

# THE VCON VANGUARD

(A Personal Fanzine devoted to promoting VCON 41 in 2016)

Issue #4 – Mid-August, 2016

published by [R. Graeme Cameron](#), VCON 41 Chair



Author Guest of Honour Robert J. Sawyer  
Gleefully showing off the alien mind-parasites  
Who control his every thought and dictate all his books.

# VCON 41

September 30<sup>th</sup> to October 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2016

## AUTHOR GUEST OF HONOUR

**Robert J. Sawyer**

(Golden Fleece, Quintaglio Trilogy, Neanderthal Parralax Trilogy, Illegal Alien, FlashForward, Webmind Trilogy, Red Planet Blues, Quantum Night, & many others)

## SUPERMARIONATION GUEST OF HONOUR

**Jamie Anderson**

(Son of Gerry Anderson: Supercar, Fireball XL5, Stingray, Thunderbirds, Captain Scarlet and the Mysterons, Journey to the Farside of the Sun, UFO, & Space 1999. Jamie maintains Anderson Inc. to preserve his father's legacy and is actively preparing a new Supermarionation series titled Firestorm)

## FILM DESIGN GUEST OF HONOUR

**Eric Chu**

(Battlestar Galactica, Cholly & Flytrap, Droids, Beetlejuice, Captain Power, The Gate II, A Chinese Ghost Story, Peter Pan II: Return to Neverland, Stasys, Space Command, Moonbase Alpha: Legacy, Bitten, Extant, Falling Skies, Firestorm, Milford's Used Car Corral, & others)

## EDITOR GUEST OF HONOUR

**Karl Johanson**

(Editor of Neo-opsis Magazine, formerly co-editor of Aurora Award winning Under the Ozone Hole Fanzine)

## ART DIRECTOR GUEST OF HONOUR

**Stephanie Johanson**

(Art Director of Neo-opsis Magazine, and a well-known West Coast artist)

## GODZILLA FAN GUEST OF HONOUR

**Stan G. Hyde**

(G-Fest Lecturer, Renowned Godzilla Expert, Founder Monster Attack Team Canada, and Star of Milford's Used Car Corral)

## MASTER OF CEREMONIES

**Spider Robinson**

(Night of Power, Callahan's Crosstime Saloon, Time Travelers Strictly Cash, Callahan's Secret, Callahan's Lady, Callahan's Key, Lady Slings the Booze, Time Pressure, the Lifehouse trilogy, User Friendly, By Any Other Name, Telepath, Deathkiller, Very Bad Deaths, Very Bad Choices, And, with Jeanne Robinson, the Stardance trilogy)

## HOTEL

Sheraton Vancouver Guildford Hotel, 15269 – 104<sup>th</sup> Avenue, Surrey, BC, Canada, V3R 1N5.

## VCON 41 MEMBERSHIPS

**You have till September 15<sup>th</sup>  
To purchase discounted memberships online!**

After that only at the door memberships will apply.

Go to our our website < [www.vcon.ca](http://www.vcon.ca) > to check out the convention!

Here you can < [Book room at discount rate](#) >

Or you can < [Buy VCON 41 memberships here](#) >

## CURRENT RATES

### Full weekend Memberships

**Adult = \$60** – (\$65 at the door)

**Senior = \$45** – (\$50 at the door)

**Adult Student = \$45** – (\$50 at the door)

**Teen (13-18) = \$35** – (\$40 at the door)

**Youth (9 – 12) = \$35** – (\$40 at the door)

**Child (infant to 8) = Free**

**One Day memberships will also be available at the door.**

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## **GENERAL VCON 41 INFORMATION**

### **WHAT?**

VCON is Canada's oldest ongoing science fiction and fantasy convention. The first VCON was held in 1971 at the Hotel Georgia with Ursula K. Le Guin as Guest of Honour. The upcoming VCON will be our 41<sup>st</sup>!

