does it are direct consequences of what one’s philosophy is on the subject. Because of this, there will almost certainly be some how-tos embedded in the text.)

These ideas apply to both Worldcon programs¹ and to those of smaller conventions. It will attempt to explore my thoughts on some basic issues someone programming a convention should consider—and, if at all possible, implement.

Who is the program for?

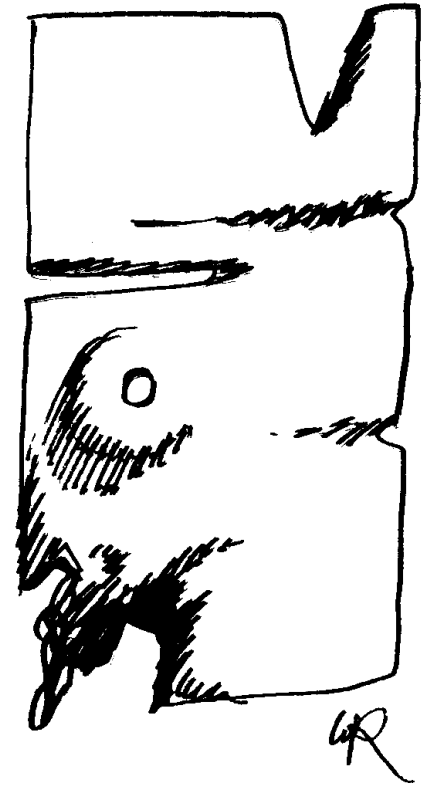
The program is for your convention community. It is not for the program head. It is not for the chair of the convention, or

¹ I think it’s important to note that for a Worldcon, program is more a giant *area* than a division: it concentrates, basically, on one (admittedly large) project, and I think that makes it differ from the other standard Worldcon divisions. Additionally, in many ways, programming for a Worldcon is easier than programming for a smaller convention. For the former, one has nearly unlimited resources: space, people, time, etc. Generally, too, a Worldcon is meant to be strongly inclusive; practically anything goes. A smaller convention is lapidary work; it’s all about precision, and is frequently harder to do.

for any specific guest(s) of the convention. It is not for the convention that someone thinks you should have or for the one someone wants to have in the future. Program heads who refuse to understand this concept, should not be doing the job.

Can one incorporate items into the convention that serve the other causes listed above? Of course! (In fact, it would be ridiculous not to do so. The program must not devolve into a stagnant reflection of the past!) But because the program is conversation between members of the convention (see below), the program head is responsible for putting together a program that is first and foremost for the people who will be there and who have certain expectations of that particular convention—and that program should be balanced² accordingly.

² When you get right down to it, programming is really about balance. That word will show up again and again in this discussion. Serious? Fannish?



What is the program for?

Teresa Nielsen Hayden once described the program as orchestrating³ "the conversation of the convention" and that's a great short summary. The main job⁴ of the program head is to put together a schedule of interesting topics staffed with interesting people who'll talk about them in ways that extend the conversation to the convention. The conversation (two-way or multi-way interactions) takes place between and among the members of the convention community⁵—all of them at one time or another if the job is done well. A really great program is one whose ideas are still being



How much of one topic? How much fringe? How much specific? How much abstract? Etc.

While I can describe how I can sometimes achieve this balance by staring at a giant piece of foam core covered with scraps of paper and going into a Zen-like trance (allowing me to see the convention holistically) and then applying feng-shui principles to it, that would sound like the claptrap it probably is. Sorta works for me, though. Find your own way, grasshopper...

³ And like a conductor, the program head isn't actually making the music (though some insist on a very, um, hands-on performance of the job), but balancing all parts of the orchestra so the performance is better than the orchestra could have done by itself.

⁴ Please note that I am making some distinctions between "job" and "responsibility" here. While the former is merely a description of what someone does, the latter has, I believe, personal and moral connections and implications, some of which will be dealt with in the following section. Just want to make that clear.

⁵ For example, because I strongly believe a convention should be a community, I'm opposed to closed-door writing workshops at most of the conventions in which I'm involved. I believe such workshops foster inwardly-directed behavior (navel-gazing, if you will) that isolates and often selects for people who do not truly become part of the convention community as a whole.

discussed days later by people who didn't even attend the original program item!

So what makes a good conversation? In a nutshell: lively, knowledgeable, articulate people talking to each other, interactively,⁶ about some interesting subject.⁷

So, the program is basically produced by joining together ideas and people to best deliver these ideas—but it's really about more than that. After all, it's pretty easy to generate ideas (even good new ideas),⁸ and not even that hard to get pretty good people to present them. The trick lies in combining them right, and scheduling them properly. The program head⁹ might best be thought of us as of an editor, striving for an interesting balance of ideas and people that will let him turn his visions into realities. Knowing the field and the potential program participants helps: imagination and creativity are important—but obsessive attention to details is essential. (Lots of people don't

⁶ I hate, hate, hate "panels" where individuals are essentially encouraged to give their oration/agenda on a topic, seriatim. (And then the audience starts. Gack.) Hate.

⁷ Though it is a truth universally acknowledged that the right people can make anything interesting.

⁸ Yeah, ideas are easy—doing them right is hard. I am strongly against sending program participants checklists of ideas. I am aware that this is a bit of a "religious" issue, but since over a third of my good ideas for each convention comes directly from said program participants (the remaining 2/3 split between coming from myself or swiped from other convention), I'd be foolish to try to do a program so robotically.

⁹ I think a strong "buck-stops-here" decision maker at the center of the programming process is vital, whose word should not be overruled even by the chair. This feeling has strengthened as I've gained more experience in convention programming. One result of this, for example, is that I used to be much more comfortable with "road-show" panels (put together by outside groups): I am now far less inclined to schedule them than I have been in the past.

understand that part.) To produce a really good program, the devil is in the details.¹⁰

What is the responsibility of the program head?

First, do no harm. Do nothing to enrage or embarrass program participants, members of the convention, the committee, etc.¹¹

Do your best. Try not to get lazy: do not take the easy way out. Think. Stay alert. Seize opportunities. Use people. Use technology.¹²

Communicate. (Be polite about it, too.) Answer every piece of paperwork/queries in a reasonably timely and affable manner. (Even if it kills you—but don't assume that anyone has actually read anything sent to him/her.)

Realize life isn't fair. (And you don't have to be fair either).¹³

Balance. Burnish. Balance again.¹⁴

Try to have fun. If you're not having fun, that will be reflected in the program, and in you, too. It's often a big, hellish, and frequently fraught job.¹⁵ Sometimes those of us involved forget it's only a con, and that real life is more important.

¹⁰ There are too many things to even start to go on about here: just think how many pages could be written about counter-programming the convention's Guests, for example.

¹¹ OK, there are a lot of fairly subtle ways of taking revenge on the assholes who have made your life miserable during the course of your position as program head. Just make sure it looks nice on the outside.

¹² And/or get someone on your staff who can and will!

¹³ Just to clarify one possible spin-off of this: I think treating fans on the program differently from pros on the program is abhorrent. Program participants are there because of what they can contribute to the conversation of the convention community—and the convention should be encouraging conversation, not idolatry.

¹⁴ See #2 above.

¹⁵ It's still is my favorite job on a convention. That sez something, huh?

Why do we do this?

For the sake of the trust.¹⁶



¹⁶ With a fond nod to the Musgrave Ritual...

Running a Children's Program

Lisa Hertel

When fandom was first founded, nobody thought about a children's program. It wasn't until the 1970's, when the male-female ratio improved enough to make interfan marriage and children likely, that the first thoughts of having some place at a convention to leave, and perhaps entertain, your child crossed into the fannish consciousness. The first children's program that I know of was at Noreascon II (1980), when two couples, all on the committee, had children. In the beginning, it started as something slightly more than babysitting, but as fannish families aged, they wanted more, and now several conventions have extensive programs geared to kids of all ages.

Many smaller conventions, however, still eschew a children's program. It's true that it does cost quite a bit, especially to start one.

Craft supplies are a major expense, and bulky: soon, the pile of 'kid's crap' may threaten to overtake your storage. But the expense is often outweighed by the benefits: keeping noisy younger kids out of hallways, allowing committee and program participants who are parents to fully volunteer, and even attracting families.



Program Philosophy

There are many aspects building to children's program. First, consider the ages you wish to service. There are five basic age categories:

- Infant (under 2)—not much you can do with this age but keep them safe and provide approved toys; check with local laws as to approved adult/child ratios
- Toddler/preschooler (2—5)—very short attention span; may be able to do simple crafts; needs snacks and probably diapers; likes to run around; care may be governed by laws; must have two adults minimum (for potty break coverage)
- Early elementary (6—9)—moderately short attention span; can do more complex crafts, read/write, and participant in some structured activities; bathroom independent, but needs supervision & watching when outside the kids' area
- Tweens (10—12)—have different interests than any other group, often focused on relationships; still prefer hands-on participatory activities; require some autonomy
- Teens (13—16)—can participate in adult activities, but prefer to be with their peers in an unstructured environment; will still enjoy sufficiently advanced crafts and hands-on activities; probably should be allowed to come and go freely

Each age group has its own needs, interests, and capabilities. Most conventions are too small to service all

groups, and ignore one or both groups on the ends (infants, toddlers, and teens). Conventions also often lump together several groups, which poses a challenge to the person running children's program. The commonest division is to provide basic babysitting care for children under 5 or 6, and activities for elementary-aged children under 13. Some will run program, such as anime, for teens as part of the normal program.

Once you've sorted out age groups, there's a philosophical question to answer: are you program, or childcare? In part, local laws may dictate this. Many conventions create a cut-off age, under which a child may not roam alone. If your convention is very small, and the children are well known, it's likely that children of all ages can roam at will.

On the total program side, children's program does not close for lunch, does not provide snacks, and does not supervise who is going where—after all, the general program allows ebb and flow. Instead, it just concentrates on offering program items that will appeal to the target age group. Adults are usually welcome to join in, though children often get preference on limited materials. Depending on the size of your younger population, it is reasonable to consider this a one-person-run program track. Basically, if children are free to wander in and out (perhaps with suitable parameters set by parents), then you are program.



On the total childcare side, parents (or other responsible parties) are required to sign children out of a room, to which non-parentally associated adults may not enter. Snacks, and sometimes meals, are provided. Care is

often given professionally, which comes at an expensive price. Conventions often chose to 'hide' the childcare room, by only telling parents the location. Parents may also be charged extra, or pay by the hour, for the professional care. While expensive, professional care has two advantages: it only takes one person to find and organize an agency, and none of your staff burns out by being stuck in a room with small children all weekend. In essence, though, if you are stopping children from leaving the area where children's program is held, you are automatically childcare, whether you use professionals or college students.

However, you can span the spectrum, and most children's programs do. You can limit the egress of children as designated by their parents (usually with red versus green ribbons). Closing for meals encourages parents to feed their children regularly—and some parents will forget, and not feed their kids, caught up in the con fever. If a parent wants to feed his or her child in children's program, insist they sit with the child, because kids are easily distracted away from their dinners, and nobody likes to find a cold, half-eaten chicken nugget on the floor. You can serve snacks, which is usually a good idea with younger children, anyway; just be careful to avoid the common allergens, such as chocolate and peanuts, and have a gluten-free, dairy-free, wheat-free snack available, such as fruit snacks. Juice boxes, while more expensive than buying a bottle of juice, spill less; buy the small ones, and let older kids drink two. (Anyone with severe allergies really ought to bring their own snacks.)

