



The Seventy First issue of a sort-of letter substitute, kinda thing. Maybe weekly, maybe not. Available from:

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Available via the World Wide Web. I recommend the Portable Document Format (pdf) or, if you insist, a word or Rich Text Format (rtf) can also be emailed. Get in touch and we'll sort something out. You are going to [vote James Bacon](#) for [TAFF](#), aren't you?

Dated, already, 25/04/04.

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## Consternation.

This spring (2003), here in Ireland there has been a load of student run conventions. Well Ok, maybe that's too strong a word, there have been three, but considering that usually we only have two SF conventions in a whole year, it's a bit of a big deal.

I wasn't able to make it to them all, and was dead curious to find out how they went, so I went about gleaning info and I did a little hunting about. I unusually got a considerable amount of information back. I should say at this stage that I have varying opinions on student run conventions, but more on that opinion another time.

First up was Confusion, in Cork, run by the University College Cork SF society, 28 February-2 March. I wasn't able to make this one, so instead I asked one of the guys, who I shall not name, who was heavily involved and right up against the coal face:

'Confusion, where to start . . . The fate of future Confusions is kinda uncertain, I felt the con was a major disappointment and I don't see how from an external point of view it could be justified again. The guests were some of the nicest people I've ever met. I have to say though I felt extremely embarrassed, here were these amazing guests, even an established con would be lucky to have them and by some stroke of luck we managed to book them for our first. Their presence should have given us the advantage we needed.'

'So what went wrong? Nothing you can do or say will convince me to say how many delegates we had, all I'll say is it was LOW! Nobody knew it was on, where it was on or what it was. The turnout was abysmal and even if it had been better I'm not sure we could have dealt with them. That was the biggest problem there was no promotion.'

'I am well aware that it was entirely our own fault. I am not going to point fingers at anyone particular and say it was their fault. Surprisingly the UCC Science Fiction Society was a major success last year; we increased our overall grant from €1600 to €4500, as a group we were at least twice as active and our overall image has improved considerably. We also made sure we are on good terms with the college administration.'

'But when it came to the convention there was no leadership in the committee, there was no driving force so a lot of the essential work fell by the wayside namely promotions. Some people did nothing others did very little, there was no ambition or more importantly there was no organisation. '

'Everyone says we didn't advertise enough but that wasn't the problem, that was just a symptom. I think what most people were seeing as our problems were just symptoms of the same single problem. No-one was doing anything. The director needs to inspire the committee to work, if he decides to take a couple of months off from organising things in the middle of it all, he can't expect everyone else to carry on regardless.'

Not exactly the report I expected. I know how things work, and one way to limit damage is never to admit anything is going wrong, or went wrong, and always put the best face out, I was struck by the honesty of what I was told. I had heard fairly negative stuff via the grapevine, on this one anyhow, but it is refreshing to see that the guys know where they went wrong, I just hope that they can overcome this, and use their experience for a future event.

Next up was MeCon. It's run by the Queens University SF society and was on the 7-9 March. I made the trek up to Belfast for this one.

I must say at this stage that I have a little love affair with Belfast, and always have, ever since I was small. Today there are few differences between The Republic and the North (or occupied territories to coin a phrase from my Dad), yet this was not always so. As a young boy, it was a fantastic treat to go to the north, on a shopping trip, and every Christmas the family made the journey. There was a better selection, different sweets, all the toys you could find, an Argos Debenhams, Woolworth's and most of all, the stuff was cheaper, and still is. Belfast has one of the best selections of second hand bookshops in the country.

The drive up is getting quicker, and it was a pleasant one, on this occasion to the north. I had agreed to carry books, for my housemate Rory, who owns Dandelion books, and was going to have a dealer table there. I had decided that, I should take my own advice, for a bloody change. Usually at MeCons, I commute back to Alix's parents place, just down the Motorway in Portadown. I decided to get more involved this time, and book a room, something that made all the difference.

There were a couple of English fans over, Alison Freebairn and Max, along with Ireland's favourite son, Dave Lally. Some established Belfast fans also came out of the woodwork, and it was good to see the likes of Eugene Doherty and Mark McCann.