The theme of VCON in 2016 is "Muppets, Puppets, and Marionettes" which includes everything from giant puppets to stop motion models to Supermarionation. Expect panels and lectures on these and many other SF&F topics, plus demos, workshops, and numerous audience-participation live action games like "Human Battleship" and "Fan Feud." A mid-sized SF&F convention run by fans for fans, we average 700 to 800 attendees.

The secondary theme is "The Small Press Cabal" which will celebrate independent Small Press Canadian Book and Magazine publishers who have created the environment for a veritable renaissance of Canadian SpecFic. Participating professionals will include publishers, editors, authors, artists and poets.

**Gamers take note:** VCON 41 will feature 4,100 square feet of gaming space divided between the Fraser room devoted to table top, board, card and role-playing games, and The Barnston B room dedicated to old school console games where you can try your luck at classic video games. Both rooms will feature competitions and contests. Both rooms will run 24 hours a day from 1:00 PM Friday till 6:00 PM Sunday. A gaming utopia!

### **WHY?**

To have fun of course. Why else would one get involved in SF&F fandom? We want both our Guests of Honour and our attendees to enjoy themselves as much as possible.

### **WHEN?**

The dates are firm. From Friday September 30<sup>th</sup> to Sunday October 2<sup>nd</sup> in 2016.

### **WHERE?**

Sheraton Vancouver Guildford Hotel, 15269 – 104<sup>th</sup> Avenue, Surrey, BC, Canada, V3R 1N5.

**HOW DO I JOIN UP?** Go to: [Buy VCON 41 memberships here](#)

Or go to < vcon.ca > to reserve a hotel room at our discount rate and also buy a membership.

### **WHAT IF I DON'T LIKE BUYING STUFF ON-LINE?**

Ah, that means you are a delightfully old-fashioned Luddite like me!

Just write a cheque, or send a post-office money order, made out to "West Coast Science Fiction Association," and include a mention it is for a VCON membership (or) Art Show panel (or) program book ad (so we don't think you're simply sending us money out of the goodness of your heart), and mail it to:

W.C.S.F.A./VCON 41  
Box 78069  
Grandview RPO  
Vancouver, B.C., Canada  
V5N 5W1

Do, however, keep in mind the possibility of a mail strike. Paying online is best.

## ROBERT J. SAWYER, THE ALIEN MIND AT WORK

*By R. Graeme Cameron*

Robert was born in Ottawa April 29<sup>th</sup>, 1960. In the fall of that year the family moved to Toronto and both parents took up teaching positions at the University of Toronto. A bright kid, Robert found school mostly boring and tended to be a bit disruptive from time to time. Fortunately, his father found a way to engage his intellect. Every Saturday morning Robert was taken to the Royal Ontario Museum's club for kids where they were brought behind the scenes and introduced to all manner of bizarre and wonderful things kept in storage. Rob later described the club as "the intellectual highlight of my childhood."

(Editor's note: This, on the occasion of the opening of a particular drawer in a shadowy corner of a deeply buried hall, may be when his alien mind-parasites hooked up with him. Then again, maybe not.)

Every parent and every child knows that education specialists and experts are forever saying "Don't let your kids turn into lumpish clods because you let them vegetate on uncomfortably comfortable couches staring at the boob tube! Throw them outside! Get them involved in sports so they can morph into victory-minded aggressive competitors determined to crush their enemies! Let them learn about the real world!" Something like that.

By his own account Rob, as a kid, was chubby and out of sorts coordination-wise. So instead of bothering with sports, Rob watched TV, a lot of TV. This of course doomed him to an empty mind and an empty life devoid of accomplishments (as your typical children's specialist always predicts). How then, to account for all the books and literary awards? The alien mind-parasites? Ummm, nope.

Turns out the mere act of watching TV was a profound learning experience which laid the basis for Rob's spectacular literary career. In 1972, at the age of 12, his favourite show was a crime mystery called SEARCH starring Hugh O'Brian and Burgess Meredith. Back in those days Canadian television stations were in competition with American signals drifting across the border. To keep viewers loyal, Canadian networks would arrange to have popular (mostly American) shows broadcast on their channels a day ahead of their appearance on American channels. This meant that Robert could watch all of his favourite shows twice in the course of two days.