Practical Concerns

When one deals with children nowadays, one often deals with severe medical conditions. It's a very good idea to have the parents fill out a simple form with their basic information (hotel room number, cell number, who can pick the kids up if it's restricted, and allergies or medical conditions). If possible, one person in the children's program should know basic first aid, including child CPR, and, if possible, how to use an Epi-Pen and

an inhaler. Anaphylactic allergies, ADHD, asthma, diabetes, learning disorders, and autism-spectrum diseases are fairly common. If you honestly feel you can't deal with a child's particular medical condition, tell the parents as quickly as possible, and offer to refund memberships as needed. Always have the childcare contact information on the convention's website, so that parents may send in their concerns pre-con. Some consistency in childcare staff is useful, as the 'problem' children are known.

Be sure that parents always write their cell number on the back of all kids' badges, though age 16. Have Sharpies at registration and in children's program.

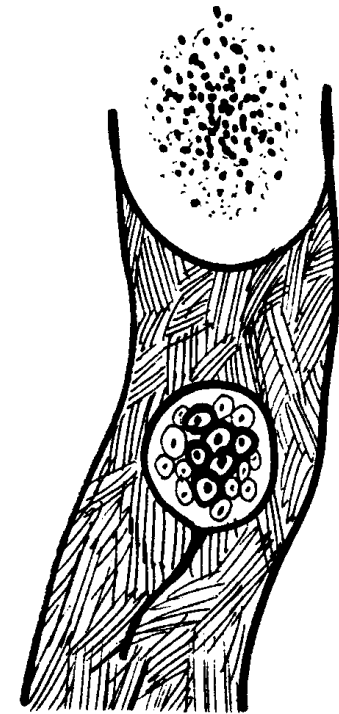
Many conventions worry about the cost of childcare, and who will pay for it. Many years ago, I had one parent tell me that an adult weekend membership for each of her kids was incredibly cheap compared to the cost of babysitting. Even with rising convention rates, that is still true today. Many parents understand this, and are willing to even pay extra for a quality program. However, most conventions consider childcare, which is oftenest used by those either working the convention, or on the program, as an acceptable loss. For one, without the program, you would lose the entire family, including not only the membership, but also the room-nights in your hotel. And if that family is volunteering on the convention in some way, you've lost some of your labor as well. Even if you don't have enough children to run a program for a particular age group, have specific methods for parents to meet up and create their own playgroup, or hire a sitter in advance. (Saying "the hotel has a sitter service" is insufficient.)

Program Pointers

Kids are not miniature adults. They have different interests, a different attention span, and a different way of interacting. Whereas your standard adult audience is quite content to sit, listen, and maybe ask questions, that sort of

program items will not work for children, even in a more unstructured setting. Kids are very 'hands-on.' They need to be doing things constantly, and the program participants running any particular item have to be flexible, as well. Demonstrations need to be dramatic. Kids want to constantly touch things, create things, and move. Give them a bunch of tape, rolls of foil, scissors, random craft bits, and plenty of cardboard, and they're happy. Ask them what their favorite book is, and they'll clam up. The only exceptions are movies, storytelling, and singing; even young children will often sit and listen in these instances. However, program participants need to not be offended if a kid wanders off to play during story time; the child is probably still listening.

Some program participants will not work with children, and some who will just are awful with them. As to the former, you need to ask well before the convention program is set; if possible, ask it on your program participant surveys. As to the latter, that is something you can only learn by experience. (This is true of any program participant, of course.) Don't be too desperate to put everyone who asks on program, even if you know then item won't work, or the participant is awful. It's pretty easy to find simple "filler" crafts, especially if you shop websites like Oriental Trading, or do a web search for suggested teacher



YOU, MINUS TEN SECONDS

projects. A bin of Legos will keep 6- to 12-year-olds amused for a couple of hours; a set of wooden trains will keep toddlers through kindergarteners happy for a morning. Both of these are examples of items that require little guidance beyond some refereeing. In the evening, try a movie, but be sure you have the proper A/V equipment; six children gathered around a laptop screen isn't pretty.

There are some things that you just cannot do with children. Stay away from anything excessively dangerous, no matter how much the kids will love it, like jumping on (or off of) beds. Avoid anything that will make parents hate you too much, such as putting stickers in hair, permanent paints, and PG-13 movies. Try not to do things that modern sensibilities view as bad, such as leaving the TV on all the time, stuffing kids with empty sugar, or hitting children. (You may need to discipline children in extreme cases, and don't be afraid to do so, but use modern methods such as time-outs.) However, kids love doing the stuff their parents won't let them do at home: making a mess is particularly popular. So long as you have the ability to clean it up, do it! However, be aware of your facility's limitations, too.

Probably the hardest part of running children's program is finding a volunteer. Parents tend to get tagged most often. However, as their children grow up, the parent volunteer moves on, you'll need to find a new parent. Further, volunteering to run the kids' stuff is viewed as unglamorous, and many volunteers are afraid to get stuck in a rut for years. Further, if you're not using professionals, or treating it strictly as program, you'll need a small crew. Recruiting college students as helpers is usually a plus, and conventions can even use volunteers under 18 for the younger set, but they'll need supervision. If you can find someone who is willing, make sure there's a backup to take over. Since there's a bit of a learning curve in knowing who is good on program, the kids' personalities, and what works, it's always best to have an understudy.

Conclusion

If you decide to run a program for kids, know what ages you'll be aiming for, and whether you intend to treat the program as panels aimed at kids, or babysitting, or something in between. Next, decide on pricing, hours, and location. Make sure you have program participants who want to work with kids, and program items suitable to your intended age group. You'll need supplies, especially art supplies, and suitable toys to occupy kids. Finally, you'll need to find a volunteer to coordinate it all, and get them assistants if needed. Add in a little bit of paperwork for safety's sake, and you've got a children's program!



Be Our Guest: The Green Room

Ann Totusek

Guests and program participants are a critical part of a successful convention. Keeping them happy and healthy is in part the responsibility of the person running the Green Room. Depending on budget and priorities, a Green Room can be extremely simple- a room with a few chairs and tables with a beverage station, or it can be decadent- full meals provided along with alcohol and a chocolate fountain! Whatever the budget, the following are things to consider in order to make your Green Room a success:

A peaceful, attractive environment- One of the purposes of a Green Room is to provide a place for guests and panelists to retreat between their program items. Panelists may wish to meet prior to a panel to gather their thoughts and organize the flow of their panel. Or they may wish to find a place to retreat to after a lively panel. Extremely well-known Guests of Honor may appreciate the relative privacy of a Green Room where they can be assured that there will be a far smaller number of star-struck fans approaching them while they sit down and take a break. I often post a notice outside or just inside a Green Room encouraging people to be mindful of their noise levels in consideration of others using the room. The Green Room is not the ideal place for contentious discussion.

Like your food, decor can be minimal or over the top. You may wish to not decorate at all, but simply have your facility set up its tables with tablecloth and draping. Consider both the needs of your guests and the needs of your staff in arranging your decor. Avoid decorations that will hinder clean up and act as garbage magnets.

Cleanliness- Have you ever eaten at a buffet restaurant, and as you were eating observed the staff of the restaurant

replenishing the buffet only to notice things that immediately squelched your appetite? An employee who sneezes on their gloved hands, cross-contaminates food, or fails to keep cold items cold and hot items hot? Providing food for free doesn't relieve you of the responsibility to ensure that the food you provide is safe, and believe me- your guests will be observing you and your staff. Ensure that you and your staff use proper handwashing technique and safe food handling practices.

Ensure that the hotel empties garbage, vacuums the floor, and changes out table coverings as necessary. During the first garbage change out, request extra garbage bags and ask hotel staff if there is somewhere you can leave full bags in the event that hotel staff is not immediately available so that your area remains clean and uncluttered.

One trick I have learned is to determine my layout and number of tables ahead of time, and purchase clear plastic tablecovers that I cut to fit the tables. This makes clean up a snap and minimizes the number of times that I have to call hotel in order to have linens changed. It also can contribute to your decor- pictures, book covers, artificial flowers stripped from their stems, and other items can be placed under the clear plastic to serve as decoration.

Beverages- I like to have a range of beverages available. In addition to soft drinks, I try to include a selection of teas, hot cocoa, apple cider, and fruit flavored water. In addition, I also ask the hotel to set up a water station in the Green Room. If your budget permits, you can ask the hotel manage your coffee for you. This will save you some work and give you some goodwill from the hotel's catering department.

Food!- What you serve and how you serve it is the cornerstone of your Green Room. Obviously your menu is to a large extent dictated by your budget, and also by the history of your Green Room. If your Green Room has a history of being a chips and dip type room, you've got a simple situation on your hands, but generally Green Rooms are a more "upscale" version of the ConSuite. I try to include full sandwich makings and stretch my budget by making a variety of soups. Soups are filling, and welcome item that adds a homemade touch to the Green Room. I also stretch my budget by doing as much home baking as possible. I can make a huge number of cookies, bars, and breads for a fraction of the cost of purchasing a similar number of bags or boxes of cookies. One nice thing about doing this is that a lot of these can be made ahead of time and frozen until they are transported to the convention. Also, I've had good luck recruiting friends and asking "Hey, could you please make a batch of your special cookies for the Green Room?" I apply this approach to my main dishes as well- I will purchase the fixings for tuna salad and chicken salad, and add that freshly made to the more traditional deli meats. Again, making it myself ensures that it's fresh, and also saves quite a bit of money.

Another labor saving option is to use canned vegetables for dips. Here's a particular favorite of mine. It involves fresh cilantro, fresh green top onions, garlic and an avocado. Everything else comes from a can. We couldn't keep this on the table at the last Windycon!

Cowboy Caviar

- 2 tbsp red wine Vinegar
- 1/2-2 tsp hot pepper sauce
- 2 tsp olive oil
- 1 medium sized clove garlic, minced
- dash of fresh ground black pepper
- 1 can (15 oz) black beans rinsed and drained
- 1 can corn, drained
- 1 ripe avocado, chopped
- 1 15 oz can finely diced tomato
- 1/4 cup sliced scallion, white and green parts
- 1/4 cup chopped fresh cilantro

Mix all ingredients in a bowl. For best flavor, let it sit for a couple of hours to allow the flavors to blend.



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A Neo-Pro's Guide to Fandom and Con-dom

Susan Shwartz

SFWA Handbook, 1990

If you write fantasy and science fiction and don't know what a "neo-pro" is, chances are you are one and that you're at your first science fiction convention. Chances also are that you're already thinking, "Omigod, how'd I get into this—and where's the fire exit?"

If you don't enter the ranks of sf pro writers through fandom and conventions, the first inkling you probably had that conventions even existed (disregarding the series of cryptic initials and dates at the backs of magazines you hoped to sell to) probably came from your Smiling Editor (hereafter, S.E.), as in: "And I think it would be a good idea for you to put in an appearance at a few cons."

A few whats?

New, that should have been the key for good ol' S.E. to explain how conventions work, and suggest you attend one. Ideally, you'd have made your convention debut, lovingly supervised by your publisher (and preferably at your publisher's expense), guided, wined, dined, and introduced to the community of sf writers and editors, and your potential readers.

Right. Save stuff like that for a fantasy novel. To quote my astonishingly precocious nephew: "Never trust a smiling editor."