Friday was a quiz, which was good laugh, followed by a drinking session. Alix's mom turned up about midnight, with some provisions, and to take Alix home. Some time later, I found myself in a taxi, with very bizarre seat coverings (clear heavy duty plastic, prevents blood stains I pondered), heading to a Belfast suburb, and a party in Mark McCann's, which went on till late. A strange sort of room party I thought, the living room, but good all the same.

Saturday wasn't too bad at all, the panels were OK, but the attendance was defiantly on the low side. I took the opportunity to head around Belfast and do some shopping, and when I returned things had warmed up, and the GOH Peter F Hamilton was making an impact. That evening there was an excellent disco, and most of us hung around drinking. Then on to a room party, which was in too small a room, so Alison hijacked it and we moved to her room, which was huge. There was no shortage of discussion concerning Ted White and we were having a real blast. Max experienced her first go of Ted and she seemed to enjoy it. Much later we watched the Grand Prix, I was giggling a lot, and in between the wrestling, shouting, and various madness it was a good laugh.

Sunday was restrained and easy going, although the Eastercon Bid in 2008, for Belfast seemed to get a strange reception. In the end it was agreed that until a medium sized (250 people) con could be run in Belfast by Belfast fandom, the thoughts of an Eastercon should be shelved. Eugene Doherty impressed us all with his Turkey Buffet, a bizarre selection of footage, comics set in Belfast and sound bites, a most horrible and hilarious show, and the room was packed. Then all too soon it was off home.

I thought that there could have been more people there. Despite this the convention itself ran well, and all seemed to have a good time, hopefully the good word will spread and it will help with next years. I know a crowd are now intending on coming over and going up.

The final convention of our triptych is Dominicon organised by the Maynooth College gaming society, but this year incorporating an SF con into the event. It was on the 21-23 March, and I could not make it, but I got too very different replies, to queries, which sort of just goes to show me that a con is what one makes of it sometimes, and that spin can be a deadly thing.

#### Dominicon Report 1:

'Good fun was had by all, with a lot going on all round, between panels and workshops on one hand, and RPGs and live action battles with foam weapons on the other. I enjoyed it very much. This was the first time that the con has featured a SF end to it, usually being only a gaming event, but it all seemed to work very well. The con itself was low in numbers, no doubt at least partially due to them having to change their dates close to the last minute, as reported here in January. None the less, they were all extremely friendly and cordial.'

#### Dominicon Report 2

'Dominicon was... quiet, to put it mildly. Several panels were cancelled due to low attendance; in some cases the attendance was zero. I've no idea how many attendees were present, but I didn't see more than about fifteen people at any one time, and most of them were committee members! The dealers' room consisted of a huge empty room with one dealer tucked away in one corner selling books, and another dealer who sold only gaming stuff. The con was quieter than a MeCon on a bad day!'

'Harry Harrison was in great form, as was John W. Sexton - he's one bad bastard, and I really enjoyed their contribution. Which for me made the convention.'

So a great guest or friendly people maketh the convention, well I would tend to agree with that, but despite both reporters genuinely having a good time, its evident that the convention itself didn't go to well. I decided to ask one of the committee members, at a Dublin SF club meeting. As I asked I was greeted with an 'Aw Jaysus. Don't bring that up' as the, dare I say it, culprit buried his head into his hands. 'it could have been much better' was the general gist of it and it's already been decided that 2004's con will have no SF element.

So three conventions and if you attended any of them there seems to be a chance that you would enjoy yourself, but I could enjoy myself with a gang of the usual types in a bog, so it beggars the question what makes a convention good?

The frankness of the con runners is refreshing. I must admit I am sick of college conventions making a mess of things and then announcing that it was the best convention ever.

This year at least, at last, there is productive and helpful assessments being made, which only bodes well for future events, but I was really hoping deep down, that with such a furore of events that there would have been a few hopeful up and coming con-runners, who might have made the jump from student con, to something like Octocon, but alas, not a sign of it.

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Next issue, a review of this year's MeCon and more from James about TAFF soon.