So what, you say?

In Rob's own words: "Back then, I couldn't articulate why it was so important to me to watch the same episode a second time—but I understand perfectly now. I was learning how to write. On Tuesday nights, I'd be surprised by the twists and turns the plot took—and on Wednesday nights, knowing how the story turned out, I was able to see how the writer had developed the plot."

Being a couch potato is obviously a good career move! All it takes is a precocious tendency to analyse the structure of a plot very much in the style of kids who used to take a radio apart and then put it back together to see how it works. Rob found that observing the cliff-hanger scenes





before each commercial break, for instance, taught him much about the kind of plotting that would keep the reader reading, that would make a plot addictive and hard to put down. Valuable lessons learned.

One assumes the STAR TREK series must have had a profound effect on Robert's development as a writer. Not quite, not at first, because his parents found the show too violent. The only episode Rob recalls seeing when it was first run was "The Devil in the Dark," the one with the Horta. Kinda sad.

However, in 1968 the book "The Making of Star Trek" came out, written by Stephen E. Whitfield and Gene Rodenberry. A ground-breaking book, nothing like it had ever been published before. Not for nothing did the subtitle above the main title read "The Book On How To Write For TV!" And the under-title "The only book of its kind! The complete history of a top TV series—how a television show is conceived, written, sold, and produced."

Rob read "The Making of Star Trek" over and over, and when the 79 episodes of the series began in syndication, armed with the background knowledge revealed in the book he studied and analysed each and every episode as his own personal TV writing course. He credits the series with teaching him, among other things, the art of "world-building," which is vital for any SF writer.

Something else was set in stone by his early TV watching. A surprising number of shows, though filmed in Canada, were set in America. The prevailing opinion was that American audiences (or readers) wouldn't stand for anything that didn't take place in America. Rob rebelled against this. Most of his novels take place in Canadian settings with Canadian Characters. According to Rob: "I've never once had an American editor, reviewer, bookseller, or reader, complain about the Canadian content in my books." Once again Rob stands perceived wisdom on its head!



Becoming more and more interested in science fiction, Rob and fellow Northview High School grade 10 student Rick Gotlieb founded NASFA (the Northview Association of Science Fiction Addicts) as one of many social clubs in the school. Of course we all assume it would consist of a few solitary male geeks and nerds commiserating over their lack of success with the opposite sex. On the contrary! The club was overrun with girls from the higher grades! Rob promptly began dating a girl two grades ahead of him. Rob is like King Midas, though instead of turning everything he touches into gold, he turns everything he gets involved with into a valuable learning experience. Extraordinary.

Furthermore, the club membership being as enthusiastic about science fiction as Rob, they collectively put together scripts and manuscripts for possible shows like STAR STATION TERRA. Its premise was a lot like STAR TREK, yet lacked the obvious naval background and command structure. Indeed, it was patterned after the British Commonwealth and featured the Commonwealth of Planets, an organization devoted to exploration but not fisticuffs. No place for Captain Kirk in this one!

In those days the last year of High School was grade thirteen (phased out in 2003) which Rob considered his best High School year ever. Subjects included dinosaurs, and Rob determined to become a Paleontologist

specializing in Dinosaurs. Alas, he quickly learned there were only 3 such jobs in Canada, and no more than 27 worldwide. NOT a good career move.

So, instead, fired up by “The Making of Star Trek,” Rob applied to Toronto’s Ryerson Polytechnical Institute in 1978 to major in Radio and Television Arts. Normally any given applicant had only a 20% chance of being accepted, but Rob got in easily and subsequently enjoyed his four years at Ryerson immensely.

On graduating in 1982 he discovered an economic downturn made it virtually impossible to get a job in the industry because so many people were being laid off. No one was hiring. So Rob promptly landed himself a job with the Ryerson Polytechnical Institute itself. Hands of King Midas again.