S.E. is likelier just to toss you a copy of *Locus* or *Asimov's*, tell you, "No problem! Just look at the convention listing and pick one. You know, since it's getting around toward Labor Day, you might really think of showing up at the Worldcon. If you do, by all means come to your publisher's party during the con, and you can meet some of our other writers."

Thus violating the First Rule for Neopros. Never pick Worldcon as your first convention.

Why shouldn't you have chosen a Worldcon as your first convention? Because Worldcons are the longest and biggest of the sf conventions; the Los Angeles Worldcon bloated to 10,000 members. Worldcon staffs these days are bigger than a lot of worldcons used to be in the fifty years they've been held.

For the neopro facing Worldcon as a first-contact experience, here is your survival kit.

Physical Maintenance

Remember to eat, drink, bathe, and sleep. At regular intervals. This sounds like such stupid advice to give an adult. However, it isn't just neos who get so excited and overstimulated that they forget to take care of themselves and collapse ignominiously with "Con Hysterics" or get sick after the convention.

1. Don't cram 20 people into your hotel room. You need quiet and as much privacy as you can grab. At my first convention, I was one of about twelve people crammed into a double room. I was lucky. At least I had a share of the bed.

2. Know how much sleep you need to function and resign yourself to the fact that you're not going to get that. And before you make arrangements for a roommate group, make up your mind whether or not you mind sharing a room with A) members of the other sex; B) smokers; C) night owls (if you're a day person); D) animals (four-footed); E) a very affectionate couple (you won't get to use the room).

3. Eat regularly. Not just junk, but nourishing food. If it helps, think of it as going into training. In addition, if you plan on

doing any drinking, you know better than to drink on an empty stomach.

4. If you can't eat, sleep. If you haven't time to sleep, at least sit down. If you can, make it back to your room at some time each day for a brief rest. A quick bath or shower can replace a nap. After you've been in a few elevator mobs, you'll know why else it's useful.

5. "Substances" and alcohol. Substances will get you thrown out, and if the cops get you, no one can help. Alcohol—if you don't drink, this isn't the place to learn. I've learned from experience that you get drunk faster when you're flirting with exhaustion.

Surviving Registration

Does this sound familiar?

You arrived at the convention hotel and promptly found yourself in the check-in and registration lines, surrounded by people, in and out of costumes (hell, some of them are in and out of any clothes and all—and some of them shouldn't be), chatting, screaming, laughing, hugging long-time friends they haven't seen since the last Worldcon. . . if you've got the normal amount of social insecurity among writers (mine's the size of the budget deficit and growing about as fast), you probably feel as if time's rolled back and, once again, you're the new kid in a strange school, or the wallflower at the biggest damned college mixer you've ever wanted to get the flu in order to avoid.

Now, look at the pro ahead of you, with all his or her reservations in order and in writing, wearing a badge and a ribbon signifying "Program Participant" (thereby legally able to write off this convention on his or her tax forms), greeting friends, fan and pro alike. "God, I needed a con," the pro announces, to nods all around. And you wonder: why?

First, get through this worldcon. Second, here's what you should do at the next convention to make life easier.

1. Get in one of those long, long hotel registration lines. Check in. Yes, I know I wrote that glibly. Checking in can take you hours. Once you're in your room, unpack and make your home-away-from-home as pleasant as possible. If you like extra towels, get them now! If you need ice to store soda, get it now. Towels, ice, soda, etc. may be scarce later on, as con participants descend on the hotel like a plague of locusts.

2. Once you're settled, REGISTER. You will not be admitted to any convention functions without a badge. With luck, you've written the convention and arranged to be a program participant. That ribbon is your passport. If you haven't done that, go to a convention worker, find the Green Room, and volunteer to be on programming. Being on programming helps you feel like you belong. It provides visibility. It makes your Smiling Editor happy. If you don't care about making the S.E. happy, think of the friends you can make and the books you can sell.

3. If you know anyone at the convention at all, get in touch NOW and agree to meet. (You probably won't, but the thought is comforting. One of the aggravating things about conventions is that you usually miss the people you most want to see.)

4. Find the SFWA suite and the Green Room.

The what?

The Green Room, as those of you who've acted know, is where actors or talk-show guests wait and have a drink before they go on stage or before cameras or whatever. The advantages of a convention Green Room are legion, but I'll mention three: they are full of professional writers whom you've probably been reading since forever and who are going to be your colleagues and maybe even friends; they're a good place to make plans; and they almost always have coffee and munchies. Important note: it is tacky to go into a feeding frenzy

that makes Jaws look like a goldfish at the sight of the Danish pastry.

If you're a program participant or a SFWA member, you automatically get into the Green Room. Otherwise, talk your way in. If you know someone in there, call that person's name. If you see your editor, you ought to be invited in, taken around, and introduced. S.E. may even snag another of your publisher's writers and ask him or her to show you around. If S.E. doesn't, ASK.

You and Your Fellow Writers

1. Writers come in clusters. Usually, a number of writers go pro almost simultaneously. These are the people you're likeliest to meet, and—unless your first few times at bat catapult you into the All-Stars—they're the people you'll probably be grouped with for a long, long time. (Imagine what it must have been like to be part of that group that included Heinlein, Asimov, de Camp, and the other Golden Agers.) Sibling rivalry is common.

2. Finding writers. If you can't find someone you're looking for, check the bar or the Green Room. Leaving messages at the hotel's registration desk isn't hopeless, but it's close.

3. SFWA is very close to being a Confucian culture. Ancestor worship, if not mandatory, is useful. In other words, if you're thinking about saying something snide about John W. Campbell or Robert Heinlein, think again. Fast. Don't try to be controversial; it'll just happen.

4. You need a mentor. Better yet, mentors, fan as well as pro. Your mentors should be able to explain the people and customs to you—what senior pro or editor not to discuss gun control with; what people to stay strictly away from; why "filk" isn't a typo or an obscenity; what panels you really want to her, or be on.

You and Your Editors—TANSTAAFL Is True

TANSTAAFL—there's no such things as a free lunch. As Smiling Editor says, "Things are tight in the industry." This is an excuse for everything from a low first advance to. . . never mind. Worldcon is neither the time nor place to indulge in editor-bashing. For one thing, you're new, and I want you to like us. For another thing, my Smiling Agent doesn't let me bash editors.

The perk with which editors are compensated for their salaries (and teachers think they have it rough!) is the Expense Account, which is the subject of articles of faith—and the occasional holy war—between editors and authors. Here is the crux of it: editors are convinced that writers are sponges of infinity capacity, just hanging around and longing to be invited to breakfast, lunch, drinks, dinner, and advantageous nibbles in between, while writers are convinced editors exist to feed them.

1. For God's sake, keep your dignity. No free lunch or drink or dinner is worth the loss of pride as you cadge an invitation. (Besides, do you want to give good ol' S.E. that much power over you?) If you're broke, that's what Burger King is for. If you're too proud to be seen dining there or without an editor in tow, call Room Service, pay on plastic, and pay off the plastic on time.

2. Editors have a list of people whom they must entertain. This list is calibrated according to the publishing house's view of the author's standing. And the editor is answerable for irresponsible use of the expense account. In other words, if S.E. stands you to pheasant under glass, the publisher's going to make the S.E. stop smiling real soon. If the editor invites you out solo, especially to breakfast or lunch, it's probably a working session. The editor—especially an assistant or associate editor—may take a writer-cluster to dinner, and probably will pick up a tab in the bar.

3. It does you no damned good whatsoever to wonder at what Three Star restaurant the publisher is feasting the Big

Names. As a new author, you can gain a reputation as a pro—or as a mooch. Pro is much better. Keep this in mind. After awhile, you'll be able to calibrate your standing with your publisher by the type of hospitality your Smiling Editor offers.

4. Neopros can pretty much expect to come to publishers' parties, unless they're off-site parties hosted by a publisher you don't work with. (As you stop being a neo and begin to be a familiar face, you'll go to those, too.) Greet the Smiling Editor guarding the door with “Hi? I'm So and So; I've written Such and Such for Other Publisher, and I was told I could stop by.” That should get you in.

5. If another writer's S.E. is in the bar with a group of writers and you're there, that editor may offer to run a tab. Don't take the editor for granted; say thank you if you have to leave before the party breaks up. The S.E. may buy you a drink solo if s/he's interested in finding out if you'd like to come write for a different publishing house.

6. If an editor has rounded up all the people you planned to go out to dinner with, or if you've been invited to dinner but have met an old friend you'd like to have come along, get the editor politely in private and ask politely if you, or your guest, may come along at your own expense. If you say this and the editor agrees, get out your wallet and settle up the instant the check comes.

7. As you cease being a neo, it's occasionally pleasant to buy an editor lunch or a drink. Practice this line in front of your bathroom mirror: “Thanks! Why not let me pick up the tab this time?” just watch Smiling Editor's jaw drop.

8. This is going to sound like one of those horrible How-To-Succeed handbooks so I apologize in advance. In general, you'll be most comfortable if you dress, look, and behave like the professional you want to be treated like. You don't need Brooks Brothers, but fur bikinis are drafty, broadswords will get you in trouble with the Weapons Policy, and armor will chafe

you in embarrassing places. (If you're a superb costumer, do programming in that area.) You want to be conspicuous for your writing and your work on programming, not your clothing. Two tips: 1. Bring comfortable shoes. 2. If you plan to go to a publisher's party, many pros dress up a bit for evening.

Public Relations I—You and the Fans

My first convention was Darkover II, around 1979. What I'll never forget was practically the first thing that happened to me. I was sitting in the lobby, trying to fight off culture shock, when an attractive, vivacious blonde woman came up, smiled, shook hands, and said, “Hi! I'm Katherine Kurtz.”

In my mind's eye, I compared her face with her dust-jacket portrait, and blurted, “Oh, you really are!” A really stunning self-introduction. The only reason she didn't get up and flee is that she's warm and gracious, a real pro.

Katherine, though it's taken me ten years to say so, I've never forgotten your kindness to a newcomer! It made me promise myself that if I ever became a pro, I would try to act just as you did. Whenever I'm tempted to go off into Conestoga configuration with the other pros, I think back to how welcome you made me feel. Sometimes, it even helps me behave myself.

Janet Morris told me before my first (and so far, only) Guest of Honor appearance, when you're at a convention, the minute you leave your room, you're on stage. If you can't smile and talk graciously to the people around you, don't leave your room. This applies to neopros as well as GOHs. If you really can't take it, maybe you and Smiling Editor had better have a little chat on whether it's advisable for you to go to conventions.

1. Basic Golden Rule. Treat fans the way you want to be treated. Fans are your audience. Fans run conventions. More to the point, fans (fannish plural: fen) are human beings; and too many of them have been scarified by writers on ego trips.

(Okay, okay, I've heard horrible stories about fans, too; the main thing is not to provide data for either side.)

2. Fans running a convention are volunteers. Not lackeys, flunkies, or IRS agents. Besides, no matter how hard they work (and they do), Lincoln freed the slaves. If the con committee gets you something you want or places you - even at the last minute - on a panel you'd love to be on, they've done you a good turn. Your con committee members are your hosts. Make your fannish interactions win/win situations.

3. Don't just hold forth. Listen. Aside from the dignity you owe fellow human beings, some fans become pros, and fans and pros alike have long memories.

4. Admire the creativity around you. If someone is carrying a particularly fine fire-lizard sculpture or is singing well, or if there's a hall costume you particularly admire, say so. Look, but do not touch, unless by mutual arrangement (You know perfectly well what I mean!)

5. First Fandom (identifiable by jacket patches) deserves respect. For the neo who wants to learn more, go to any fandom-history presentation given by Hal Clement, David Kyle, or Julius Schwartz. Incidentally, never try to keep up with members of First Fandom. They've been going to conventions for fifty years and can party you under the table.

6. Turn trouble aside. Even if you have provocation, don't insult people in the halls, and don't smartmouth the audience when you're on a panel. If you need to, get out of the convention, spot a friend, be late for an appointment, or head for the bathroom—and make it sound convincing. Listen if someone with a long memory for cons warns you about “the way we do things.”

7. Don't be a snob. No fan should feel s/he has to thank you just because you've had a short conversation. One short story or one novel does not a Big Name make. Besides, the Big Names work at being gracious.

8. Shop talk is fine, but here's one wonderful reason to head for the bathroom: the person who buttonholes you and insists on telling you the plot of the short story (novel, trilogy, trilogy cycle) that s/he plans to write. This person may be indistinguishable from the hopeful character who also has an idea. . . and wouldn't you like to write it and split the money?

Here are two useful answers:

Answer #1: Your story sounds like fun, but if you tell it, you won't need to write it. Don't talk, write. (note: you're under no obligation to read said story when it's done unless you volunteer.)

Answer #2: Write a story from your idea? Thanks for thinking of me, but I don't have time to write stories about all my ideas. Why don't you get started on it yourself?

Other people you may legitimately avoid: people who scare you (outsiders dressed as punks fall into that category for me and usually get cons into trouble with the hotel); people who smell like elevators; people who carry on monologues at anything available—you, the Guest of Honor, or the wall.

9. Learn tact. Memorize the following nice answers for use when someone comes up to you, glares at your nametag, then humphs: “Never heard of you.”

- “No reasons why you should.” Then introduce yourself.
- “This is my first convention. This is my book cover.”
- “Be nice to me; I'm a neo.” With a small, pained smile at the inevitable comments about virgins.

10. Marion Zimmer Bradley, who has probably helped more neos see print than anyone else in the past two decades, taught me that everyone who brings you something to sign has the right at the very least to a large, legible signature. I always thank people who compliment me by asking me to sign something.

11. Let people know you're having a good time. Enjoyment is contagious.

Public Relations II—How to Give Good Panel

You've been asked to be on your first panel. Essentially, this is your con debut. The minute the microphones go on, YOU ARE AT WORK. Your job is to persuade the audience that you are charming, friendly, and talented—and that they want to shell out their money for your books.

1. If you don't make a pit stop before the panel, you'll be sorry.

2. Before the panel, go to the Green Room. If you can, meet with the moderator of the panel. Give the moderator what we call "biodata"—name, rank, serial number, recent publications—and some idea of what you can bring to the topic.

3. Do not overprepare for the panel. Most panels at conventions are run pretty informally. If the panel isn't—like some panels at academic conferences, World Fantasy, or some of the main programming, attended by thousands, at Worldcon—expect to see a hand-picked panel working on a prearranged list of topics.

4. Make sure you have water if you need it. Smile at the audience. Take a deep breath and. . .

5. DO NOT JOIN THE MOTOR-MOUTH PANEL. This is a sin your mother called "monopolizing the conversation." We call it the "motor-mouth panel." It's sort of a Platonic absolute composed of the very biggest mouths who've

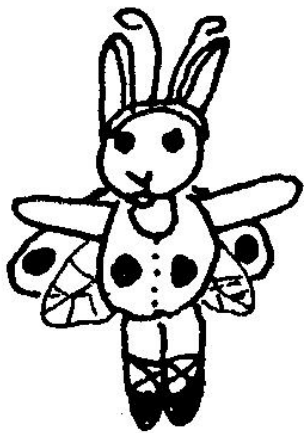
ever grabbed a microphone and not let go. Fans and pros alike have long memories for motor mouths. Most programming questionnaires have a line on which people can list people they will not work with. Motor mouths are at the top of the list. So, if you're introducing yourself, take the microphone, say your name, hold up a book cover or magazine, speak your piece, and yield the mike. Keep all comments brief. Your fellow pros will thank you, and the moderator will breathe a sigh of relief. If you're on with a member of the Motor-Mouth panel, follow the moderator, but be prepared to grab the mike. Getting the mike means it's your turn to talk, and you're entitled to say so to the Motor Mouth.

6. Get the audience on your side. "Hello, I'm Susan Neopro, and this is my first convention" is always good for the sympathy vote. Especially if your first convention is a worldcon. Then you can expect the sympathy—and admiration—once reserved for warriors who performed a particularly impressive Sun Dance.

7. Share. Don't hold forth and don't squabble, but engage in a dialogue with the other panelists and with the audience. Again, follow the moderator. The ability to moderate panels is highly prized by convention programming committees. So is the ability to work well with them.

8. Know who you can work with.

9. Know who you can't work with and come up with a reason that won't get you stuck with a libel suit.



10. Stick around for a while after the panel unless programming really needs the room or unless you didn't take a pit stop before the panel.

When I first started going to conventions, programming was something my few fannish friends were nice enough to stick me onto. I had no idea how to go about it. Gradually, I learned how to get myself on panels and how to plan them.

1. If there's a con you want to go to, write to the Con Committee. Your letter can be brief: Hello, I'm Joe Neopro; I've sold X, Y, and Z; I wanted to come to the con and be on programming; here's what I like to talk about.

2. There's almost no such thing as a free convention. Despite the "demands" for expenses and honoraria some writers (often libertarians) make, don't expect to "earn" anything but a free membership (and not even that at Worldcon and World Fantasy). The Guests of Honor have all expenses paid; media guests are well-paid. Until you're GoH yourself. . . at this point, review what I said about the Smiling Editor and the Expense Account. It's much the same.

3. Let's say that the program committee gets back in touch. You may receive a programming questionnaire. Fill it out and return it.

4. Or, you may propose ideas up front. In general—especially after a disaster when I got overly excited and insisted on showering program ideas on a program chair who had his own ideas, thank you very much, and they were on horror, thank you even more, and he didn't WANT any of this fussy fantasy stuff from an unknown femme writer (My cluster of writers knows which con this was, and the programming was pretty crummy anyhow. Note: I told you there's a long memory for this sort of thing.)—I write and ask if programming minds free ideas. Usually, they're happy for suggestions. And seriously, if they do mind input, do you really want to go to that con?

5. When you propose ideas, suggest people who'd work well on the panel—and who might be coming to the convention. Indicate if you're willing to moderate a given panel—and learn to moderate!

6. If you develop special interests in fandom, indicate them and say whether you're willing to participate in various activities. For example, Sandra Miesel, Melissa Scott, Lisa Barnett, and Don Sakers are fine costumers. Look for them at masquerades alongside fans like Peggy Kennedy. More examples: C.J. Cherryh and Juanita Coulson are pros turned filk musicians; Misty Lackey, Leslie Fish, Julia Ecklar, and Robert Rogow are filk musicians turned pro.

Last of all, let's turn to the overwhelming question.

What's the Use of All This?

Among some writers, it's considered stylish to whine about conventions, to gripe about the time you have to put in, when you could be—and should be—writing. Mostly this little angst-ridden artist act is staged at conventions. The actors are very eloquent about cliquishness and clubbishness (Shwartz's Dictionary of Bitchy Semantics defines cliquishness as any group you don't belong to and don't like, while clubbishness adds comfy-cozy silliness and pomposity to the cliquish brew), and they'll do their blasé best to make you feel overenthusiastic, nykulturny, and probably unpublishable. They'll also tell you that the best thing you can do is WRITE and that's all that counts in life. Pass the absinthe. (Better not. I think it's a controlled substance.)

I should be very sorry if all I could ever do, if all I could ever be happy for was writing. Now, writing is a part of my life. It's even one of the main parts of my life. But it's not my whole life. I tend to think that NOTHING should be one's whole life. As I see it, my whole life has room in it for writing and cons, friends and cats, the occasional day job, and all the other things that people have in their lives.

Though I may not be able to pick my colleagues, I certainly can pick my panel members or drinking buddies. That's why you won't see me with those people. You can find me, when I'm not on a panel, checking out the art show, the hucksters' room, or flaking out in the bar or the Green Room. I'm the one gulping coffee and moaning about how tired I am (mornings) or agreeing with my writer-cluster that "God, did I need a convention.:" Or I'm listening very carefully (you hear that, people?) to the people about me, especially my agent and editors. I'd like to keep them smiling.

Come talk to me. I may get distracted by seventeen conversations at once, but I don't mean to be rude, and I do want to be friendly.

Don't worry if you're told, "going to cons is just egoboo (egoboo=ego boost)." So what? Either you're earning your way as a writer so you can celebrate at the conventions, or you aren't.

Now, this lecture has gone on long enough to haul me up on charges of egoboo, too. To which I plead Not Guilty. Ten years ago, as I said, I went to my first convention. Since then, I've done a hell of a lot of writing, an incredible amount of public speaking (which has helped me in every aspect of my life), and made friends, all because of the writing and con-going that began with that Darkovercon, when Katherine Kurtz set the standard of professional behavior for me.

I can't pay her or any of the other people I've met back. All I can do is borrow: this time, from Jerry Pournelle's eulogy at the 1987 Nebulas for Robert A. Heinlein (which I'm quoting from the July 1988 *Locus*):

I [Dr. Pournelle] once asked him [Mr. Heinlein] how I could pay him back. His answer was simple: "You can't. You pay it forward."

No debt was easier to pay. Indeed, it costs nothing, because we get back tenfold everything we invest.

Here's partial payment on my account.
See you in the Green Room.



Children and Cons

James Bacon

So Steven Silver is doing a fanzine about conrunning and when I grow up, apart from getting a review accepted by Foundation of a comic, I also want to be Steven Silver. NO, that's not true, when I grow up, maybe I'll do something for the Sidewise Awards. Maybe I won't grow up, ever.

Anyhow I have had something really burning me up for some time. Bad burn, like bile in the gullet.

Do you all know I run stuff for kids, well now and again, and I generally enjoy it, I have run or been 'Area Head' of youth programme at two Worldcons, well something occurred that has tainted me a bit. So I was going to write bout it. But instead, I went and sought input from others, about 200-300 words, not much really, but enough to get their opinion and thoughts.

So some context.

IN the UK, if you are doing something for children there are laws and procedures to follow.

Once you are minding someone else's child, and doing so formally, as one would at a convention, many things kick in.

There is a whole set of guidelines for under eight's childcarelink.gov.uk/pdf/ofsted/Module2.pdf and generally there is much legislation to comply with, the Children's Act 2004, Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups Act 2006, (in Law 2008), and procedures to follow, Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) checks, Registration of organisation as an umbrella or affiliate of an Umbrella organisation for the CRB disclosure process.

Then there is good practice, which essentially means that if you follow the good practice, you will be fine. For YAFA I stole the good practice of the national amateur swimming body here in the UK, but it was the same as similar guidelines for youth workers, from scout leaders to youth club workers.

We had a lot of guidelines—like having always 2 people with children, and if the group is mixed sex, having proportionate mixed sex supervision. Its serious stuff. Its about protecting the child, but also about protecting the volunteer, a body needs to do these things, so it avoids problems arising.

Costly, about £300 for yafa alone, the youth programme in 2005 at the Worldcon, it was time consuming, so much bureaucracy, and form filling and waiting, and if you do a CRB for the scouts, you need to do it again for say JumpCon. It has to be done.

So for a smaller convention than a rich Worldcon, I came up with an idea.