Between graduation and the start of his job at Ryerson, Rob took a job with Bakka Books, a very famous bookstore, at that time run by John Rose, which was primarily devoted to science fiction and fantasy publications. John took Rob to the annual Canadian Booksellers Association convention that summer where he learned how the retailing industry really works. Rob describes it as an eye-opening experience, one that led to the foundation of his reputation among fellow authors for his profound understanding of how the publishing industry actually functions, the pitfalls authors need to avoid, what’s likely to happen, and so forth. The Midas touch once more!

Now, it is customary to assume a beginning writer normally suffers through a string of mundane jobs before successfully launching a literary career. Not Rob! He had exactly two jobs before going fulltime as a writer. Bakka, then Ryerson. That’s it. Midas strikes again!

Mind you, for the first five years it was mostly non-fiction work for newspapers, magazines, corporations, and government departments. He credits this period with learning how to interview people, how to quote people better than what they actually said (conversations tend to be disjointed and full of umms and ahhs), and above all, how to meet deadlines. Publishers like writers who meet deadlines.

In 1984 Rob married Carolyn Clink. In 1988, having saved a cushion of money earned through his non-fiction gigs, he told her from now on he was going to work fulltime as a fiction writer. A poet herself, she was fully supportive.

Rob had previously sold a bit of fiction, including a novelette “The Golden Fleece” to *Amazing Stories* which appeared in the September 1988 issue (the probable trigger for his decision to go fulltime). He decided to turn it into a novel, and was able to convince well-known agent Robert Curtis (on the strength of the novelette) to represent him. Curtis sold it to Warner books. Unfortunately sales were poor, and Warner declined to publish a second novel (actually written first, titled “End of an Era”).

Then Midas showed up unexpectedly, in the guise of author and critic Orson Scott Card, who wrote a review calling “The Golden Fleece” the “best science fiction novel of 1990.” Suddenly Robert was in demand, and Curtis promptly sold “Far-Seer” (the first in the wonderful Quintaglio trilogy featuring intelligent dinosaurs) to Ace Books, who also picked up “End of an Era.” Rob was on a roll ... till sales began to decline.

To remedy the situation Rob decided to specialize in writing



thought-provoking futurist novels with serious underlying themes. Not a clean break from the past so much as elaborating on tendencies already apparent in his writings. The result was “The Terminal Experiment,” which his agent considered his finest work to date. At the core of the novel was the question of when the soul first enters the body. At conception? At birth? And how does the answer impact the contentious issue of abortion? Not your usual ripping good yarn action adventure. Something more serious. Something meaningful. Something profound.

The first editor to look at it thought it was great, well worth publishing, providing every last word on abortion and the nature of the soul was removed from the book, gutting it thematically, ruining it in fact. Bit of a downer that. Where was the Midas touch now? Dormant? Gone?

Heck no.

Rob’s agent Richard Curtis promptly sold the novel, uncut, to HarperPrism, AND to Analog magazine which serialized the book, uncut, over four issues. “The Terminal Experiment” went on to win the Science Fiction and Fantasy Writers of America Nebula Award for the Best Novel of 1995.

Ever since Rob has written novel after novel utilizing his personal mission statement “to combine the intimately human with the grandly cosmic.” His novels take place in the near future or the present-day and always explore the consequences of current possibilities on a vast scale. Truly, a body of work constantly evoking the old sense of wonder all fans of the genre cherish, yet solidly grounded in realistic characters coping with the unexpected in a convincing, genuine manner. “What if?” novels, yes, but in the best sense of the term. Futurism combined with science fiction. Can’t ask for better than that.

To find out more about Rob’s spectacular literary career, go to his web site at < [Sawyer website](#) >.

By the way, if you are an aspiring writer, his website is in itself an extremely useful lesson. Examine it closely. This is how you need to promote yourself.



To sum up ... novel after novel, award after award, worldwide popularity ... not bad for a couch potato kid afflicted with alien mind-parasites.

The only question is ... who ARE these alien mind-parasites? What are their names? Inquiring minds want to know.