We have Parent Child programming. This is where we design a programme, for kids, but its also going to be entertaining and enjoyable for their accompanying parents. Parents are the ultimate authority over their kids, so involving them, means that we are not minding these children. I also wanted to move away from designated youth stuff, to things that will appeal to con goers in general, while being mindful of needs of children. I have found that people of all ages enjoy seeing microwave explode, but older kids may veer away, if the think its for younger ones.

Makes sense one would think.

So the situation I sought comments on, while furnishing some of the above as back ground was thus

A parent, (unnamed) who intends to bring their children to my convention, is chatting in a bar, the morning after an SF gathering, they really feel their children do not need continual supervision, and should be allowed to do what they want within reason, although whether that's their reason or mine is unclear, and poo poo's concerns about abduction, assault, abuse etc, as

unrealistic. I explain its costly running a child programme and also what PC will be as a solution and am enthusiastic.

The response:

'I don't go to f*cking conventions to mind my children'

Actually I may have the curse in the wrong place, it shocked me a bit, and the person who was going to run the programme was there, and she too was surprised.

So I asked good folk and here is what they said.

Hayley Niussere said:

I'm a conrunner and I am a parent; I was pregnant at 19 so I'm quite a young parent with it. I have yet to take my daughter to a convention for more than a couple of hours. Generally this is because I've been on the committee, and therefore know I can't give her the attention she deserves, but sometimes it has been because I wanted to enjoy myself. There, I said it. I have left her with my parents or with her dad so that I could go and have fun at a convention, without her. I'd still have fun if she was there, it'd just be a different kind of fun. I don't like sitting chatting to my friends whilst ignoring my daughter, it's not fair to either of us, so if family can't have her, I don't go to the con. Simple.

When she's old enough to get some value out of a convention, I will bring her with me and I will be by her side at all times. Not because I think someone might run off with her (though it does worry me sometimes) but because other people's children are really bloody annoying. Just because I think I've got one of the most pleasant, friendly, well-behaved children in the universe (at the moment...) doesn't mean other people will and shockingly, I am considerate enough to be aware of this fact and take action even if it inconveniences me.

If you don't want to spend eighteen years of your life being responsible for another human being, no matter how mature you think that human being is, then don't have kids. And

if you've already got kids that you don't want to be responsible for, then don't bring them.

Who knew that parents had to make sacrifices?!

Inger Myers

I'm assuming no harm came to this person. (no says James, who was in shock)

My response/contribution.

Let me preface my response with my qualifications. I am a mother of 1 adolescent, the nanny to 3 young children, a trained educator at the elementary and pre-school level, have run or helped run children's programming at 3 world cons and ran our local conventions children's programming for 4 years. I have also participated in Girl Scout activities, school sponsored activities and consulted for several other conventions on ideas and management difficulties.

My short response "Then don't bring your kids to the convention".

The longer response, if I were in charge of the CP: Due to the legal structure we have decided to use in our country, laws have been made that make the cost of running a babysitting service at the convention ineffective. Maybe you can find another parent who is willing to share the duties of watching your children and theirs so that you each have time to enjoy the convention both with and without your children. I hope you'll give our program a chance. We've worked very hard at finding a variety of things for you to enjoy with your children.

I understand that many people, myself included, attend conventions with the intent of having recreation time with our adult friends. The reality is that we chose to have children and raise them. This puts the burden of their safety and well being on our shoulders. Different countries and states

have chosen to enact certain laws to protect children from those that would do them harm. How much freedom a child has at a convention has to be gauged on several levels, the legal statutes, the child's maturity level, the willingness and ability of the program to deal with the child under the

legal structure and their own personal comfort level, and the venue with which the convention is taking place. I've made decisions about parent responsibility that were unpopular because I view children's programming as another part of a convention, not a babysitting service. There are hired

professionals available to do the babysitting or other parents who are more familiar with the individual children. My primary concern as the head of children's programming is the well being and entertainment of all of the children involved. I want the kids to feel like they have a place to belong so that they want to return to the convention, not that they were carted along by their parents and become resentful of the community we have chosen to belong to.

Finally, I find it sad that parents sometimes view their children as burdens or toys to be left to their own devices when the parent feels that they don't want the child around. I have watched many children being left in situations that they are unable and/or unready to handle simply because the parent(s) felt it was inconvenient to do otherwise. My husband and I both have busy jobs at our local convention, but we work out a schedule between the 2 of us and several other parents to make sure that our daughter is safe. Our laws in the states are less stringent than in the UK, but my personal expectations are very high for the safety of my daughter. When we were in Glasgow for the Worldcon my daughter was under the age limit to be left without parental supervision. My husband and I discussed what we wanted to see most and what our daughter wished to participate in.

Compromises were made and we all had a great time. Enjoy your children now,

so that they want you around later when you need them the most.

(Inger makes an interesting point, when Stef and I saw a pair of parents rowing about who would go and collect their Kids, in the Moat House Hotel, Glasgow, the not Scottish couple quieted when they saw us, but it was too late. We had seen them. Our opinions were one. You can use your own expletives)

SMS

My knee jerk reaction is, anyone who says they don't expect to be minding their kids is a crap parent. We all, as parents, hand our kids over to someone *in loco parentis*. The norms are: Schools. Playgroups. Scouts. Swimming lessons. Drama. Other parents running a party. 'Sleepovers'. It might even include Police custody.

However, no parent willingly leaves their kids with someone else unless they've checked them out. Moreover, they'll keep some kind of watching brief, define the boundaries and rules with the kids (i.e.: "Don't run out. Do as they tell you. Don't climb up the climbing wall on your own. Eat your dinner"), carry out some sort of basic health and safety check (This takes only a few seconds ie: What's that guillotine doing in the room?) and, of course, lay down a procedure for you to be contacted in an emergency.

There are parents—many parents—for whom dropping kids off at school or letting them hang about outside the local shop is a point at which they completely wipe their hands of any responsibility. Whatever the child does out of their 'care' is Someone Else's Problem and, equally, any mishaps that happen whilst that child is elsewhere are concurrently, Someone Else's Fault. Therefore Sue-able.

These are the people who will usually have the insecure kids who don't know any Boundaries. They'll probably be afraid to explore anything but they'll want to test any authority to

destruction because they feel insecure as they can perceive no structure. They'll probably be a danger to themselves. They are very likely to be a danger to others. They'll be exhausting and frustrating to be with and will probably be an excuse to for the parent to sue someone because of their own lack of experience or social skills and their own parents keenness to shed blame.

This is the sort of parenting my wife deals with every day at school. It's the reason why almost nothing is possible in the school due to over-paranoid (And, actually, unworkable) health and safety regulations and why kids lack stimulus because any attempt to widen kids horizons (Mainly, let them have fun) is opposed by the parents indifference or active hostility.

This attitude completely pervades the town I live in: Rochdale. Rochdale is a very deprived town but it's not a lack of money that causes this problem, it's the lack of social involvement. I speak as one who's spent most of the last decade producing and providing street parties, nature studies, community actions and general play-provision...only to continually be faced with a complete lack of parental involvement. In the end, my efforts tend to be free babysitting rather than Community Involvement...and that isn't helpful.

I have, for decades, opposed the 'Stranger danger' myths that separate kids from the larger society and now mean that any attempt by adults to complain of youth crime is a no-starter. On the other hand, there have always been dangers to children, from wolves to traffic to sick, twisted children or adults. Any parent who does not check for these dangers is, to my mind, not one who has not taken on board their responsibility as a parent. This is why, when I find I'm effectively 'babysitting' kids, alarm bells ring whenever I find the parents don't even want to know where their kids are, let alone to come and check it out.

In the past, I've run Geriatric Nursing Homes (The term 'Geriatric' is no longer PC). Here, all too often, I saw a keenness to surrender responsibility between parent and child. Now reversed. Too often, relatives simply dumped their aged parents

onto a Home and, from then until death, they no longer existed. This, again, has always scared the shit out of me. Abuse of weak, helpless and confused elderly people is frighteningly easy and it does occur. Again, as with child abuse, it's all too often glossed over with casually applied 'Safeguards' which appear only on paper and have no real application. As with so many things, I'd be so much happier with the concept of Officially sanctioned Euthanasia if only I could believe that it could be applied with Common Sense and Love (Those most rare of commodities) rather than indifference and an administrative-error prone checklist.

In my time as a lecturer at the (Epicly crap) local college, I spoke out against this cosmetic 'Political correctness' that was supposed to protect disabled kids but which, in fact, did nothing but inconvenience them whilst affording them no protection whatsoever. Having submitted (Very reasonably) to the Police Check to see if I was safe to work with kids, I was shocked when I found it was a whole year after I'd worked there that the check was completed.

Another way I get to muck about with kids is when I'm employed by libraries and art galleries to produce Comic Strip Workshops. Here, I'm sometimes monitored by the staff (Actually, they tend to come along to join in) but sometimes I'm not. Yes, I have that Police Check number, but we all know how rigorously they're researched don't we.

For the last decade or so I've been running Beyond Cyberdrome with a variety of wonderful people, along with various other Child-friendly activities. Beyond Cyberdrome is not, and has never been, a crèche in which adults can drop their kids off. Many people that play in the Beyond Cyberdrome Workshop aren't parents because they would rather muck about with server motors than kids. Nonetheless, kids have always been very welcome and are a vital aspect of Beyond Cyberdrome which we are very happy to cater to. I am continually amazed by just how excellent every organiser of the

Beyond Cyberdrome Scrap workshop has been with kids and how very sensible everyone is, under their pretense of mania. With this goes another safeguard—if anyone's an arsehole, we chuck 'em out.

We welcome kids of all ages and really do work very hard at making sure that everyone is safe, entertained, looked after and intellectually stimulated. We particularly enjoy the Beyond Cyberdrome staple of parents coming in with their kids to bond over lego. We're even happy to look after people's kids for a while, subject to assurances on both sides. It's not a matter of paperwork, it's a matter of common sense.

As a very enthusiastic dad of a very enthusiastic 6 year old, I know full well the euphoria of simply escaping the constant stimulus of his annotation and observations, and time away from him, so long as it's not too long, is a definite pleasure.

All parents need some time to practice conversation unpunctuated by explanation. On the other hand, there's no way I'm giving my child over to anyone without assuring myself that I won't regret it for the rest of my life.

Again, I must stress this—This is not a matter of paperwork, accreditation or checklists. It's a matter of common sense. If you can't make that assessment then you're not really safe to go to a pub, let alone to be a parent.

With cynical regularity, we see in the papers some emotive and entirely shallow reporting of some awful failure of Social Work, Nursing, Policing or some privatised industry. Invariably, the individuals at fault were—on paper—Qualified and the institution fully Accredited. Always, an 'Inquiry' must be held. Always, at root, there is a case of adherence to legality-based form checking rather than actual care at the Point of Delivery (Yes, terms like that). Invariably, it's due to there simply not being the manpower. More often than not, the people who are later blamed, warned that this was likely to happen. In the

end, people have trusted the paperwork and the PR rather than taking the bother to actually share some of the responsibility.

If we have no responsibility for our actions, we can not be surprised that checklists, 'Best Practice' and 'Working with People' awards have not done the job for us. In the end, it takes someone who knows what they're doing to iron out the bugs. It doesn't take a list of Performance Targets to, or even a Village to raise a child. It requires at least someone to be a Parent. That's why kids are...kids.

If you don't want to share your life with your kids, please, learn from the Hardcore Engineers: Don't have them.

Really, the world does have quite enough people to keep ecological catastrophe on target without you contributing any more kids.

Trust me: They don't have an off-button...but in 50 years time, they'll have control of yours.

Sms

Sms and Eira's son, Cuil, is regularly left in the care of the highly evolved Blue Cat, from Pluto. Blue Cat does not have a Work Permit, let alone a qualification in Child Care.

SMS is great, in a mad sort of way, yet this was some of the most erudite writing I have ever read on managing your child, I was very impressed, Although I do personally feel that occasionally Beyond Cyberdrome was used to dump kids. Especially Glasgow Eastercon but that's only my opinion.

I rather agree with you there, as I'm sure would some other people who've minded Blue Cat (I particularly remember M@ being pissed off at someone once), but I wasn't trying to grumble so much as point a way forwards...or something. Maybe in a rewrite I should hint at this.

Gillian James

Having children and young people at conventions is great and important for the future of fandom. This was my opinion when I first started attending conventions and not just since having a baby. Cons should be fun. I enjoy dressing up, playing with Lego and hitting people with light sabres. However, having been a member of staff for YAFA at Worldcon in Glasgow, I know just how much hard work is involved in organising YA activities.

Being responsible for other peoples' children has never been easy and with ever increasing numbers rules, guidelines, background checks and general red tape it is a miracle anyone is still prepared to take it on. Whether all these rules are strictly necessary, particularly considering how few regulations there are concerning having children of your own, is a debate for another time and place. The rules exist and are the same for Scouts, Guides, sports clubs, the lot. It is extremely unlikely that a child would be seriously injured, abducted or abused at a convention but it could happen and if the supervising adult was found not to have followed every single piece of guidance to the letter they would be in a whole heap of you know what.

Even if you know your child can be trusted and will be safe without your supervision it is still too great a burden to place on the already extremely busy and stressed people running the con. Besides doing stuff with your kids is fun, at least it has been so far. Perhaps once she is old enough to hit me with a light sabre I might change my mind!

Mark and Elaine Slater

James—I got my partner Elaine to comment on this (as I've spoken to her about it previously on the back of a previous conversation we had on the specific incident you mention) and she came back with the following;

"SF Conventions are primarily an adult activity. If there is child-friendly programming, it is a big plus and I appreciate it very much, but I do not expect it.

My children are my responsibility. If there is a dedicated, professional service which can look after my children for a couple of hours here & there, to allow me to go to programming, then I am perfectly happy to pay a commercial rate for that service. But again I don't expect it to be standard convention practice. If I come to arrangements with friends, along the lines of yes, I'll keep an eye on yours for an hour and you can return the favour later, that is entirely between us just the same as if we were taking each others kids to the Wacky Warehouse. But that is a private arrangement between friends, and is likely to be reciprocal.

Activities which parents and kids can share together are great ! That's not "minding" your children, that's spending quality time together ! If you come to a convention in order to spend as little time as possible with your kids then don't bloody bring them, palm them off on a grandparent or something.

It is hard to comment on the specific example without knowing the ages of the children involved. If the child is 14 and is old enough to go into town on a Saturday on their own, then they probably don't need parental supervision at a convention. If they're 7, they do. The difficulty comes in the middle ground. Ultimately you as the con-runner have got to be happy that you are not taking any responsibility for anybody else's children, beyond that which you have agreed and are happy to take. YOU set that limit, not the parents.

Me : con-goer for over twenty years, both pre- and post-children. Kids have been coming to Eastercon since they were babies, they are now primary school age."

Matt Langley

With the issue below, leaving out the organisers for a moment, there are 4 people to consider in this instance:

1. The Child
2. The parent (s)
3. The other attendees at the con
4. Panel guests/moderators

I'll go through them one by one.

1. The age and maturity of child would be how you determine whether a child could be left on their own, however, the maturity of each child is purely subjective and cannot be used as a way of measuring if they can be left on their own. Also if you have two sets of parents with children the same age you would cannot treat one child different to another due to one being better behaved.

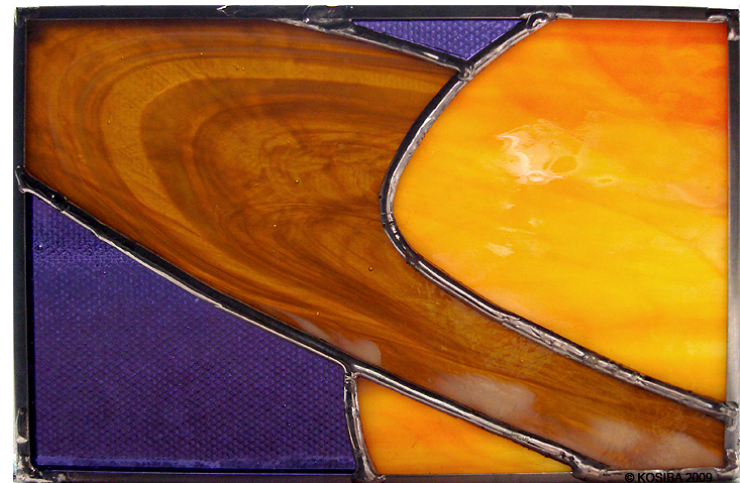
2. Understandably they want to do what they want at the show, however, due to various program items there maybe an age rating (eg zombiecon). If they was an incident involving their child they would have to be contactable at ALL times, this means that they would have to leave whatever they were doing immediately. Would they be happy for their child to wonder the convention on their own—and the possible ramifications of this (eg drinking/sex i know they may be underage but things can/will happen).

3. If a child is left on their own, this can make other con attendees uncomfortable. Although the fan community is just that, a community, they should not have to take responsibility for others and their actions. If anything was to happen to the child/ because of the child/ with the child involved who would have to take responsibility for the child in this situation. And this doesn't even start to mention possible accusations of a child and adult alone (see end point 2).

4. Panel guests/moderators, if the child starts playing up and causing a disruption, what are they to do? If they ask the child to leave, where are they to go? If there is no designated area for children will they head to another programme item, if age appropriate, to the bar (and possible drink—parents ok?), to their room, elsewhere? If they did eject them from the panel item and something happened would they be held liable? Could they eject them or would they have to keep the potentially disruptive child in the room? If the child gets bored and wants to leave would they be allowed to let them leave or would they have to stay in the panel item so as not to be wondering around the convention?

I won't go into the logistics for the convention organisers as you would know more about that than me, especially cost/laws.

However I can see the parents point but just because they say their child is behaved doesn't make it so. Also, once you let one parent do it others will want to follow and as I said you wouldn't be able to treat children the same differently, you would also have to determine at what age you would considered a child to be responsible and mature enough to sit through a panel item.



Keeping the Filkers Happy

Bill Roper

It used to be easy to keep the filkers at your convention happy. You gave them a function room late at night that you weren't using for programming, one not chilled down to 57 degrees or next to the dance, and the filkers would be happy as clams—although a good bit louder! It's not so simple any more, depending, of course, on how many filkers are attending your convention and what the fannish and filkish norms are in your area.

The first thing to recognize is that filk is an annoyingly slippery concept to get a handle on, simply because that single word can mean so many different things in the context of a filksing. Normally, you expect to hear music at a filksing, but occasionally, you'll hear a spoken presentation. Some times, you'll hear parody lyrics set to existing tunes, or even a mash up of existing lyrics and mismatched existing tunes; other times, you'll hear music that is entirely original. It can be silly. It can be serious. Some of it is of professional quality. Some of it isn't.

And there are different styles of filksing. You may not know what bardic, or performer's circle, or chaos mean in this context, but you do need to know that there are people who will defend each of these styles to the death. If your con is attracting a lot of filkers, whether through your good efforts or blind luck, having multiple empty rooms available for the filkers can help reduce conflicts. If you don't have an extra room, the filkers will work



it out. But extra space makes it easier for the filkers to organize themselves according to their taste.

If you give the filkers decent space late at night, you've now done the minimum necessary to keep them happy. If it's not too far from the con suite, that's even better, because singing is thirsty work and it's nice to be able to get something to drink without riding twenty stories up an elevator and back down. That's not always possible, but nice when you can arrange it.

So now it's time to check up on our late-night filksing. If you've got a person on the committee who is in charge of filking, that's their responsibility. If not, you're going to want to poke your head in and see how it's going, just like you would with any other activity at the con.

If your main (or only) filkroom has a happy bunch of folks sitting around with guitars and other instruments and the place isn't so packed that there's no oxygen left in the room, then you're probably doing just fine. If people are spilling out into the hallway or there are a lot of instruments sitting around that don't seem to be associated with anyone actually playing them, then your filksing may have exceeded the carrying capacity of the room.

People spilling out into the hallway are the result of an obvious problem—they've simply run out of space in the room. Abandoned instruments tend to indicate that there are more performers trying to play in the room than can fit into the time available, so they've gone out to grab a soda or chat in the hall for a bit until things thin out a little. In either case, having a second filkroom available may help.

So all that is the minimum that you might do for filkers at a general-interest convention. But what if you want to do more?

The first thing that you're going to want is a person who is responsible for the filking at your convention. And then you're going to let filking graduate from being a scheduled, but otherwise unprogrammed late-night activity to being part of your actual convention program. Your filking head can schedule concerts, panels, and workshops for your program, depending on how much space you make available, how many filkers are already planning to attend the convention, and how many filkers that he or she can talk into coming.

If you're planning to have filk concerts at your con, you're going to need a sound system. It doesn't have to be expensive—I used to rent one for about \$50 for the weekend before I finally bought a portable system. But your hotel's microphones are never going to be sufficient for the purpose. And if you've got a nice venue—Capricon is running a coffeehouse with a concert series that is modeled after the Dark Star space at the multi-thousand person Minicons of some years back—and your filk head programs it well, you're going to find that a lot of people are having a good time.

Once you put the filkers onto scheduled programming, they become Program Participants and need to be treated the same way that you'd treat all the other program participants at your con. No sensible filker expects to get program participant credit for showing up at the late-night filksing, any more than the editor of ISFiC Press is going to expect to get program participant credit for pontificating in the con suite. They do expect it for being on a panel, or giving a concert, or running a workshop. And they expect a ribbon for their badge, should you have them, and access to the Green Room.

Should you forget this, well, the standard statement in filking is "Your name is funny and can be made to scan to Greensleeves." And that's not just a joke. I tossed a metaphorical firecracker into the room when LACon IV

announced that filkers weren't program participants. You can see the results here: <http://billroper.livejournal.com/341837.html>.

It got fixed. To be honest, I just wanted my ribbon.

But I digress.

The point here is that you can have as much filk as you want to have at your convention. Personally, I try to avoid scheduling so much filk that a person can bury themselves in it and not see any of the rest of the convention, but that's my particular prejudice. The actual limits are imposed by space, budget, and who you can talk into showing up, just like any other activity at the con. You can even have a filk guest—many conventions do!

It's up to you.



Film, Film, Film

Chris Garcia

To start with, I've got one big piece of advice, one thing for everyone who is going to be running a film program at a con. That one piece of advice- you're not running a film festival. This especially has to be told to those of us who have worked with film festivals. I know, I know, you want it to be taken seriously, but really, you're not running a film festival. That's both a good and a bad thing, but there are some very useful tips that you can use to put together a great film program.