By the way, you are in for a treat when you meet Rob. He is one of the most intelligent and knowledgeable futurists you can ever hope to hear. Listening to him is like receiving a jolt of energy direct to the brain. Suddenly you will remember why thinking can be so much fun. He will provide the key to unlock the gate to the sense of wonder within yourself. A more inspirational speaker would be hard to conceive.

You owe it to yourself to attend VCON and meet Robert J. Sawyer!

In addition to his panels, he will be at the Book Launch Friday Night. During breaks in the readings you’ll be able to converse with



him and the other authors. He can often be found in Hospitality too. Don't be afraid to introduce yourself. He enjoys meeting his fans. He's eminently approachable. Say hello!

**Meanwhile, here is some contact information of possible use to you:**

[Buy VCON 41 memberships here](#)

[Book room at discount rate](#)

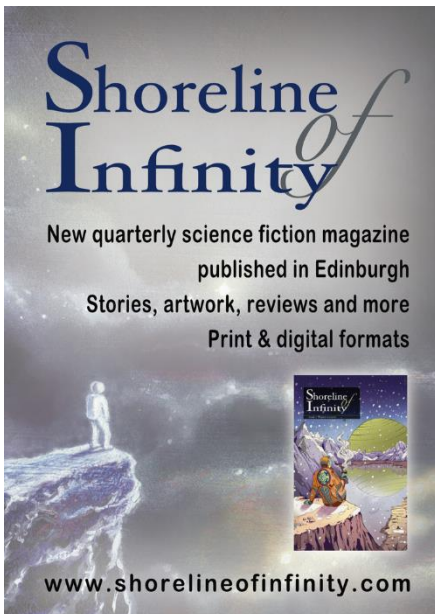
[VCON 41 Ad Sales](#)

[Purchase Art Show Table or Panel](#)

[Vcon 41 Art Show](#)

[Vendor Tables](#)

[Fan Group Tables](#)



**This is our first "sold" ad, featuring a Scottish SF fiction prozine out of Edinburgh, Scotland. It will appear in our program book.**

**We welcome any and all genre advertisers.**

**See below for details.**

### **PROGRAM BOOK ADVERTISING RATES**

**To Place Ad:**

Contact me at < [VCON 41 Ad Sales](#) > and once the ad is sent to me I will generate an invoice from Eventbrite to be paid within 30 days.

**Advantage of placing ad early:** Your ad will be included at no extra charge in monthly issues of The VCON Vanguard.

**Black & White: (Interior pages)**

- \$100 – Full Page
- \$75 – Half Page
- \$50 – Quarter Page
- \$25 – Business Card

**Colour:** Inside Covers & 4 mid-section interior pages)

- \$200 – Full Page Interior [\*]
- \$150 – Half Page Interior [\*]
- \$100 – Quarter Page Interior [\*]
- \$50 – Business Card Interior [\*]
- \$300 – Full Page Inside Cover
- \$150 – Half Page Inside Cover
- \$400 – Full Page Back Cover
- \$300 – Half Page Back Cover

[\*] “Interior colour ads” are included in a single colour sheet at the middle of the program book, providing four full pages of colour printing.

The back cover is reserved for a VCON 42 ad.

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### **ART SHOW GALLERY TABLE & PANEL RATES**

**Artists! To Purchase table or panel:** Go to Eventbrite site:

< [Purchase Art Show Table or Panel](#) >

**Queries can be sent to:** < [Vcon 41 Art Show](#) >

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### **VOLUNTEERS SOUGHT TO HELP RUN VCON**

VCON is fan-run by fans for fans. In addition to volunteers serving on the convention committee, numerous volunteers are required for all sorts of jobs, be it checking membership badges at the doors to convention events, checking bags and cases at the doors of the dealers room and the art show (both open to the public), moving equipment, moving chairs, guiding attendees and answering their questions, guarding dealers tables when the dealers go for a break, helping to register newly arrived attendees, and so on.

Every four hours of service earns a free day membership. Other perks are planned. It's a great way to learn all about con-running. Apply here: [Fill out Volunteer application here](#)