OK, let's get to the part where I explain why you ain't gonna be running a film festival. It's all about expectations, in this case of both the audience and in many cases the filmmakers. Even if you're gathering new films that have never been seen anywhere, folks have far different expectations for a film festival, including having an actual theatre-setting and top-notch projection and sound. Not a lot of cons can provide that sort of setting and while there are festivals that run in hotel functions rooms (I even ran one when I was in college), generally, they're far less thought-of than the 'real' fests that run in movie theatres (and the less like a multiplex your theatre is, the more likely folks are gonna think well of it). If you're running a film program where you gather independent films from all over and show them, well, there are no pickier people when it comes to film festivals than filmmakers. You really have to manage those expectations. Plus, there are things associated with many film festivals that cons can't really supply, like offering lodging, in-city transport, passes for friends and family and so on. Not every festival does, but it's something that filmmakers consider. I know I have when I've had films in festivals.

I should also mention that I'll be saying Film a lot. Really, unless you've got someone who is a regular projectionist, you should probably stick with video. Film is hard, projectors can be

very cranky, and they aren't something you get good at unless you do it a fair deal. Video is much easier.

That's not to say there aren't actual film festivals within some cons. The Conestoga Film Festival is well respected among genre filmmakers, as a fine example of that focus, but it's rare, and usually it's better just to consider a film program to be a part of the programming realm. You need years of Film

Programming to become a Film Festival within a larger event. Having run the Vintage Computer Faire's film program for two years certainly gave me a clear concept. Filmmakers showed up, but they showed up more for the Faire than the films. They also had a very different interaction with their audience than you'd have at a traditional festival, and in a good way. More on that later.

Alright, you're the head of the Film Program at a con. Where do you start? First, start with facilities. It's the single most important thing you can do. If you don't have half-way decent facilities for showing films, you're better off not doing it. Luckily, there are tons of places you can show films and videos that'll actually produce good results. The most popular location is in traditional programming rooms. This isn't a bad thing as long as they aren't echo-y and aren't in the middle of things. Yes, it is



always best to have programming of any kind in a location where people can get to it and find it easily, but the last thing you want is to have constant traffic moving in and around it, distracting from the movies. DO a walk through of the facility ahead of time and scope out which will be usable.

The second most popular location is a large ballroom space. This can work well, especially if you're going to have a great many people interested in seeing what you've brought. The acoustics tend to be a little more difficult, but there also tend to be better sound systems and sometimes even built-in projection units. These can be very useful, though if they require using Hotel AV people, you might find them costing a good deal more than renting your own equipment and running them yourself.

There are specialty locations that can work to varying degrees of success. BayCon would show films outdoors, projecting films two night at the con on the side of the Hotel, allowing folks to watch from the pool deck. At Constrained, they showed films in the restaurant, dedicating a section for folks

who wanted to watch films while they were eating. I've seen cons run films in foyers, in regular hotel rooms, in lobbies and even in parking structures. Outdoors isn't a great idea in many parts of the country, but it can work. It requires a lot more sound and a stronger projector at most times. Indoors you have a little more control.

After you've found your location, you need equipment. Many cons have their own AV equipment. You'll need, at a minimum, something to splay



the movies with, a projector and a sound system of some sort. Yes, I've been to film programs that simply used a television, one of which was even really good, but that's not recommended because unless you've got a big ol' TV, you ain't gonna be able to get more than 50 people comfortably. And maybe that's what you're going for, and that's fine. If you want to have a big crowd, even if it's just for a few of your screenings, you need a projector. These have come down in price, and even office projectors of the kind that HP specializes in can be very effective. Sound systems are usually a little more difficult, though a decent set of stereo speakers aren't that expensive. The thing to play with can be tricky. VCRs and DVD players are usually very easy to use with sound systems and projectors. They're fine, require almost no training and aren't expensive. Computers are also used by a lot of groups, and they can make things very easy and very hard. You can possibly build up a single drive full of all the films, set up a playlist and just let them roll with minimum interaction. You can create special menus and even put together things in programs like PowerPoint that'll allow you to show the film and provide other material for discussion afterwards. They can also mess things up, often have far more compatibility problems with systems and add another world of complexity. The best idea is to go with the specialties of whoever you've got. Got an IT person who does this stuff all the time, then maybe a computer is best for you.

After the first considerations, you've gotta start thinking about what kind of program you want to put together. Do you want to put together long blocks of shorts to make a program where you might want to do a group Q+A after? Maybe you want to treat each film like it's own program item and have longer discussions after each one? Maybe you want to have a series of movies running constantly, encouraging people to drift in and out. These can all work. I've got my preferences. Doing the constantly running program is very good if you've got a lot of material and a space that is completely dedicated. You'll also need more staff for that kind than any other. Many Anime rooms

run like that. If you've got a few films and are able to get a few filmmakers out, treating each film as it's own program item can work very well. If you've got a lot of shorts and fewer folks coming, doing blocks can work really well.

Once you've figured out what you're gonna do, you have to do the work that is sometimes the hardest: getting the movies. The easiest way is to contact one of the film distribution and licensing companies and getting their catalog. They'll have a list of the movies they can provide and the prices for screenings. These can vary from as low as 50 bucks to thousands of dollars, though I've discovered that you can usually get the projection rights to most stuff for 250-500 dollars. Usually you save money if you're the one providing the media. I ran a series of films where we showed DVDs from our collection and having our own saved us almost 200 dollars a screening. Of course, you could also go and find Public Domain films, of which there are thousands. The trap with some of these is that record keeping has led to many films that are thought to be Public Domain actually being owned by one group or another.

You could also go the indy route. You can put out a call for entries in many venues, withoutabox.com, filmfestivals.com, craigslist and so on are all places that Filmmakers look. Also, don't overlook MySpace, Facebook and other sites where filmmakers congregate as a potential place to find films. Put out a call at least six months before your event on your website and on every other site that you can think of. You'll want to contact as many of your local film resources as you can. I'd say to start with local film societies, then any group that might do screenings in your area, including film festivals. It was once figured that there is no spot in America that is more than a three

hour drive from a film festival. Getting these folks on your side will help you get in touch with local filmmakers who can help provide films, as well as in touch with film fans who you might be able to get to come and join in on the fun, especially if you're showing films that are very little seen.

One mistake a lot of film programs make is to try and compete with film festivals to be a 'premiere' screening, or even worse, to say that there's no 'premiere rule' meaning that anyone can submit any film no matter where it's been shown already. There aren't a lot of film festivals that are "premier," and most of them are things like Cannes and The Berlin Film Festival. Even Sundance and the Toronto Film Festivals have backed away from that. Saying that you're the kind of program that accepts anything that's available will get you more submissions, but significant filmmakers will steer clear of any group that announces itself as such. Just say you're looking for films and they will come you way.

Next step is screening films ahead of time. Film programs that grab films from outside sources can build their programs much easier than those that rely on submitted films. Some programs will barely get any films and will just show whatever comes in, and there's nothing particularly wrong with that. On the other hand, if you announce and get hundreds of films submitted, you're going to have to screen and score and make choices. It can be a hard process, one that I've done a dozen times with Cinequest and a couple of other fests, but the best idea is to get a team of two or three folks, divide the films up, everyone watches their set and brings their best picks together and then the team assembles a

program from those films. Establishing how many slots you're gonna have and what kind has to happen before this, but sometimes the submissions will force your hand by giving you a ton of films from locals who might come and want to do a full



program item, which will give you something more to get people into the screenings.

There's another thing: ultimately, you wanna draw crowds. Here are some suggestions for how to program. You might want to select a few films, potentially very popular ones, that you can show twice. The first time during Prime Day or



whenever there are no special events and the second time during events like Masquerades or Guest of Honor speeches. These can provide space for people who can't make it in, or maybe those who aren't into whatever is being presented, and if you've managed to get a good location, let it appear that your programming is endless! That's always a help.

You should try and put together a schedule as soon as possible. That's easier said than done, but here are a couple of tips. First, come up

with what the significant films you're going to show on what day. Don't worry about what order or anything, but set-up the highlights and get that onto the website as soon as possible. So let's say that you've got 24 films that you're going to be showing, and three of them are classic Hollywood Science Fiction films, one is a feature from a local filmmaker who will do a Q+A, and one is an Indy film that has a local actor in it who fans are aware of. You'd say which of those you're showing when and add a 'and many more!' at the end and that'll set folks up. It's like those teaser trailers you see for big films that aren't coming out for 18 months. Then you get more detailed at least a month ahead of time.

And that's key. Folks tend to make plans at once when they finally see a schedule. If you can beat the main program schedule, you can often put things in better position to get people excited. The next step should include the names of all the films, preferably with a little bit of info on each. You don't need times for everything, but you should make sure you say if Filmmakers are planning to come and you may want to put them into day slots. You'll also wanna announce if you're having any late-night programming. These should be more adult-themes (but I'd say you should avoid straight porn, as that adds a number of problems) and can often draw an interesting and boisterous crowd.

The final schedule should be out at least two weeks ahead of time. Now, something this is very difficult as you may still be looking for copyright and other matters. That's what you use phrases like "Special Attraction coming!" or the like can be used for. With a lot of film programs, you don't see a full program until you get to the con and they have it printed and on the door of the room. This is OK, not ideal as folks tend to make plans ahead of time. Even if you've published the program listing on the website months in advance, you should have it printed and in accessible locations (That's right, plural) around the con. That'll help get folks interested.

The matter of staffing is also important. You're going to be there taking care of stuff, but you're going to want to have a staff of a few people. First, you should have at least three different people who can run the projector and manage the sound. You don't want someone to have to spend more than 8 hours at a clip in the place. Trust me, it can make you go crazy. That same person can serve as an introducer and moderator for the Q+A if you have one. You can also have others do that from the general pool of panelists. I've seen that work, including once when the Q+A host was a SETI scientist and the film screened was Contact. It was great stuff. Making sure that any filmmakers who do come get on to the regular program can help make sure that they are involved with the con and don't just see it as

another screening. That'll help your following years even more than it'll help you on the first year.

Now, if you really want to make an impact, try to stand out a little more. You can do things like have screenings with discussions afterwards in round-table format. You can even have formal-ish debates with each team using examples from the film (you think that sounds interesting? It is. Try getting two teams together and having the debate on whether continued space exploration is a good idea after having shown the documentary about the Columbia explosion *Rising Above*) and you can even go further and have a full panel topic with experts from around the world. If you can pull that off, you might even get mainstream publicity (I've done that with a computer movie at the Computer History Museum).

One thing that'll really help you reach people is doing a printed program. It doesn't have to be flashy, it can just be something like a single sheet that gives the names and times, director, year, runtime and maybe a brief description. This gives folks who show up something to carry around and get folks talking about. Also, having that information in printed form will bring that info into the next year's work. That will help with continuity, trust me.

There are a couple of things you might want to consider adding to your film program. First, you could consider having a filmmaking track-let. You can get a few filmmakers and have them do seminars about how to make movies. This can be a lot of fun, I've been on a series of panels like this over the years and it's always been fun. Some cons do this and have the team put together a short film. Norwescon has done this over the years and it's a lot of fun. I highly recommend it. Another thing might be a film discussion series. You pick three films, let's say *A Trip to the Moon* from George Melies, *Destination Moon* and a documentary like *One Giant Leap* all shown back to back and then have a feature discussion. I've never managed to put that one together, but I've thought about it for years.

Tricky matters pop up. What do you do if the projector breaks? Well, you should have bought an extra bulb or two, and you should build in a little extra time between movies to deal with problems like that. There are a lot of things that can go wrong with sound systems, so spend a few hours ahead of time dealing with training on how to fix these things. It also doesn't hurt to have another, less powerful system ready in case the main one fails. This has saved many a film program. We once had to show our film *The Chick Magnet* on a Laptop with a set of external PC speakers, and while it was not perfect, it did get a good reception. That's the important thing. Always having a TV around is a good idea. If that's your main method of screening, it's not a bad idea to have two around, just in case. Working back-ups make for successful events.

The Film Program can make things a lot of fun. I've seen some wonderful movies that showed nowhere else but cons and I've met some really cool filmmakers. You can make a big deal no matter what you show by treating it with respect, taking a little extra time and making sure that you've covered the interests of your attendees. It can almost make you feel like you've put together a real film festival.

Almost.



Hugo Administration

Mary Kay Kare

The most fun job I have ever done for a Worldcon was administering the Hugo Awards for Denver in 2008. When I say this to people they tend to look at me strangely. Apparently not everyone loves making lists and counting votes and knowing who won the Hugos before everyone else.

Eligibility for the Hugos and voting on same is controlled by the WSFS Constitution. See Section 3 of that document for the nitty gritty. (<http://pl745.pairlitesite.com/executive/2007wsfscconstitution.php>) For the most part this lays down the lines and limitations and the administrator works in concert with other members of the committee to set the initial time lines. Then the administrator and her staff issue the call for nominations. Those nominations are tallied and the final ballot is put together and released, usually around Easter. The members then vote the final ballot which the administrator tallies. Once all the votes are in and tallied, the administrator orders the plates for the trophies engraved. (The design of the trophy's base is usually the perquisite of the Chairman.) Then you get to run around Worldcon knowing who won and trying to keep a straight face. Once the award night is over your job is not yet finished as you must mail out the trophies to those who were not there or who really don't want to have to explain the damn thing to the TSA. Let's look at these things in more detail, shall we?



TIMELINE

You have 4 important dates to set. When will nominations begin? When will they cease? When will final balloting begin? When will it cease? Obviously the first date to look at is when the convention will be. Look at that date and figure out how long you'll need for counting ballots and having plates engraved. You can find out the latter by calling around to trophy shops. Ours were done quite quickly. Jeff Copeland delivered the copy electronically to the shop and they were done about 2 weeks later. Jeff had them done locally to him and hand carried them to Colorado. This involved close coordination with the base designer and manufacturer so that they would fit and match but we thought it best to handle it that way. It allowed us to control the people who had the information and to check carefully for typos (engraveos?) before the convention.

Now that so many people vote electronically it is much easier and faster to count final ballots than it used to be. We had all electronic ballots feed directly into the counting software Jeff designed (which many Worldcons have now used). The paper ballots we received we input electronically ourselves. This required me to have read only access to Denver's database so I could retrieve the membership numbers and the PINs necessary. In effect I was electronically voting for those members who sent in paper ballots. This

requires one be very careful about proofreading before pushing that final button, but it makes counting completely automated. This allows you to leave voting open quite late before convention – driven mostly by the engravers' schedule. I think we closed voting about 3-4 weeks before the convention.

Now that you have the date voting will end on the final ballot, you can work backwards to establish when the ballot will be released and voting can begin. Ideally, one wants to give the voters as much time as possible to track and down and read/view nominees. We announced the nominees on Easter weekend and electronic balloting was available soon after with the printed ballot being distributed sometime a bit later. You need to enlist as many people as possible to proofread your final ballot. Each nominee should verify their own spelling and publication information as necessary. We had two of fandom's finest proofreaders (Janice Gelb and Teresa Nielsen Hayden) do ours and we still had corrections to make. The amount of niggling detail cannot be imagined until you do it. What kind of punctuation and where does it go? How do you handle multiple names for a single item? Be sure to build in adequate time for proofreading and corrections. Note that corrections to lists/ballots online can be accomplished quite quickly and easily. Printed ballots, not so much. That's why you issue them later, because I promise you, people are going to find corrections to make to something no matter how careful you are.

It's mildly traditional to make the announcement of who/what is on the final ballot around Easter, but you should tailor this to your own circumstances. If you have a late Easter and an early convention your year, obviously this will need to be taken into account.

Figuring out how long you need before the issuing the final ballot is a dark art. I'd recommend at least 3 weeks. You have to finish tallying all those last minute ballots (and tallying nominations is way more time consuming than finals), contact all the nominees to get their acceptance (and yes, people do

decline so that's important), fit all that information in the traditional 4 pages and have it proofread.

So that gives you your date to cut off nominating ballots. Obviously, nominating starts on January 1. That allows for maximum time for nominations after all the previous year's entries are out.

In establishing your timeline, you'll also have to work with the convention's pub staff for coordinating when paper ballots go out with PRs. The PR schedule may have impact on your timeline, or vice versa so conduct those discussions early!

So there's your Awards timeline. One hopes you've done all this in a timely fashion so that you can publicize things before hand. Also, make announcements early and often in all online forums you and your minions have access to. I nagged people unmercifully as deadlines approached because I wanted as many people to vote as possible.

Whew. Okay, the timeline's done. Let's talk about the nominating process

NOMINATIONS

FOR THE LOVE OF GHU, DO NOT WAIT UTIL ALL NOMINATING BALLOTS ARE IN TO START COUNTING. Counting the nomination ballots is an arduous, labor-intensive process that has not been automated. Jeff is still thinking about it, but I don't see how it can be. These are free-text fields and peoples' spelling is so – creative. Not to mention ill-remembered dates, titles, and names.

Before ballots come in you need to decide how you're going to record things. I used index cards, some people use 3-ring binders or excel spreadsheets. Whatver works for you. Just decide on the method and start as soon as you get your first nominating ballot. Because it's going to take way longer than you think to count the damn things and far too many will come at the last minute.

For written works, I made a card for each discrete work nominated. It contained the title, author/editor, and publication data for that work. The publication data will help to establish eligibility. Even if the publication date was outside the eligibility guidelines, I still recorded the vote. Make a hash mark for each nomination. File alphabetically by the title.

Dramatic presentations are pretty much the same, IMDB can help with dates and credits. Individual people are even easier. Just put their name at the top of the card and record nominations received. It's really slow at first because writing all those cards requires a lot of time but as the nominations come in you write fewer and count more.

Okay, the deadline for nominations has passed and you've counted all the ballots and put together a first draft of the final ballot. Now, you have to contact all those people and ask them if they accept their nomination. For written works you contact the authors; for magazines, the editor/s. Individual editors, artists, and writers. I heartily recommend the joys of email. This by the way is one of the most fun parts of the job. I don't think I've ever given so many people so much pleasure with or without the exchange of bodily fluids. Everybody is thrilled to be nominated, even those who decline, and you've just made their day.

In the emails I sent notifying them and asking for acceptance, I included the way the entry would appear on the final ballot and asked the people to confirm that they/the work were eligible and to make any necessary corrections. (I included the definitions of the categories where necessary to help determine eligibility.) Where possible I verified pub dates online myself but backup is always good. I also gave them a date to respond by. If you haven't heard back from them, prospect for additional email addresses and/or phone numbers. Previous administrators and Locus are good sources. And they all know how to keep their mouths shut until the ballot is officially announced.

Once you've got all your acceptances, make necessary changes and corrections and send the ballot to the proofreaders. When they report back, incorporate their corrections and suggestions and you've got your final ballot. Send it out early to your web person who will put it online. I believe it's also traditional to send it early to Locus and File 770. Based on my experience, I would advise sending it to no one else earlier to avoid possible 'accidents' or malfeasance.

THE FINAL BALLOT

You've done the hard part of your job mostly at this point. I heartily recommend that you use the ballot counting software developed by Jeff Copeland for counting the final ballots. The Hugos counting system is a bit arduous to do by hand but easily automated and Jeff's program has been used for counting final ballots by a good many Worldcons at this point with no known problems.

The weekend after the ballot deadline, our committee met to go over the results. One category was very very close so we counted it by hand, just to be sure, and the results were consistent with the automated tally. We had, by this point, already decided on the layout and font to use for engraving the plaques and Jeff put together the electronic file, we all proofread it, and he handed it over to the engravers.

OF TROPHIES AND AWARD CEREMONIES

After the plaques came back, we again proofread carefully and Jeff hand carried them to Denver with him. While he was taking care of this, I was printing out the labels for the cards and envelopes to be used in the ceremony. I printed two complete sets. Jeff and his wife Liz (my stalwart staff members!) took one set to Denver with them and I took the other set. Just in case, you know?

Jeff also prepared a DVD with the voting statistics. I handed over the DVD to the head of publications so she could put together the post ceremony newsletter. Be sure you talk to

your Pub Head well in advance so they make arrangements for doing this.

The guy at the trophy shop who manufactured the bases agreed, for a small fee, to add the plates onto the bases and have them ready for us in plenty of time for us to put on the rockets and have things in order for the awards ceremony. (The rockets are made in mass quantities by British fan Peter Weston.)

We had a small curve thrown us by the Convention Center's stipulation that anything brought into the CC by a person not a union member had to be hand carried, i.e., we couldn't pile them on a hotel cart and ferry them in. (Between the time we picked up the bases with plaques attached and the awards ceremony, the whole shebang lived in my hotel room. I have no idea what the housekeeping staff thought.) Our logistics team came through in stellar fashion. What we did was this.

At the decided upon time the evening of the ceremony (you have been coordinating with your award ceremony person, right?) 15 gophers showed up, ramrodded by their Dept. head, and they each took a sealed box containing a Hugo award trophy (put together and sealed into those boxes by my husband the rocket scientist) and we all paraded down to the lobby, across the street, into the convention center and down to the stage area. Memory suggests I was at the head of the parade singing and dancing as we went, but that can't possibly be right. Everyone knows how dignified and restrained I am. We then left the boxes piled on a table guarded by a very muscular man all dressed in black and mirrorshades. Very threatening he looked too!

When the time came for the ceremony, I sat in the wings with my little stash of envelopes which I handed to people as they readied themselves to go onstage. My husband Jordin handled the ticklish job of unboxing each trophy as needed and handing it to the escort who was to accompany the presenter.

After the ceremony and the picture taking, we hung around to collect the Hugos of people who didn't want to carry them around for the night and/or on their trip home. I forget how we got them all back to the hotel room, but we did. Several other people chose to carry them for the night but give them back to me the next day for mailing home.

Ah the mailing. Yes, we had to mail a bunch of those trophies to the lucky winners. It was intimidating. Do you want to be responsible for X's Hugo arriving in less than pristine condition? I used the boxes we had acquired for transport to the ceremony with lots of padding. Some of them had to be shipped to the UK. If I remember correctly, I used FedEx ground for US shipment and the Post Office for overseas. Because you don't want to know the FedEx Ground charges for shipping to the UK.

Then I went home and shredded all the ballots.

The End

Well, ok, maybe not. I haven't talked any about the really ticklish part of administration, which is resolving dilemmas not covered by the rules. The problem is, most of those are really extraordinary and it's hard to give anything but the most general of advice:

1. Unless it contradicts a specific rule, the will of the voters is paramount.
2. Be aware of the spirit of the rules as well as their letter.
3. In judgment matters, consult with your peers (former Hugo admins) and people you trust. As I recall, I talked to a few WSFS stalwarts at Boskone to get some advice on a possible problem in the Dramatic Presentations category.
4. Be prepared for the fact that someone will be unhappy no matter what you do. If that upsets you, don't take on the job. Me, I hope to do it again some day.